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# Hate speech and political media discourse in Nigeria: The case of the Indigenous People of Biafra

## ABSTRACT

*The study adopts approaches in linguistics and critical discourse analysis to interpret media speeches and public statements of the Biafra secessionist movement leader, Nnamdi Kanu, as hate speech. The study shows that hate speech in discourses produced by the separatist Indigenous People of Biafra appears as language aggression, such as insults and verbal attacks, as well as threats. Discourse structures such as the use of interrogation and metaphor also appear in the hate narratives. Compared with the Rwandan case, the study argues that hate speech could result in similar incitement and violence. While hate speech caused genocide in Rwanda, it did not work in Nigeria, largely because of the division among the Biafra campaigners and the Igbo political elite about the Biafra independence campaign.*

## KEYWORDS

hate speech  
Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)  
Nnamdi Kanu  
critical discourse analysis (CDA)  
Nigeria  
violence  
politics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hate speech is broadly defined as any speech that denigrates people on the basis of their nationality, ethnicity or race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. The term 'speech' has also been extended to include any expression in the form of writing, images, cartoons, songs or plays that reflects hate, prejudice and intolerance for targeted persons on the basis of their membership of a national or demographic group. Some definitions of hate speech also include any communication that promotes discrimination, hostility and violent attacks (Gagliardone et al. 2015). All forms of racist, xenophobic and sexist comments and speeches are included here.

Unfortunately, hate speech can influence the behaviour of in-group members towards the out-group often viewed as an enemy. And through socialization, the in-group can adopt and understand a particular ideology and 'recruit members through the construction of a common enemy, which is constructed as evil or as a cultural/economic threat to the in-group' (Gagliardone et al. 2015: 10). This was the case preceding the Bosnian war in the early 1990s, when anti-Croat and anti-Muslim messages were deliberately and consistently transmitted on the Serb Television (Benesch 2004). Thus, hate speech can serve not only as 'an effective tool to intimidate minorities, promote violence and intolerance' (Gagliardone et al. 2014: 16) but also can be a precursor to mass violence (e.g., genocide) (Dovell 2010). In Africa, the Rwanda genocide of 1994 has been attributed partly to the systematic use of incitement and hate speech against the Tutsis (Schabas 2000; Marcus 2012).

In Nigeria, hate speech became a worrisome concept in 2017 with the rise of a new faction of the *Biafra* independence campaign movement. The group known as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a faction of the erstwhile *Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra* (MASSOB) of the Igbo of south-east ethnic group of Nigeria. The separatist group is seeking a referendum for an independent government of the Igbo tribe and has applied online and offline campaigns and protests to pursue their goal. The group has also been accused of making hateful comments about the Nigerian government and other ethnic groups, capable of inciting mass violence like in the case of Rwanda.

The current study examines the various media and online political statements and speeches by the IPOB's leader and how these constitute hate and intolerance. The study contributes significantly to scholarly understanding of the structure and mobilization of the Biafra groups and how hate speech worked against them. In comparison with the Rwanda's case, this study shows how the use of hate speech may not achieve the same results even though in both cases, hate speech was used to galvanize troops and incite violence and inspire ethnic consciousness.

## 2. IPOB AND THE BIAFRA CAMPAIGN

*Biafra* was a defunct secessionist state of the Igbo of the south-east of Nigeria that was born out of a long-standing dissatisfaction with the political structure of the Nigerian central government and the alleged marginalization of the Igbo.

The Biafran agitation is traceable to the British amalgamation of the previously independent and ethnically heterogeneous regions in 1914. While this was necessary for effective colonial rule, it generated a series of crises in postcolonial Nigeria. Prior to colonial independence, the Nigerian

constitution identified three geopolitical regions in the Nigerian federation. This allowed regional autonomy and enhanced regionalism and ethnicity among the various tribes, and unfortunately, at the expense of national political consciousness and identity (Ajiboye 2017). Thus, there was a scramble to consolidate power at the regional level. This precedence was carried on into the First Republic (postcolonial Nigeria), which featured three dominant ethnic groups (i.e., the North, south-east and south-west geopolitical regions) in national politics, and each of these groups feared regional domination by the other.

The political insecurities resulted in the Nigeria's first two military coups and a major political crisis that resulted in the mass killing of the Igbos in the North. This led to a three-year war between Biafra and the Nigerian government, when the Igbos under the leadership of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared the independence of the *Biafra* nation from Nigeria in May 1967. Biafra was defeated and reintegrated into 'one' Nigeria in 1970. However, in spite of the integration and the so-called reconciliation, the consciousness of an independent Biafra has remained in Nigeria as the people of the south-east geopolitical zone still complain of injustice and marginalization especially in the central politics of the country.

From the late 1990s and upwards, various neo-Biafran movements and groups, which advocated the peaceful actualization of the Biafran State, came into existence. The first was the movement for the MASSOB created in 1999 by Ralph Uwazuruike; subsequently, other splinter groups developed such as *Biafran Liberation Movement* (BLM), the *Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups* (COBLIG), the *Biafra Foundation*, the *Biafra Actualisation Forum* among others (Omeje 2005; Onuoha 2014). Most of these groups were formed and supported by the Igbo in the diaspora. IPOB and MASSOB now appear to be rivals, as each group holds divergent views on the realization of Biafra. Interestingly, some factions have also emerged from IPOB such as the *Reformed Indigenous People of Biafra* (RE-IPOB) and *The Rebranded Indigenous People of Biafra* (TRIPOB), which disagree with the ideals of IPOB.

