This paper discusses the Ibo secession and Lt. Col. Ojukwu declaration of the Republic of Biafra in 1967. It examines the secession by the Ibo and the declaration of Biafra as a catalyst to the Nigerian civil war. It analyses the ambition of Lt. Col. Ojukwu and Major General Gowon as contributing to the outbreak of the civil war. The mass killing of the Ibos in the North and the inability of the Federal Government to intervene also came to focus. The study relied on primary sources as oral interviews and archival materials. It also used secondary sources like books, newspapers, articles, journals theses, dissertations etc. It was found that the declaration of Republic of Biafra was the immediate factor that led to the war. It was also found that the poor management of issues involved in the war by General Gowon and Lt. Col. Ojukwu led to the war. The study demonstrated that the mass killing of the Ibos in the North was unnecessary and unpatriotic. The study indicated that the creation of 12 states by General Gowon was done without proper consultation, as it provoked the Ibos to advocate for separation. It was also found that the war ended with much causalities from both sides especially the Ibos.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Secession, Biafra, War, Catalyst.

**Background**

Ibo land is one of the most densely populated rural area in Nigeria. It is estimated that in some areas, the density is more than 1,000 persons to the square mile. The Ibo people live in the area between Benin and Igala, the Cross River and Niger Delta City States and were divided into five major cultural groups: the western or Riverine, Northern or Awka, Owerri, Cross River and Ogoja Ibo (Webster, Boahen, Idowu, 174-175).
Inspite of the cultural differences between the groups, there were certain characteristics which bind the Ibo society. This includes respect for age and leadership came from the elders. The Ibo generally were individualistic and live in egalitarian society, where an individual considers himself as important as everyone else and commands a say in the local affairs. Since everyone has a right to rise in the society, Ibo culture emphasized competition between families, between lineages and between clans (Ibid., 174-175).

Although men were born equal they could rise to positions of prestige through a combination of wealth and a record of service to the clan (Ibid., 175). The society was therefore intensely democratic with characteristics of competitive and equalitarian societies (Ibid., 175).

It is important to note that the Ibo were not alone in the type of administration which they operate. There were other people in West Africa which operate similar government. Such areas include the Kru of Liberia Tallens of Ghana, Konkomba of Togo land and Tiv of Nigeria. Their system of government were similar to the political organisation of the Ibo compared to that of the Yoruba, Dahomey, Asanti or Mossi systems.

The political organisation of the Ibo in pre-colonial times was segmentry in nature. It was not a central government headed by a single person. Segmentary societies are different from stratified societies which usually have royal and noble families who pass high political office from generation to generation.

Hence Afigbo mention that in the area of government in the pre-colonial Ibo society, there are four broad political type involving differing articulations of the role of kinship and non-kinship institutions as of individual and group leadership (Afigbo, 1973). In the same vein, in the pre-colonial Igbo society, village group was the largest unit of political integration and within, the village group authority was dispersed with lineage and non-lineage institutions, individual and groups, hereditary and non-hereditary office-holders, men and women; the gods and the ancestors playing recognised roles in government (Afigbo, 1980:1).

So we can say that the Ibo people have a more decentralized political structure than any other major group. According to Aremu and Adu, monarchical ascendancy in the Igbo subsection was by achievement (Aremu & Adu, 2017:6). This desire for achievement at all cost made them to develop commercial sense and a pragmatic approach to life. The people exhibit a tendency of materialism resulting in a highly competitive and economically stratified society.

In order to imbibe this spirit of materialism and economic viability, most of them migrate to different parts of the country and outside in search of greener postures. They are found in every part of Nigeria and even beyond particularly in cosmopolitan centres engaging in gigantic business.

However Dike argues differently in connection with the rapid Ibo migration from their homes. According to Dike, “perhaps the most important factor conditioning Ibo history in the nineteenth century and in our own time is land hunger… The Ibos pressing against limited land resources had of necessity to seek other avenues of live hood outside the tribal boundaries (Dike, 1956:28). The soil is comparatively poor. According to Talbot during the forty-year period 1911-1951, the number of Ibos in Lagos increased from 264 to 26,000 (Talbot, 1926). Again, Talbot posits that in the Northern provinces there were less than 3,000 Ibos in 1921 and nearly 12,000 by 1931, by 1951 the number had increased to more than 120,000 (Ibid).

In term of economy in Nigeria at independence in 1960, the country survived mainly on agro-based economy. The palm oil was dominated by the Igbo. In pre-colonial Igbo society agriculture was the most important economic activity with regard both to the number of people-engaged in it either on full or part time basis and to the prestige it carried (Afigbo, 1980:1). Uchendu described farming as the Igbo staff of life (Uchendu, 1965:30) J. E. Flint described Igbo agriculture as “perhaps the most efficient in Africa” and he thinks it was largely for this reason that Igbo population “developed a density per acre only matched in Africa by that of the Nile Valley (Flint, 1966:63). The Ibos are of the opinion that yam was the king of Igbo crops, hence the beginning of the harvest season was marked by important New yam festival. The Igbo people are also good in blacksmiths, and wood carving.
It is well established that the Ibos worship Chukwu, Ala and Ifejioku generally. Apart from these, Afigbo posits that every autonomous community and indeed, every segment of it had deities exclusive to it (Afigbo, 1980). It is believed that the Ibos speak Igbo, which includes various Igbo languages and dialects. However, Adefolaju and Jegede opine that their language also has an affiliation with the Kwa language family (Adefolaju and Jegede, 2017:31).

The Ibos were also affected by the Constitution of Sir Richards of 1947 where provision was made for Regional House Assembly. The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 approved bicameral legislature for the Western Region and Northern Regions while the Eastern was still unicameral legislature. Ezera remarks that the Eastern Region, which hitherto had only a House of Assembly, was to have a House of chiefs in addition, with powers similar to those of the Western House of chiefs according to the Constitutional Conference of 1957 resolution (Ezera, 1960: 234).

On Tuesday January 15, 1966, Major-General Aguyi-Ironsi named his four regional Military Governors, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu was appointed the Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria which he called now as group of provinces in accordance with his new military system of government (Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsí’s Broadcast to the Nation, 1966, January 28).

During the creation of 12 states by General-Yakubu Gowon, three states were created from the former Eastern Region. There were the East Central State, South East State and River State comprising Ahoada, Brass, Ogoni and Port Harcourt Division. Mr. Ukpabi Asika was made Administrator of East Central State. Lieutenant Commander Alfred Dieter-Spiff was the Military Governor of Rivers State. Colonel E. J. Esuene, the Military Governor of South Eastern State. Today the Ibos have 5 states namely; Enugu, Imo, Abia, Ebony and Anambra States.

Ibo Nationalism

Nationalism could be defined in different ways. It could mean pride in one’s custom and traditions. It could be defined as strong resistance against British rule by Nigerians in order to eliminate colonial rule. It could also mean sentiment or activity opposed to alien control (Edeigbonya and Buhari, 1917). Coleman argues that nationalism in Nigeria would include not only the recent and contemporary movement among Nigerians to create a self-government in Nigeria, but also the early militant resistance of the Delta rulers, such as the famous king Jaja, to European Penetration of the area, the defiance of king Kosoko of Lagos and of the Sultan of Sokoto and the Aba women’s riots in Eastern Nigeria in the late 1920’s (Coleman, 1986). Hodgkin considers it as covering any organisation or group that explicitly asserts rights, claims and aspirations of a given African society (Hodgkin, 1966).

Against that background the Ibo nationalism in Nigeria can now be examined. The first factor which enhanced Ibo nationalism was the desire for western education. When the Ibo federal Union, Pan-Ibo organization was inaugurated on 1944, its specific objective was to raise money to build and maintain five secondary schools in Iboland. Specifically it was observed by the members that when a boy was given good secondary education, he can rise to any height in the world to the extent that he cannot be dragged down by the doctrine of inferiority. Coleman posits that during the period 1944-1947, the Ibo federal Union under the leadership of the Lagos branch made great stride toward the realization of an Ibo educational plan (Coleman, 1986: 34).

So the Ibos embraced western education with great interest. The Christian Missions came in, to establish schools because of the encouragement they received from the Ibos. Most of them received scholarship from village improvement unions to encourage the young Ibos to go to school. Hence, it was said that by the late 1930’s the Ibos were more heavily represented than any other tribe or nationality in Yaba Higher College and in most Nigerian Secondary Schools (Ibid). It was part of the reasons why Ibos who were appointed to the African Civil Service and as clerks in business firms increased with unspoken rapidity than any other groups. In juxtaposition of that the number of Ibos admitted to the University College, Ibadan increased at a faster rate almost equal to that of the Yoruba.
The influx of Ibos into the towns of the West and the North and their rapid educational development, which made them competitors for jobs and professional positions, were two indicators of their emergence as a an active group in Nigerian affairs (Ibid; 335). This zeal for educational attainment among the Ibos in Nigeria for future political battle was complimented by the enthusiasm and patriotism displayed by Ibos who were educated abroad particularly England. Among them were Lawyers and doctors who also provided leadership.

The stage was now set for the Ibo ethnic nationalism. It is well established that in Nigeria, a great deal of tribal consciousness and hostility was created by competing politicians exploiting their own tribal background in order to build up a following. Again it is the interactions among members of different ethnic groups that produce ethnicity. It is a source of much controversy and tensions. The ‘go-getter spirit among the Ibos was an added advantage over the other ethnic groups in their fight for justice, equality and subsequent acquisition of national power.

The powerful urge for progress and self-transformation which drove them to assert themselves in the affairs of Nigeria was in effect the same that drove them on to take the lead in early postwar nationalism (Ibid; 340).