IPOB came into limelight in 2015 and primarily engages social media, a website and an online radio (i.e., Radio Biafra) for activism. Radio Biafra particularly garnered support and sympathizers as well as international attention for the Biafran struggle. IPOB's members, largely youths, are mainly the Igbo in Nigeria and the diaspora. The group's leader, Nnamdi Kanu, was arrested in October 2015 and charged with treason, and despite court injunctions for his release, the Nigerian government continued to detain him illegally. He was later released on bail in April 2017, after about eighteen months in detention. His continued detention resulted in multiple protests by his supporters both online and offline. Many of the offline protests led to clashes with security agents, sometimes resulting in killings (Amnesty International 2016). Significantly, these protests and killings as well as the labelling of IPOB as terrorist group by the Nigerian government have further spread the pro-Biafra message and popularized the group at the international level. It has also sparked off numerous debates on the break-up of Nigeria. And there are fears that if the activities of IPOB are not properly checked, they are most likely to incite mass violence against both the Igbos and other ethnic groups, especially through their strategy of incitement and hate speech.

### 3. HATE SPEECH IN DISCOURSE

Research literature outside Africa has shown that hate speech has featured extensively in discourse studies, such as political discourse (Vasvári 2013; Kampf 2015), religious discourse (Bob 2014), media discourse (Arcan 2013; Musolff 2015), online discourse (Neshkovska and Trajkova 2017; Cleland 2017) and academic discourse (Durodie 2016) among others. Scholars have also applied approaches and methods in corpus linguistics, pragmatics and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to the study of hate speech either as discourse of violence (Leezenberg 2015), homophobic speech (Love and Baker 2015), threatening discourse or discourse of discrimination (Szilagyi 2015). Leezenberg (2015) argues that the 'performativity of hate speech' is not only about violence in speech or writing but is indeed 'in itself a discourse of violence' (2015: 200). Ozarlan (2014) proposes the terms 'hate discourse' and 'hate speech act' rather than 'hate speech' and argues that hate speech is a concept more associated with the social media 2.0, and either of the terms (i.e., hate discourse or hate speech act) is likely to be a new beneficial way of analysing and possibly combating online hate speech.

Love and Baker (2015), identifying some characteristics of hate utterances in homophobic speech in the British Parliament against the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) minority, argues that while homophobic language appears to be on the decrease in such political contexts, 'there is a mismatch between words and acts, requiring analysts to acknowledge the presence of more subtle indications of homophobic discourse in the future' (2015: 57). Similarly, Musolff (2015) shows that the British debates in the press and the Internet about immigration have been characterized by 'dehumanizing metaphors', in the representation of immigrants. Such discriminatory metaphors are viewed as some forms of hate speech expressed towards the unwanted 'other'. Vasvári (2013) views 'gendered political discourse' in the United States during the 2008 presidential campaign as 'gendered hate speech' with Hillary Clinton and other female political figures depicted in sexist and misogynist terms. The study argues that deep-seated gender stereotypes have continued unchallenged in post-socialist society as well as in public discourse. And that masculinism is ironically the bedrock of western liberal democracy where gender stereotypes are deep-seated and where the backlash against women in the public sphere has been ongoing.

Szilagyi (2015) further identifies major references, metaphors, frames and argumentation strategies with which the British National Party and the Jobbik party in Hungary construct the different images of the 'Chinese other' and concludes that 'the far-right in the UK – a major Western power, presents China clearly in hostile terms, mainly as a "dangerous, threatening intruder" into the British market' (2015: 151). In addition, the discourse of the British far-right portrays China primarily as a communist dictatorship, and this is used as a metaphor of oppression in the domestic UK context. Interestingly, Kampf (2015), in the 'politics of being insulted', shows how public figures in Israeli public discourse manage insults or hate speech. The study shows that hurt feelings are 'strategically employed to protest against politically unacceptable acts' and that 'public actors sometimes explicitly refuse to be insulted, shifting the meaning of what is perceived as an insult by side-participants into a compliment' (2015: 107). These interesting studies, among many others, have given theoretical, conceptual and descriptive insights to research into hate speech as a discourse concept.

#### 4. HATE SPEECH IN MEDIA DISCOURSE IN AFRICA

Twenty-four years after the Rwandan genocide, hate speech, which was a weapon of the Hutus against the Tutsis, has remained a challenge in the socio-political and cultural cohesion processes in Africa. African media, in particular, have been blamed for their roles in fuelling hate speech in some already tension-soaked communities. The Rwanda genocide, Kenya's post-election violence in 2008, Burundi's election crisis of 2015 and the South Sudan conflicts are some instances of how media contributed to the escalation of violence. In the Rwanda conflict, hate speech was extensively used in the local radio stations (i.e., Radio Rwanda and the RTLM [Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines]) that transmitted messages of Hutu hatred and incitement against the Tutsis. Some publications that disseminated propaganda and ethnic hatred were also in circulation in many parts of Rwanda. Some metaphors that denigrated and stigmatized the Tutsis as the 'enemy' were also freely used (Viljoen 2005).

The Burundi case is not completely different from the intractable violence and killings in South Sudan, which was largely fuelled by hate speech on public radio. Hundreds lost their lives and millions were displaced in the conflict, which is often viewed as an ethnic conflict (Nakitare 2018). Again, hate speech on the public radio station in South Sudan was used by the rebels to incite violence in the *Bentiu* massacre in 2014. The 'fighters took to the radio to broadcast hate speech, urging men to rape women of specific ethnicities and demanding that rival groups be expelled from the town' (Smith 2014).