There was unhealthy competition between the Ibo and Yoruba. According to Ezera the Ibos usually referred to by the Yoruba as kobo-kobo which means backward ones made what looked like a serious effort to narrow the gap between them and the Yoruba (Ezera, 1970: 90). Again most Ibo resident in Lagos suffered various forms of discrimination particularly in regard to housing. This was another dimension to Ibo quest for unity within the Nigerian political space and equation; hence the need for the formation of Ibo unions. It was not surprising that in 1943, the General-Secretary of the Ibo Union in Lagos launched a campaign to federate all Ibo unions throughout Nigeria; hence in 1944 the Ibo federal union, Pan-Ibo organisation was inaugurated with headquarters in Lagos and the specific objective was to raise money to build five secondary schools (Coleman, 1986).

The return of Dr. Azikiwe to Nigeria from USA compounded the problems of Yoruba people and increased the tempo of Ibo nationalism, the period witnessed the employment of ethnic propaganda which laid the foundation of ethnic assertiveness.

At a mass meeting the Ibos of Lagos decided that all personal attacks on Azikiwe would be considered attacks upon “Ibo nation” because “if a hen was killed, the chickens would be exposed to danger (West African Pilot, 1948:36). At the apex of this confusion and tension, the Ibo and Yoruba radicals bought much machets in preparation for war. As Ibo-Yoruba tension mounted during the summer of 1948, a member of the Egbe remarks:

We were bunched together by the British who named us Nigeria. We never knew them the Ibos, but since we came to know them we have tried to be friendly and neighbourly. Then came the Arch Devil to sow the seeds of distrust and hatred. We have tolerated enough from a class of Ibos and addle-brained Yorubas who have mortgaged their thinking caps to Azikiwe and his hirelings (Egbe Omo Oduduwa 1948, Monthly Bulletin).

Some Yoruba and Hausa leaders resented Azikiwe and his followers because they were afraid that his coming to politics is a serious challenge to their political hegemony. They expressed selfishly that if Azikiwe had never intruded himself upon the Nigerian political scene, tribal tension and separatism would not have existed in the nationalist struggle in Nigeria. However the authenticity of this claim is another dimension at later events showed clearly, such assessment was based on sentiments, emotions and tribal identity.

It is possible to say that his critics could not understand that Azikiwe actions is based on his strong political thought of no comprise on the issue of imperialism. In his view, imperialism was based upon the ethics of force and could be liquidated only by a radical alteration of the power structure (Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1943:54). According to Azikiwe:
After having studied the history of man through the ages, I have come to the conclusion that control of political power is the only key which can open the door of happiness and contentment to man as a political animal. Without political power no country can live a full life (Ibid; p. 54)

Besides the emphasis upon power, Azikiwe believed that in a renascent Africa the young must displace the old Renascent Africa, 1937:1821). This uncertainty in the political climate between Ibos and Yoruba in 1948 led to the politicization of the Pan-Ibo, Ibo federal union and Pan-Yoruba, Egbe Omo Oduduwa nationality federations. At this period, also Ibo Union in Lagos was gave maximum support to NCNC. The close alliance between the Pan-Ibo movement and the NCNC Pan-Nigeria movement alarmed the leaders of other nationalities, who saw what they suspected to be a growing threat of Ibo domination (Daily Times, 1948).

Azikiwe’s Newspapers, Daily Comet and West African pilot caused panic and tension amongst the Yoruba people. He was resisted by some politicians of Yoruba and Hausa origin because of his bright political fortunes. The Ibos were emphatic in nationalism because of Azikiwe’s leadership which were militant in nature. It would be recalled that Azikiwe had his University education in USA and was no doubt inspired by Marcus Garvey militant and race-conscious nationalist movement. He was instrumental to shaping the attitudes of his large Ibo followers hence they were political conscious and assertive.

The leaders of the Yoruba people and those from the North began to examine the close alliance between the Pan-Ibo movement and the NCNC Pan-Nigeria movement and they saw this as a serious threat of Ibo political hegemony. The leaders of Yoruba in particular took tangible and positive steps to curb the excesses of the Ibo leaders particularly Nnamdi Azikiwe. This also became imperative after 1948 when the Ibo leaders converted the Pan-Ibo federation into a quasi-political organisation. The political activities and journalistic enterprise of Nnamdi Azikiwe served as additional threat and a serious challenge.

In December, 1948 at a Pan-Ibo Conference at Aba, the Ibo Federal Union was converted into the Ibo state Union, ostensibly to organize the Ibo linguistic group (Minutes of First Pan-Ibo Conference, Aba, 1948). As the Ibo organized their union, other ethnic groups in the country were not left out, as the Ibibio State Union, Warri National Union emerged. Hence it was not a surprise that in 1945 in London, a small group of Yoruba students founded a Pan-Yoruba cultural organisation called Egbe Omo Oduduwa, when translated means the society of the descendants of Oduduwa, who was the mythical founder of the Yoruba Peoples (Lucas, 1949). When the Egbe Omo Oduduwa held its inaugural conference at Ile-Ife in the early part of June, 1948 Sir Adeyemo Alakija, the President stated:

This Big Tomorrow… (for the Yoruba) is the future of our children… How they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria. How the Yorubas will not be relegated to the background in the future (Minutes of the first inaugural conference of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, June, 1948).

The 1951 Macpherson’s constitution led to the formation of political parties like Action Group and Northern People’s Congress. Ezera states that with the prospect of a new constitution in 1951, Awolowo and a small group of Yoruba intellectuals with the full support of the Yoruba Obas quietly planned and organized in the political wing of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Ezera, 1980). It was not until March, 1951 that this small group publicly announce the existence of the Action Group as a political party (Ibid; p. 93) in the same vein, the North People’s Congress was formed in Northern Nigeria to contest and win election in that region following the promulgation of the 1951 constitution. The stage was fully set for ethnic nationalism and tribal identity.
Ibo Secession from the Federation

The issue of secession is very deep in Ibo history. It is not a concept which began in the 1960s. In 1948 at a Pan-Ibo Conference at Aba when the Ibo Federal Union was converted into the Ibo state Union, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was elected Ibo State President. Addressing the conference Azikiwe posits that:

It would appear that the God of Africa has specially created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages… The Ibo nation cannot shirk its responsibility (West African Pilot, July 6, 1949)

It was said that at one Lagos mass meeting, the singing of the Ibo ‘national anthem took place with much enthusiasm and nationalism (Daily Times, Sept. 24, 1944). As part of the process of their nation building and development, a decision was made later to found a national bank of Iboland (West African Pilot, March 7, 1946).

The issue of secession was also noticed during the 1963 census which gave an added advantage to the Northern Region over and above the East and Western Regions Ojo opines that the 1963 census which results were published in Feb. 1964 once again showed that the population of the North was more than that of the East, West; Midwest and Lagos combined (Ojo, 2006: 89). It was at that point that Dr. Michael Okpara led Eastern Government first decided to secede from the federation as a result of the manipulation of the 1963 census. According to Ojo Michael Okpara instituted a law suit to invalidate the census figures and threatened to pull the Eastern region out of the federation if the Northern figure was not cancelled (Ibid).

It could also be argued that the Northern leaders also considered secession in 1953 when they refused to support the motion moved by chief Anthony Enahoro of Action Group in 1953 that Nigeria should be self-governed by 1956. While the members in the South saw it as eventful and historic, the Northern members saw it as an attempt by the South to set-in motion, political hegemony. Hence Sarduana of Sokoto, Sir Ahmandu Bello added to the motto as soon as it is practicable. It was said that excited crowds outside the House of Representative in Lagos showed their disapproval of the Northern stand by booming and insulting the Northern members at which these members swore never to come to the South for any meeting again (NERC, 1978).

Even Chief Obafemi Awolowo warned that if the Eastern Region is granted secession, the Western Region will follow. So the concept of secession was not peculiar to the Ibos and not new in Nigeria political space.

Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu-Ojukwu’s Secession and the Declaration of the Republic of Biafra.

Secessionist aspirations in the Eastern Nigeria focused on the Military Governor of the Military Governor of the region, a complex and highly intelligent officer with a great measure of personal charisma. Ojukwu called for all easterners to return home and thousands poured out of Lagos which had once had almost as many Ibo inhabitants as indigenous Yoruba, thereafter patriotic and secessionist sentiments were whipped up in the East. According to Ukpabi Asika:

“There is something insidious about Mr. Odumegwu Ojukwu, an element of undying malice against Nigeria perverted his reason, clouded his version and drove him madly, irrevocably towards disaster (Drum, Jane, 1970).

He made ludicrous and impossible demands at conferences and he secretly started to arm and feed the Ibos on the most hypnotic, most inciting propaganda, that Africa has so far witnessed” (Ibid)
Ukpabi Asika also remarks that: while Nigeria leaders laboured under the illusion that he was one with them in the search for peace, love and national unity, Ojukwu systematically prepared for secession (Ibid).

**Arguments for and Against Secession by Lt. Colonel Ojukwu**

**Argument Against Secession**

It has been argued by many that Ojukwu misled the Ibos into secession. It is clear that the massacre of the Ibos in the North was regrettable, unacceptable and very unnecessary. This actually resulted to fleeing of the Ibos in the North to their homes because the Ibos were massacred with unspoken rapidity. Lt. Colonel Ojukwu now used this golden opportunity to achieve his hidden political agenda because, there is doubt of the fact that Lt. Colonel Ojukwu, the military Governor ofEastern Region was a man full of ambition.

A lawyer in Awka Province, Mr. Chukwuemeka explained:

“I blame myself, the Ibos and all the others, who encouraged or condoned secession. How could Ojukwu alone or with a clique of a handful of people run the secessionist territory and shoot the guns as well? Nobody has been honest enough to admit that while we made the mistake of going to the ridiculous extreme…” (Drum: April 1970).

Again, Nelson Ottah another Drum correspondent posits that Ojukwu whose lust for power led to war… Ojukwu was hell-bent on seceding from the federation (Interview with Ojukwu, State House, Enugu, 1967). As an ambitious man, Ojukwu invented the propaganda of genocide. It is for this reason that the dreadful propaganda apparatus under his command still shout genocide at every turn, inspite of the universal consensus that there is no determination of the federal military government for genocide (Ibid).