In Nigeria, the understanding and practice of hate speech appear to manifest more in political speeches and discourses. These encompass words and comments that are insulting to those in power or derogatory of individuals that are socially visible (Gagliardone et al. 2015).

Unlike in other African countries, hate speech is not usually transmitted through the Nigerian public radio and TV stations. But there have been instances of hate utterances by politicians and religious figures being disseminated in some popular Nigerian newspapers (Ezeibe 2015). The Biafra group has extensively applied the social media and their Biafra online radio and television to disseminate incendiary speeches and comments.

The Nigerian government, for the first time, reacted to what was described as hate speech produced by the Biafra campaign group and took some steps at criminalizing it; hate speech was then perceived as 'the latest of the troubles afflicting our country' (Adetayo 2018: 2). At a National Security Conference at Abuja in August 2017, the Vice President (Yemi Osibanjo) declared that hate speech was a criminal offence punishable by law. According to him, 'the Federal Government has drawn a line on hate speech. Hate speech is a species of terrorism; terrorism, as it is defined popularly, is the unlawful use of violence or intimidation against individuals or groups, especially for political ends' (*The Nation* 2017). This ad hoc approach was immediately followed by an order to the police across the country to arrest any person or group of persons perpetrating hate speech either in the social media or conventional media (Adetayo 2018).

Unfortunately, scholarly studies of hate speech, especially those that apply linguistic approaches, are rare in Nigeria and Africa. Okafor and Alabi (2017) is one of the few studies of the speech act of hate speech in political campaigns in Nigeria. The study argues that 'campaign speeches made prior to the 2015 general elections in Nigeria served as weapons of intimidation, blackmail,

1. Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room (Electoral Update, vol. 2, no. 1). Accessed 15 January 2019.

incitement and coercion' (Okafor and Alabi 2017: 61). Ezeibe (2015) further argues that the Nigerian political leaders appeared not to be sensitive to the provocative tendencies of their utterances. Utterances such as the examples below, the study argues, are capable of inciting violence:

The North would make the country ungovernable if President Goodluck Jonathan wins the 2011 polls. [...] Anything short of a Northern President is tantamount to stealing our presidency. (*A comment credited to a former governor of Kaduna state in 2010.*)

(Ezeibe 2015: 15)

The Igbos are collectively unlettered, uncouth, uncultured, unrestrained and crude in all their ways. [...] Money and the acquisition of wealth is their sole objective and purpose in life. (*Femi Fani-Kayode, a former Aviation Minister, 2013.*)

(Ezeibe 2015: 17)

However, the Nigerian electoral law had attempted to address offences related to hate speech. For instance, there are detailed provisions that prohibited hateful speech in the Nigerian Electoral Act. The Electoral Act (2010, Section 95) specifically forbids incitement and hate speech in political campaigns and Section 102 prescribes the appropriate penalty for offenders.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, hate speech is still prevalent in political, ethnic and religious contexts and discourses (Umar 2016).

## 5. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

CDA, applied to this study as conceptual framework and methodology, is a type of qualitative/descriptive discourse analysis that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted in discourse in the social and political contexts (van Dijk 2001). Works in the various type of CDA with theoretical and analytical diverse approaches have thrived towards a common goal – exposing ideological discourse structures in texts or language use in the reproduction of social dominance, ideology, power asymmetry, racial discrimination, class intolerance and gender inequality, among others. Thus, CDA scholars, studying media or political discourses have examined prejudice, racism, ethnocentrism and antisemitism (van Dijk 2001, 2005); sexist and gender stereotypes (Kendali and Tannen 2001) and ethnicity (Guillem 2017) among others. These studies examined some subtle ways certain social and ethnic groups are represented and/or misrepresented in discourse.

For this study, we have adopted the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl and Wodak 2009), which adheres to the socio-philosophical orientation of critical theory to critique text and talk and adopts a 'critical stance' to do discourse analysis. One of the main three aspects of the critical orientation of DHA is the 'future-related prospective critique' that 'seeks to contribute to the improvement of communication (e.g., by elaborating guidelines against sexist language use or by reducing "language barriers" in hospitals, schools and so forth)' (2009: 88). Such 'contribution to the improvement of communication' will include also 'elaborating guidelines' (2009: 88) against hate speech as it is in the context of this study. The DHA is also oriented towards

the investigation of intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres and discourses, as well as extra-linguistic social/sociological variables, the history of an organization or institution, and situational frames. While focusing on all these relationships, this approach further explores 'how discourses, genres and texts change in relation to sociopolitical change' (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 90). Interestingly, what is considered as hate speech in the context of the Biafra struggle of today is indeed a function of historical and political forces such as the Nigeria-Biafra war and the perceived victimization of the Igbos. Some identified features of the language of hate often used by Nnamdi Kanu draws from the ideological war rhetoric of the Biafra war leader – Odumegwu Ojukwu. However, this approach to their so-called freedom struggle appears to be counter-productive. The counter-productivity of this discourse of hate speech as manifested in Nnamdi Kanu's utterances is one of the main arguments of this study.