In the former Eastern Nigeria, people –young men old men, young women, old women and children are still dying daily in hundreds and in thousands from bullets, from bombs, from hunger, from exposure, from despair Ojukwu urges the Ibos to continue to fight and die… He sees glory in death-a futile and meaningless death and urges it on his own people, they were dying in large number in obedience to Ojukwu (Ibid).

One wonders why Ojukwu still continue to encourage his people to continue the fight when it was clear that the federal side was close to victory. As a military Governor and a combatant soldier he cannot claim ignorance of the fact that it is better to quit the stage when ovation was loudest. That Ojukwu instructed his people to continue the fight like Adolf Hitler did during the Second World War, especially when it was clear militarily that the game was up, it is an indication of his own private ambition and this may explain why he failed in his duty to save his people.

Majority of the Ibos blame themselves for not having had the self-control to pause to reason in their moment of excitement to find a way of avoiding the secession. Some also blame the leadership of their elite for not explaining to them the effects of secession. That could have put them in a better position to decide whether to support or reject Ojukwu’s secession bid. More especially, it was not be proved that secession was desired by the majority of the people who suddenly found themselves in Biafra… Neither do they realize that secession can only bring retrogressive consequences (Drum, 1970:165).
Tamuno also saw Ojukwu as an ambitious seeker for political power at any cost when he argued that:

“Ojukwu did not disguise his interest in such matters like seeking high political office, seemed ambitious and sought to reach the very top at his profession (Tamuno, 1989:9)

So it is possible to say that Ojukwu saw Gowon as blocking his path to further progress in federal Nigeria hence he was not ready to listen to voices of reasoning.

Again the sharp difference which existed between both Ojukwu and Kaduna Nzeogwu, the leader of 1966 coup is another pointer to his secession bid and the quest for power. Many people in the country today still believe that Lt. Col Ojukwu organized the death of Kaduna Nzeogwu in the early part of the civil war while fighting on the Biafra side in July, 1967.

According to Nzeogwu:

“He is worried about my popularity among his own people was to be put back in prison, but he was afraid of repercussions. Right now, I am not allowed contact with troops nor am I permitted to operate on the staff. One gentleman’s agreement we have is that I can carry on with whatever pleases me” (Nzeogwu’s Letter to Obasanjo, 17 June, 1967).

The annoyance of Ojukwu was that Kaduna Nzeogwu believed in the idea of one Nigeria and New Nigeria Army. It could also be argued that Ojukwu was afraid of great soldiers on the Biafra side who could challenged his authority no matter how useful they could be to the Biafra Army. Top on the list was Kaduna Nzeogwu who led the army that organized the January 15, 1966 Coup. Based on his braveness and charismatic speech he gave after the coup, he became a household name in Nigeria. Hence Ojukwu became jealous and highly suspicious. Others brilliant professional soldiers in that category, were Major Sam Agbamuche, Major Philip Alale, Col. Banjo and Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna. One would have thought Ojukwu would be very proud to have these fine soldiers assisting him. That was not the case because of his personal interest in secession.

It is on record that because of the failure of Biafra adventure on the capture of Midwest, which he blamed on Sam Agbamuche, Philip Alale, Banjo and Emmanuel Ifeajuna, they were tried by a court-martial and found guilty of treason. They were executed on the same day. The accusation against them could best be described as a fallacy, a frame-up to implicate them for possible execution.

Also Dr. Chike Obi was detained by Ojukwu for his opposition of the concept of secession and Biafra (Drum, June 15, 1970). Again, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe spoke of Ojukwu this way:

“I find it very difficult to understand the stand of Ojukwu. For the mere fact that I got up in London and appealed to him to retract their steps, go to the conference table and negotiate for a just and honourable settlement, I was called names and they have mounted polemic against me day and night for the past two weeks. I don’t mind” (Azikiwe’s Statement in Kaduna, 12/9/69).

The strong desire of Ojukwu for a secession was part of his refusal to attend peace conferences in an effort to avoid the war. His main focus was for the federal military government to approve a separate Sovereign Republic. In order to discourage any peace effort by the federal Government, Lt. Col. Ojukwu would always insist that Nigeria should recognize the breakaway state and conclude a peace treaty with him as Head of a foreign state which no responsible government can accept.
It became clear from these impossible demands that Ojukwu was now fully ready for a secession. Hence those going against Ibo secession was seen as enemies to him. It was for this reason that Nelson Ottah, a high officer in Ojukwu’s propaganda directorate said:

“Ojukwu was a gambler, not with money but with lives… According to him, because the Ibos dazed and confused by his satanic propaganda, are still prepared to pay his gambling debts with their lives. The Ibos having been led by Ojukwu’s propaganda of genocide into believing that they would be slaughtered if they surrendered, still consider it more honourable to die with their boots on than with their hands behind their backs and Ojukwu will continue to gamble so long as the Ibos continue to show willingness to pay (Golden City Post, January 16, 1967)

It was against this background that since the war officially ended on January 15, 1970 Nigerians have been treated to a blizzard of publicity materials by Ibos returning from the formal secessionist enclave… They condemn Ojukwu as the arch-villain of secession, painting unbelievably sordid pictures of his “nightmarish dictatorship”… To them, they claim that, they opposed secession and were punished for their patriotism by Ojukwu and his henchmen (Drum June, 1970).

**Argument in Support of Secession**

Some Nigerians especially the Ibos argued that Ojukwu should not be blames for the Ibos seceding from the federation. Their argument was based mainly on the mass killing of the Ibos in North in May, 1966 and in those killed after the counter-coup of July, 1966. It must be agreed that this unnecessary killing of the Ibos in parts of the country during this period under focus was least expected. Those Ibos dead ran into many thousands. Although it was said that the Military Governor of Eastern Region, Lt. Colonel Ojukwu demanded for adequate compensation for the loss of life and property suffered by easterners in the North, he was not able to hold the angry Ibo tribesmen in check.

When Decree No. 34 was promulgated to empower a unitary system of Government for Nigeria, there were violent anti Ironsi demonstrations in several towns in Northern Nigeria between May 28-31, 1966 in which many people were killed. The Eastern Military Governor, claiming to be quoting police reports, put the number at 3,000 at a press conference in Enugu on October 11, 1966 (Drum January 28, 1966) Golden City post comments that they cut the throats of the Ibos like sacrificial animals (Golden City Post, July 17, 1966). This is apart from the massive killing of the Ibos by the Northern soldiers in the counter-coup of July, 1966 and the deaths registered when the Constitutional Conference was going on in Lagos in October-November, 1960.

Against this backdrop it may be wrong absolutely to blame Ojukwu for instructing his people to return home”. In fact, they were already returning home before Ojukwu intervened. One should also not forget that in the counter-coup of July, 1966, the Nigerian Head of States, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Ibo was killed by the Northern soldier. The massive exodus of the Ibos from the North and West to Eastern Region was to ensure their safety and was based on also for lack of confidence in the Federal Government.

So it may not be wrong to say that their desire to break away was the direct result of the killing of the Ibos in the North. In the same vein, it may be bais and unconstructive to blame Ojukwu in that circumstance. It was for this reason that Barrister Chukwuemeka maintained that the general feeling of the people in the East Central State is that although the war of secession was tragic, the events that led to it nevertheless provided enough excuse (Drum June, 1970).

Confirming the massive death of the Ibos in the Northern Nigeria, Oluleye observes that the coup leaders of July 29, 1966 made it clear that their main aim was to avenge the death of the Northerners killed on 15 January, 1966 (Oluleye, 1985:38) Olav maintains that people from the south
without the Yoruba tribal marks were indiscriminately killed by the rioters, their property being looted and their homes burnt (Olav, 1970:51).

**Ojukwu’s Declaration of the Republic of Biafra**

The declaration of the Republic of Biafra by the Governor of East Central State, Lt. Col. Odumegun Ojukwu marked a turning point in the final declaration of Nigerian Civil War. It was the last straw that break the camel back. Hence it could be described as a catalyst that led to the war.

Lord Milverton saw Biafra as a name invented by the rebel leader to cover the Eastern region, as if it was one natural tribally united area because he claimed to carry with him by force several reluctant minority tribes numbering about five million people and the reason why he had to force them into the rebellion was that the seaport of Port Harcourt and the bulk of the oil were in their territory and not in Ibo land (Daily Telegraph October 25, 1968).

It is important to establish the fact that Lt. Col. Ojukwu was not the first person to invent the concept “Biafra” The British first used Biafra to describe the heart of the Ibo land and called it the Bight of Biafra just as we also have the Bight of Benin. However, today Biafra is synonymous with Ojukwu because it became so popular and a household name after Ojukwu’s declaration.

However as the war progresses, it was remarked that:

“The so-called Biafra the never-never kingdom that Ojukwu holds forth to the Ibos as the justification for their death, has since shrunk from an area of some 50,000 square miles to one of less, than 2,000 square miles (Drum, April, 1970).

Much ground was prepared by the Eastern region for secession before the final declaration of the Republic of Biafra. On May 30, 1967, Olav listed the following actions and activities as preparation to secede from the federation. They are;

1. Constitutional proposals from the federal government were rejected by Ojukwu, who also declined to participate in the federal executive organs.
2. He refused to accept Gowon as his military superior.
3. He suggested that under the existing, conditions the regional units of Nigeria ought to pull apart.”
4. He took some unilateral decisions which include (a) the release on march 12, 1967 of army officers who had participated in the January coup including the leader of the Coup Major Nzeogwu against protests from Lagos (b) Publishing a white paper maintain that the regions should have full control over their own resources

When the Lagos government on March 31, 1967 published its budget statement not taking account of the claims of the Enugu government that the regions themselves should have control over regional resources, the Enugu government published an edit stating that all revenues from Eastern Nigeria which had gone into the federal treasury were now to be paid to the Eastern Region treasury and the revenue collection would be subject to control by the regional government. This edit was explicitly presented by Eastern Region authorities as the first step towards secession and was immediately turned down by the Federal Government which maintained that the edit was illegal and contrary to the constitution. A new edit published by the Easter Region government on April 18, 1967 continued this process by proclaiming the take-over of 10 federal corporations and installation situated in the Eastern region (Olav, 1976:53).