As method, the CDA carried out in this study is essentially qualitative, which adopts the analytical tools of the DHA to describe and explain hate speech and linguistic violence attributed to persons (e.g., Kanu and his members); how 'objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically' are represented; 'how characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to social actors' (e.g., the Nigerian army accused of killing IPOB members), as well as objects, phenomena/events and processes and what arguments are employed in the discourse in question (Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 93). This study also shows how the Nigerian political context and dominant ideologies and power relations are reflected and resisted through hate speech.

The analysis of the samples of hate speech focuses on Nnamdi Kanu's speeches and comments on YouTube videos posted on Facebook in 2015 and 2017. These were the years of intense animosity and conflict between IPOB and the Nigerian government and the military. Specifically, the following samples are analysed:

1. A message by the IPOB leader entitled 'I am Nnamdi Kanu: A Letter from Nnamdi Kanu to Biafrans, Africa and the World', published on Facebook on 8 November 2015.<sup>2</sup> This is a 3483-word transcript of the Radio Biafra published in English.
2. Nnamdi Kanu's speech at the World Igbo Congress on 6 September 2015 posted on Facebook, on 26 March 2016.<sup>3</sup> This text comprises 1630 words in English, except in some parts, especially greetings, which are rendered in Igbo language.
3. Two video messages showing Kanu's threats to destroy Nigeria posted on Facebook on 4 January 2016 and 9 June 2017.<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this study, the videos messages were transcribed and converted into written texts by the authors. All the videos (broadcast on Radio Biafra) were in English except for some few intermittent code switches in Igbo and promptly repeated in English by the speaker.

Twenty excerpts from the speeches and political comments of the IPOB leader are reproduced in the analysis. 'EXP' as used in the study stands for 'excerpt'. Since Facebook posts of Kanu and his members were direct repetitions of the hate comments in the speeches, they were excluded from the

2. <https://www.facebook.com/radiobiafra/posts/i-am-nnamdi-kanu-letter/500086420172681/>. Accessed 15 January 2019.
3. <https://www.facebook.com/radiobiafra/posts/nnamdi-kanuspeech.../977537479094237/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XU2JtIU6M>. Accessed 15 January 2019.
4. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlaMJU\\_bdb5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KlaMJU_bdb5); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18scM7MrqzA>; <http://www.cambellsblog.com/2017/06/video-anybody-attending-pentecostal.html>. Accessed 15 January 2019.

data. YouTube videos are frequently used by IPOB to show photos of police harassment and killings of their members. Many of the videos were unverified and denied by the Nigerian government. However, Dixon (2016) shows that an Amnesty International report had accused the Nigerian security forces of torture and killings of members/supporters of the pro-Biafran independence movement. At least 150 Biafran protesters were said to be killed in 2016 (Chiluya 2018).

## 6. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of data identifies features of hate speech such as insults, threats, verbal abuse and hateful comments that are laden with ethnic prejudice and hostility. Specifically, the study analyses negative comments and construction of the out-group, particularly the Yoruba ethnic group. Patterns of these negative representations of the Yoruba and some historical insights to why this was so are provided. The character of hate speech expressed through metaphor, threats and rhetorical questions is also analysed. The constructions and framing of historical antecedents of war and conflict in Nigeria are significantly done through threats and rhetorical questions.

### 6.1. Evaluations of the Yoruba 'other' and their historical root

Gagliardone et al. (2014) have argued that hate speech is context-dependent, and in order to sustain equity and dignity of individuals, it should be studied with particular reference to unique historical and cultural contexts because in 'divided societies', some historical or social events could have precipitated the preference of one group over another and resulted in structural inequalities that have continued till today. The Biafra campaigners are constantly aggrieved not only by the civil war defeat but also by the perceived humiliation and injustice still being meted to the Igbos since the Nigerian civil war; the Igbos are said to live in Nigeria as a 'defeated people' (Chiluya 2018). Hence, the IPOB leader (Nnamdi Kanu) had used language aggression, comprising inciteful comments, verbal attacks and provocative words against the Nigerian government in his speeches and comments (Sani 2017). He had also attempted to construct an exaggerated cultural dichotomy between the Igbo and other ethnic groups, especially the *Yoruba* and the *Hausa*.

The Igbo hatred for the Hausa/Fulani is understandable due to their roles in the political crises that led to the civil war, and in the civil war itself. The then Nigerian Head of State (i.e., Yakubu Gowon) is from the Middle Belt. But the antipathy against the Yoruba is not often clear to an outsider. Obafemi Awolowo – a one-time leader of the south-west region – was a Yoruba hero and idolized by many Yorubas. He was also the Minister of Finance during the civil war who 'arguably crafted, engineered and implemented the genocidal policies that led to the Biafran war' and persuaded the Nigerian government to adopt the policy of starvation against the Igbos (Akintide 2012: 1). Chinua Achebe (an Igbo literary champion) in his book *There Was a Country* had argued that Awolowo, and by implication, the Yoruba people, should be held responsible for the death of over two million Igbos in the Biafran war (Achebe 2012; Akintide 2012). Awolowo was also accused of introducing tribalism to Nigerian politics. Hence, the anger and hatred for the Yoruba had lingered on the mind of the modern Igbo who consistently claim they are not Nigerians,



and Kanu had frequently reminded them that they are 'Biafrans' – not meant to coexist with Hausa and Yoruba in one country (EXP. 2).