It is quite unfortunate that General Gowon was not matured enough in handling the issue of the creation of states. It is correct to say, that the country has a long history of well-articulated demands for states. Even Ezera posits that as Nigeria approached self-government, there were developments of minor nationalism and demand for separate autonomy within each existing region (Ezera, 1960: 245). The time was wrong, he cannot claim not to know that Lt. Col. Ojukwu was set for secession and
declaration of Republic of Biafra. He was waiting for an opportunity to explode, that golden opportunity came in May 27, 1967 when General Gowon created 12 States structure carving three states from the former East Central State.

The Ibos saw the creation of River and South Eastern states as a way of depriving them of much needed support they could have received from these minorities in their region. Again these areas were very rich in natural resources especially petroleum.

In the national broadcast of General Yakubu Gowon on May 27, 1967 he said:

“I am therefore proclaiming a state of emergency throughout Nigeria with immediate effect. I have assumed full powers as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed forces and Head of the Federal Military Government for the short period necessary to carry through the measures which are now urgently required. In this period of emergency, no political statements in the press, on the Radio and Television, all public media or any other political activity; will not be tolerated. The military and police are empowered to deal summarily with any offender” (Gowon’s Broadcast, May 27, 1967).

Such statement from General Gowon did not help matters, instead it provoked Ojukwu to declare the Republic of Biafra three days later. Since he has started the peace process which many peace loving Nigerians applauded, there was no need for such show of power and strength, as it later became counter-productive. Again his creation of states was another area that needs serious examination. According to General Gowon, I am satisfied that the creation of new states as the only possible basis for stability and equality is the overwhelming desire of vast majority of Nigerians (Ibid).

Again he said:

“To ensure justice, these states are being created simultaneously. To this end therefore, I am promulgating a Decree which will divide the Federal Republic into twelve States (Ibid). East Central State comprising the present Eastern Region excluding Calabar, and Ogoja provinces. River State comprising Ahoada, Brass Degema, Ogoni and Port Harcourt Division (Ibid).

It was said that the crisis entered a decisive stage during the last part of May, 1967 when Lt. Col. Ojukwu got a mandate to declare the independence of the Eastern of the Eastern Region from the Assembly consisting of approximately 300 delegates from the various districts of the region (Olav, 1970: 53-55). It was at this point that the federal Military Government adopted most of the measures that usually characterize a serious crisis including economic sanctions and a blockade of the Eastern Region. As a follow up, the federal forces advanced into the Eastern Region from the South and from the North.

Ojukwu used this miscalculations and the inordinate ambition of General Gowon to quickly declare the Republic of Biafra on 30th May, 1967 three days after General Gowon created the 12 states which was particularly seen by the Ibos as a way to disunite and destabilize the Eastern Region, thereby making it less powerful in the event of secession. Infact that broadcast gave Lt. Col. Ojukwu the justification to declare the Republic of Biafra.

Lt. Col. Ojukwu, a very intelligent soldier, who saw himself as far above his fellow officers and who suspects the motives and moves of fellow officers saw the danger in this address especially creating 3 states from the Eastern Region reacted quickly. He addressed the people of the Eastern Nigeria on May, 1967.

“Fellow country men and women, you the people of Eastern Nigeria: conscious of the supreme authority of Almighty God over all mankind, of your duty to yourselves and posterity: Aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any Government based outside Eastern Nigeria; believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be
preserved by yourselves, determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Federal Republic of Nigeria; prepared to enter into such association, treaty or alliance with any sovereign state within the former Federal Republic of Nigeria and elsewhere on such terms and conditions as best to subserve your common good. Affirming your trust and confidence in me; having mandated me to proclaim on your behalf and in your name, that Eastern Nigeria, be a sovereign Independent Republic, now, therefore, I Lieutenant colonel, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, military governor of Eastern Nigeria, by virtue of the authority, and pursuant to the principles, recited above, do hereby solemnly proclaim that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of “The Republic of Biafra” and I do declare that all political ties between us and the Federal Republic of Nigeria hereby totally dissolved (Ojukwu’s Declaration of Secession, 30 May, 1967).

The first reaction of General Gowon was to announce to the nation that Lt. Col. Ojukwu had been dismissed from the Nigeria Army and relieved of his post as the military Governor of the Eastern Region. Therefore it was not a surprise that on July 6, 1967 war broke out between federal troops and Biafra forces when the federal government stated that it was taking action to end the rebellion in Eastern Region. By July 6, 1967 Federal forces invade the East and took Nsukka after days of fighting. Ogoja in the South-Eastern State was liberated on July 15, and Bonny was captured by federal forces on July 26, 1967. This war continued until 1970 when it ended.

Conclusion
The Iboland is one of the most densely populated rural area in Nigeria. The Ibo generally are individualistic and live in egalitarian society, where an individual considers himself as important as everyone else and commands a say in the local affairs. The Ibo culture emphasized competition between families, between lineages and between clans. The society was therefore intensely democratic with characteristics of competitive and equalitarian societies.

The political organisation of the Ibo in pre-colonial time was segmentry in nature. The Ibo people have a more decentralized political structure than any other major group. In the pre-colonial Igbo society, agriculture was the most important economic activity. The Ibos are of the opinion that yam was the king of Igbo crops, hence the beginning of the harvest season was marked by important new yam festival. It is well established that the Ibos worship Chukwu, Ala and Ifejioku generally.

The desire for western education was the first factor, which enhanced Ibo nationalism. The Ibos embraced western education with great interest. It was part of the reasons why Ibos were appointed to the African civil service and as clerks in business firms. The go-getter spirit among the Ibos was an added advantage over the other ethnic groups in their fight for justice, equality and subsequent acquisition of national power.

There was unhealthy competition between the Ibo and Yoruba to acquire national power and occupy important positions in the country. The return of Dr. Azikiwe to Nigeria from USA compounded the problems of Yoruba people and increased the tempo to Ibo nationalism, as the period witnessed the employment of ethnic propaganda which laid the foundation of ethnic assertiveness. Some Yoruba and Hausa leaders resented Azikiwe and his followers because they were afraid that his coming to politic is a serious challenge to their political hegemony.

The issue of secession among the Ibos began in 1948 at a Pan-Ibo conference at Aba when Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was elected Ibo State President. It came up again in 1963 census when the results were published which showed that the population of North was more than that of the East, West, Midwest and Lagos combined. It was at that point that Dr. Michael Okpara led Eastern Government first decided to secede from the federation as a result of the manipulation of the 1963 census.

However, during the period of Nigerian civil war, secessionist aspirations in the Eastern Nigeria focused on the Military Governor of the region, Lt Col. Ojukwu. It has been argued by many
that Ojukwu misled the Ibos into secession. This is against the background that Lt. Colonel Ojukwu, was a man full of ambition. Some condemned Ojukwu as the arch-villain of secession, painting unbelievably sordid pictures of his nightmarish dictatorship.

Ojukwu was an ambitious seeker for political power at any cost. The sharp difference between Ojukwu and Kaduna Nzeogwu, Major Sam Agbamuche, Major Philip Alale, Col. Banjo and Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna point to his interest for high political office, seemed ambitious and sought to reach the very top of his profession.

Ojukwu to a reasonable extent should not be blamed considering the mass killing of the Ibos in North in May, 1966 and in those killed after the counter-coup of July, 1966. It must be agreed that this unnecessary killings of the Ibos in parts of the country during this period under focus was least expected. Although it was said that the Military Governor of Eastern Region, Lt Colonel Ojukwu demanded for adequate compensation for the loss of life and property suffered by easterners in the North, he was not able to hold the angrily Ibo tribesmen in check. They cut the throats of the Ibos like sacrificial animals. Against this backdrop it may be wrong absolutely to blame Ojukwu for instructing his people to return home. Infact, they were already returning home before Ojukwu intervened. One should also not forget that in the counter-coup of July, 1966, the Nigerian Head of States; Major General Aguyi Ironsi an Ibo was killed by the Northern soldiers. The massive exodus of the Ibos from the North and West to Eastern Region was to ensure their safety and was based on also for lack of confidence in the Federal Government.

The declaration of the Republic of Biafra by the Governor of East Central State, Lt. Col. Odumegun Ojukwu marked a turning point in the final declaration of Nigerian civil war. It was the last straw that break the camel back. Hence it could be described as a catalyst that led to the war.

References
[8] Drum, April, 1970
Nigerians agitating for the secession of Biafra or trying to whip up ethnic tensions in the country will be met with the "full force of the law," according to the country's vice-president. In response, a coalition of groups from northern Nigeria calling itself the Northern Youth Groups issued an ultimatum earlier in June, calling for Igbos, an ethnic group that made up the majority of Biafra's population to leave the north, where the biggest ethnic group is the Hausa-Fulani, or face forced eviction. Nigerians agitating for the secession of Biafra or trying to whip up ethnic tensions in the country will be met with the "full force of the law," according to the country's vice-president. The West African country has witnessed a rise in pro-Biafra sentiment in recent years. And Lt Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Eastern region military governor, declared the sovereign Republic of Biafra 30 May 1967. The Nigerian Civil War had begun. Baxter traces the total tale, beginning with the immediate run-up to war "dramatis personae and the Aburi Conference. Early Nigerian military actions, Biafra's audacious Operation Torch and the inevitable, almost plodding Federal strangulation follow. No coverage would be complete without Nigeria's use of starvation as a weapon. And Baxter dutifully distills clandestine international relief and gun-running efforts to B... Biafra, officially the Republic of Biafra, was a secessionist state in West Africa which existed from 30 May 1967 to January 1970; it was made up of the states in the Eastern Region of Nigeria. Biafra's declaration of independence from Nigeria resulted in civil war between Biafra and Nigeria. Biafra was formally recognised by Gabon, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Zambia. In January 1967, the military leaders Gowon, Chukwuemeka Ojukwu and senior police officials of each region met in Aburi, Ghana and agreed on a less centralized union of regions.