Arguably, some of Nnamdi Kanu's verbal outrages have their intertextual underpinnings from the 'Ahiara Declaration' of the Biafra Warlord – Emeka Ojukwu, delivered in 1969. In this war rhetoric, Ojukwu stressed the identity of the 'Biafrans' and insisted that they were no longer Nigerians. Nigeria was constantly attributed to significant actions and character traits as corruption and brutality and was referred to as the 'enemy' (Chiluwa 2014). In a war situation, this was understandable as the speech basically enunciated the basis for the Biafra revolution – which according to Ojukwu was not only for the Igbo but also for the restoration of the dignity of the black man from the dungeon of neo-colonialism. Significantly Ojukwu's speech was never criticized for containing any form of linguistic violence. Unfortunately, it appears Ojukwu's ethnic bias was grossly misunderstood.

In his speeches (e.g., video posted on Facebook on 4 January 2016), the Yoruba are constructed as 'our enemies', 'liars' and 'blood suckers'. According to Kanu, the main aim of the Biafra struggle is to 'undo [sic] (undo) 56 years of Yoruba lies and deceit' (EXP. 1).

EXP. 1: We are unstoppable. *Our enemies* know this. That's why they keep praying and fasting. And I am praying to God that as soon as they kneel down to pray and fast, let them die from there. [...] We are mobilising, making people aware [...] we are trying to undo 56 years of *Yoruba lies and deceit*.

EXP. 2: ...When the *evil British slave masters* led by (Dmitri John Fredrick Lugard) and his girlfriend (Flora Shaw) ruthlessly amalgamated the children of GOD (Biafrans), the (Ariwa's) Hausa/Fulani and (Oduduwa's) Yoruba people. They put us together without any consultation or agreement between us: *they knew that we were never one people, and we shared no common value system as a people*.

EXP. 3: [...]. Obasanjo who single-handedly within 13 days to the expiration of his tenure *stole nearly 900 billion* (Naira), he is asking for prayer to be as one. And do you think God will listen to them? He doesn't listen to such foolish prayers. [...] Obasanjo who *stole your money, kill your children* is asking for prayer so that Nigeria will be one headed by Yoruba people.

In the YouTube video posted on Facebook on 9 June 2017, Kanu insisted that any Igbo that attended a church pastored by a Yoruba was 'an idiot', 'a complete fool' and 'not fit to be human being' (EXP. 4). Although this verbal outrage was not directly to the Yoruba, it was borne out of severe hatred and animosity and also meant to incite hatred against the Yoruba. This outburst reiterates his earlier remarks that the Igbo have no dealings with the Yoruba and they cannot live together (e.g., EXP. 2). The hate remarks reflect the influence of tribal sentiments and how the history of ethnic hostility can influence religion and culture.

Unfortunately, Kanu forgot that some of the Yoruba pastors in question were actually sympathetic of the Biafran cause, and in fact, Yorubas also attended churches being pastored by Igbo clergymen (Chiluwa 2018). Kanu's verbal attacks appear non-sensitive to the complexity of religion in Nigeria and also failed to realize that Nigerians do not generally choose churches on the basis of ethnicity; hence, there is nothing like 'Yoruba church' or 'Igbo

5. Nnamdi Kanu in a video – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-A4WdmpyP8>. Accessed 15 January 2019.

church'. People attend churches based on their needs of miracle or healing or deliverance, not necessarily on who pastors a church.

EXP. 4: If you are attending a Yoruba church, you should be ashamed of yourself; anybody attending a Pentecostal church with a Yoruba pastor is *an idiot, a complete fool, an embecile. [...] They are worse than Boko Haram. They are very very foolish; if your pastor is Yoruba, you are not fit to be a human being.*<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, after this verbal insult and abuse of Igbos who attended 'Yoruba churches', many Igbo and non-Igbo supporters, especially those that attended Yoruba churches, withdrew their support for the Biafra group. Some elite Igbos who probably did not want to associate religion with the Biafran political struggle began to perceive the Biafra campaign from a different perspective. Pastors of 'Igbo churches' with dominant Yoruba membership became uncomfortable. Yoruba pastors that originally supported the Biafra freedom campaign withdrew their support (Chiluya 2018). The Igbo people living in Oyo State (Yoruba land) condemned Kanu's hate speech to Yoruba people (Opeyemi 2017). Another Igbo community in Kano (in the North) also dissociated themselves from the activities of IPOB, especially on account of the provocative speeches of its leader (*The Punch* 2017). Other factions of the Biafra campaign such as the 'Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra' (MASSOB), 'Biafra Independent Movement' (BIM), TRIPOB, 'Renegade Indigenous People of Biafra' (RENIPOB), etc., also began to criticize Kanu's religious stance and openly dissociated themselves from his ethno-religious sentiment and hate speech. These factions of the Biafra struggle, with their different ideological perspectives and approaches, openly attacked Kanu. Some of them used Kanu's hate speech as propaganda against Kanu's group and to win membership to their own groups (Chiluya 2018). Hence, unlike in Rwanda, hate speech and incitement rather than unite the Igbos against the Hausa and Yoruba as Nnamdi Kanu had probably contemplated, brought division among them and contributed to the conflict and the split in IPOB itself (Chiluya 2018). Thus, the use of hate speech actually worked against the group and endangered their objectives.

It is important to note here that Nnamdi Kanu's utterances were largely not intellectually driven and lacked the kind of logicity that an average Igbo elite and intellectual would identify with. Firstly, his attempt to dissuade the Igbo from attending 'Yoruba Church' seems to defy logic, especially with his emphasis on Pentecostal churches. Apart from the Pentecostal churches, there are several other kinds of churches in the country where Igbos and other ethnic groups worship freely. Secondly, an average Igbo intellectual and business man would easily see the danger and oddity in these pronouncements, given the fact that they have coexisted peacefully with the Yoruba and other groups and fared very well in their intellectual pursuit and business ventures without discrimination. Moreover, intellectually, the justifications given for regarding Nigeria as a 'zoo' in some of his speeches, do not appear to be cognitively and scientifically true. While zoos are created for animals to encourage scientific research and conservation of different animal species, such animals are not killed anyhow. Also, zoological gardens forbid any form of violence or maltreatment against animals kept in them, so this runs contrary to Kanu's claim that violence is the order of the day in a zoo. Unfortunately, also, his expressions are fraught with the kinds of grammatical and spelling errors,

which the highly intellectual people will not want to claim any form of association with. It will therefore be very difficult to imagine that Kanu's expressions capture the overall idea, perception and conception behind the call for the Biafran state, which is first of all to demand for equity and fair play in Nigeria.

IPOB membership comprises mainly the Igbo youth many of who are self-employed (e.g., traders), young school leavers and the unemployed. There are also the educated Igbo Nigerians, especially those in the diaspora, who incite the youth at home. It is also important to mention here that many of the members are not properly educated, particularly in the processes of political activism or peace negotiation and diplomacy. In fact, some social commentators have questioned the eligibility of Nnamdi Kanu as a political leader, who from his utterances betrays ignorance of political processes such as state creation or political self-determination (Alabi and Ayeloja 2019). Language use by the IPOB leader and his members are generally offensive and lack any of the basic features of Igbo cultural values, including peaceful co-existence. This fundamental flaw in the use of language due to insufficient education and lack of tact, no doubt could have hindered strong support not only from the Igbo political class but also from the elite/intellectual class of the Igbo.

## **6.2. Metaphor in hate narratives**

The purpose of metaphor in discourse is often to achieve a better understanding of image or meaning of the referent, that is, representing 'one thought in the image of another that is better suited to making it more tangible or more striking than if it were presented directly and without any sort of disguise' (Ricoeur 1978: 60). Unfortunately, certain critical metaphors are misleading in terms of the representation of a target domain. Hence, metaphors have been used to misrepresent fact or common sense and have often been misapplied to erroneously convey some negative evaluation of others or used as a weapon of war against some perceived enemies.

Some studies of hate discourse show that metaphor has been used to disseminate hate propaganda messages that diminish the worth of another group, infusing racial hatred, contempt and denigration as well as stigmatizing one group as the enemy (Viljoen 2005). For instance, prior to the Rwanda genocide, some hate metaphors for the Tutsis were popularized among the Hutu. 'Inyenzi' (or cockroach) was a term used in the 1960s by some Rwanda's governing Hutus to refer to rebel fighters of the Rwanda's minority ethnic group, the Tutsi, and by early 1990s, 'inyenzi' had become a popular label for any Tutsi (Benesch 2004) that totally diminished their worth as human beings in the eyes of an average Hutu fighter. In another study, Musolff (2015) finds out that 'parasite metaphors' were prevalent in blogs and forums for describing unwanted immigrants in the United Kingdom and that the depiction of immigrants as parasites, leeches or bloodsuckers is dehumanizing and deliberate, as they express negative feelings and hatred.

In all of Kanu's speeches and comments in the data, Nigeria is called a 'zoo – the animal kingdom' and constructed as a product of 'white people' and endorsed by 'black fools' and 'slaves' whose brains do not function. This negative evaluation is used to mark the cultural divide between the Igbo and the rest of Nigeria. However, this particular evaluation of Nigeria hardly reflects public opinion, not even among his native Igbos. While Nigeria is labelled a zoo, implying that its citizens are animals, Nigerian government officials are described as 'idiots, and not educated' (EXP. 4). However, Nnamdi Kanu

ideologically refers to himself as ‘whiter than white and whiter than snow’ (EXP. 7). Perhaps, this is his own way of constructing his intention towards his people (the Igbo). But it also clearly illustrates van Dijk’s (1998) ideological square (i.e., maximize my/our good action and minimize *their* good action). The zoo metaphor attracted reactions in the media and among some interest groups, and when Kanu was asked by journalists why he used the word ‘zoo’ as a metaphor for Nigeria, he replied: ‘the language the people hear in the zoo is violence’ (Ebuzor 2016a). He further argued that it is only in a zoo that people (or animals) are killed, and no one asks any question. However, if a metaphor is defined in terms of similarity of two domains being compared, and the character of one is being transferred to the target domain, Kanu’s zoo metaphor becomes problematic in terms of how it captures the Nigerian situation. As highlighted above, one wonders how the language of a zoo is violence and how animals are killed without any consequence.

EXP. 5: As our people rest in the grave, we’ll never rest until Biafra is restored. I don’t care what they say in Abuja. I don’t give a damn what they say in Lagos. I’m a Biafran and we are going to crumble *the zoo*. *Some idiots who are not educated* said that they’ll arrest me, and I ask them to come. (Facebook)

EXP. 6: That zoo – the animal kingdom created by white people adopted by *black fools and slaves*; those that *their brain does not function*. [...] *The zoo* called Nigeria will not exist [...]. We are here to ensure its destruction. [...] The name ‘Nigeria’ will not exist by December this year (2017).

EXP. 7: *Terrorist* Buhari exposed. [...] Nigeria must die. (Facebook, 27 August 2017)

Two other metaphors that are used for Nigeria are ‘shackle of darkness’, alluding to the usual complaint of marginalization and the lack of freedom; and ‘man-made contraption’ (EXP. 8), indicating that Nigeria is a mere creation or device – an unsafe product of the British colonial policy. The Nigerian President is frequently labelled as ‘terrorist’ (EXP. 7), and Britain is referred to as ‘evil British slave master’ in order to construct negative opinion of them among the supporters of the campaign.

EXP. 8: I am Nnamdi Kanu, I am whiter than white and whiter than snow, and my mantra is (Eziokwu Bu Ndu) which means ‘Truth is life’ in the Igbo language. I am Nnamdi Kanu; I was born to liberate my people the (Biafrans) from *this shackle of darkness; man made contraption* that has enslaved them since 1914.

EXP. 9: It’s more clear to me that one of the main reason I was arrested, is because I defiled their divide and rule strategies that were the strongest ideology infuriated on us as a people, hatred and divided lies has been dispensed on us which the *Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba gutter media* has impacted into the mind of Biafran’s living within the river line areas.

Unfortunately, negative opinion formed through hate metaphors like any other type of metaphor creates a mental picture that tends to last very long in the mind of people. So, hate metaphors are dangerous in terms of how they constantly reconstruct and re-enact negative assumptions of other ethnic groups, resulting in perennial hatred and hostility. Significantly, hate speech was viewed by many people in Nigeria as hardly a diplomatic way of seeking

redress for whatever victimization Kanu and the Igbo claim to have suffered or still suffer.

### 6.3. Threat and hate speech

Verbal or written threats are intentional commissive acts (Searle 1969) that send a message conveying the intention of a person to perform an act that the addressee will view unfavourably and the intention to intimidate the addressee (Fraser 1999); such intention could be to harm or even kill the addressee, either as an individual, a group or a government (Chiluwa 2016).

Threat has been studied as a key element in self-other constructions and the process of ordering. For instance, in his study of the United States and Arab 'othering' of Iran, Reinke de Buitrago (2015) argues that given a background of prejudices and stereotypes and someone threatening, perceptions of the other can develop as threat perceptions. Cap (2018) also shows how threat is communicated in Polish anti-immigration discourse. Interestingly, there is a 'thin line between hate speech and real threats' (Johnson 2012: 1), and many instances of hate speech have been understood as implied or direct threats. For instance, constructing immigrants as 'terror risk' (Cap 2018) may be perceived as an implied physical or emotional threat to them (immigrants). Indeed, Appel et al. (2015) have shown that 'stereotype threat' (a state of psychological discomfort that is thought to arise when individuals are confronted with negative stereotype about their own group) is responsible for low performance of immigrant students in the United States and other countries where they live. This implies that othering, hate speech and incitement not only are threats of emotional trauma in themselves but also expose the target to risks of physical harm. Some of the definitions of hate speech have included threat as one of its properties (see Gagliardone et al. 2015). In Nigeria, much of what is known about Nnamdi Kanu's hate speeches is their potential to incite war and violent acts on politicians, government officials and the military.

Samples of hate speech in Kanu's hate rhetoric in the data are shown in EXP. 10–EXP. 15. The threats are in four categories: firstly, in EXP. 10 and EXP. 12, he threatens to assassinate anyone who attempts to arrest him. The Nigerian government had threatened to re-arrest him for violating the terms of his bail in April 2017, which include not granting media interviews and attending public functions.

EXP. 10: We shall make sure that the zoo – animal kingdom, called Nigeria will fall. Biafra will come or everyone will perish.

EXP. 11: As our people rest in the grave, we'll never rest until Biafra is restored. I don't care what they say in Abuja. I don't give a damn what they say in Lagos. I'm a Biafran and we are going to crumble the zoo. Some idiots who are not educated said that they'll arrest me, and I ask them to come. I'm in Biafra land. *If any of them leaves Biafra land alive know that this is not IPOB.* Tell them that's what I said.

EXP. 12: Tell Buhari that I'm in Aba and *any person who comes to arrest Nnamdi Kanu in Biafra land will die here.* I'll never go on exile I assure you. [...] Forget all the nonsense they write about us. *We are not slowing down and no man born of a woman can stop us.*

Secondly, he advocates extreme violence and war, which is contrary to the original principle of non-violence of the Biafra agitation (Chiluwa 2012, 2018) (EXP. 13–15). He makes it clear that without weapons, the Biafran dream would not materialize. Hence, Kanu seeks armed conflict and war as the last option and asks for supports.

EXP. 13: [...] The mission of Radio Biafra is a very simple one, to get Biafra by every means necessary and possible *including war*, by every means including violence. [...] Dear Lord in heaven [...] this *violence that no man has ever seen before. We said we will burn that zoo down and we will do it. Nigeria will be burned to the ground, completely burned to the ground.*

EXP. 14: You must come out to support what we are doing. *We need guns, and we need bullets.* [...] To kill somebody is very difficult for us, so to ask a gathering of Igbo people that we need guns and bullets, and weapons would be very very difficult to address, *but without it, Hausa people will barrage us.*

EXP. 15: If they fail to give us Biafra, Somalia will look like a paradise compared to what will happen to that ZOO (Nigeria). It is a promise, it is a pledge, and it is also a threat to them.

Thirdly, he threatens to exterminate Nigeria (the zoo), and he compares the level of devastation intended for Nigeria to that of Somalia during the war, which he implies would be worse in comparison with that of Somalia (EXP. 16 and 17). And he was so certain that he called the threat ‘a promise’ and ‘a pledge’. He overtly advocates violence when he says: ‘I do not believe in peaceful actualization of whatever the rubbish is called. [...] I have never seen where you become free by peaceful means’. Again, this reflects a blatant repudiation of their initial claim of non-violence, especially contradicting the mantra of the former leader of the Biafra campaign group (Ralph Uwazuruike), who now leads a different faction of the Biafra campaign (Chiluwa 2012, 2018).

Significantly, Nnamdi Kanu’s threats actually came to nothing because, about three years later, nothing really happened other than that he incited a violent campaign in Nigeria that led to his arrest and the unfortunate illegal killing of many of his members and supporters by the Nigerian army. The group was eventually banned in September 2017, making their activities illegal in Nigeria (Chiluwa 2018). As at the time of this study, there is a court order demanding his re-arrest, and Kanu has been on the run since late 2017. Nnamdi Kanu probably over-assumed the strength of his group and the capacity of his foreign supports; unfortunately, he was isolated by those he trusted.

EXP. 16: *If they do not give us Biafra, there will be nothing living in that very zoo they call Nigeria. Nothing will survive there; I can assure you.* [...] I do not believe in peaceful actualization of whatever the rubbish is called. I have never seen where you become free by peaceful means.

EXP. 17: I am Nnamdi Kanu *If anything happens to me, sink the zoo, I mean kill every governor and ministers in Biafra land including their family members from A TO Z. I am Nnamdi Kanu, if anything happens to me, make sure that no living thing remains in that contraption called Nigeria. I*

am Nnamdi Kanu I implore you to fight not to live but to die for what belongs to you: I am Nnamdi Kanu I encouraged you to fight for your children and your children's future.

Fourthly, Kanu gives a direct instruction to his members to destroy Nigeria 'if anything happens to me', this being a euphemism for death by assassination while in detention. His members indeed claimed (in 2016) that the Buhari-led government planned to assassinate their leader. He then advised his members and supporters to not only destroy Nigeria (the Hausa and Yoruba in particular) but also the compromised Igbo politicians that serve in the Buhari government as governors and ministers with their families.

#### **6.4. Rhetorical questions as discourse structure in hate rhetoric**

Rhetorical questions do not expect explicit answers, but listeners/readers are made to think deeply and answer the questions to themselves; hence, they are very strong tools for provoking emotional response that may result in physical reactions as well. Particularly in his 'I am Nnamdi Kanu' speech, rhetorical questions occur 39 times. Kanu calls them 'simple questions', comprising 22 questions to the Igbos and other supposed Biafrans (e.g., the Niger Delta tribes): five questions to the Yoruba and 12 questions to the Hausa/Fulani (see EXP. 18 and 19). Thus, rhetorical questions are used as another discursive strategy for the amplification of hatred for other tribes in recalling the history of violence and injustice on Nigerian minority groups; and rhetorical questions predicting answers that could incite violence and retaliation of the alleged injustice. Like Gagliardone et al. (2014) have noted: 'we should not pretend that history has not affected the relative power among groups in a society where there has been a history of slavery, apartheid, holocaust, ethnic cleansing, or ethnic marginalization' (2014: 15).

The rhetorical questions generally border on marginalization and injustice meted to the Niger Delta ethnic groups; he appeals to their emotions with these questions by reminding them of the unfortunate denial of basic infrastructure and the economic consequences of environmental degradation. By framing questions that reverberate their past and present sufferings, Kanu not only invites them to join the Biafra campaign but also mobilizes them to civil uprising. Questions such as 'do your children attend good schools?' or 'is there any drinking water for them?' (EXP. 18) have the potential to incite a mob action against the government.

EXP. 18: I want you to pay close attention to the voice of that man living within the River line areas of Biafra Land as he answers these questions.

(1) Does the Biafran's living within the River Line Areas live a good and healthy life? (2) Do their children attend a good school? (3) Is there any clean drinking water for them? (4) Does the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba cabals care about them? (5) Is there any Electricity and Good road network within their region? (6) Do they fish from their rivers anymore? (7) Do they cultivate in their farm land anymore? (8) Is there any social, medical care center for them [...].

EXP. 19: Why were they massacred in thousands at Odi in (Bayelsa) state by the former president of Nigeria a Yoruba man, Obasanjo? (11) Why was Ken Saro-Wiwa killed by a Hausa/Fulani formal Head of state Sani Abacha? (12) Why did Adekunle a Yoruba Man shot and killed Isaac

Adaka Boro after helping them fight his people Biafrans? (13) Why did they Kill Harri Marshal? (14) Why did they Arrest Asari Dokubo many times? (15) Why is Hausa/Fulani the only people that own all the Oil wells in your region [...]?

Kanu further delves into the history of police brutality in Nigeria against the Niger Delta minority ethnic group by citing the killings at Odi community in 1999, when the retaliatory action of the Nigerian police over the killing of some police officers on peace-keeping mission in Odi resulted in killings and razing down of entire villages. He also refers to the murder of the Nigerian environmentalist and writer, Ken Saro Wiwa, by the military government in November 1995 among others (see Chiluwa 2011a, 2011b). More importantly, he asks: 'why is Hausa/Fulani the only people that own all the oil wells in your region [...]?' Kanu understands the complexity of the Niger Delta oil and resource control controversy – that is, the direct placing of oil revenue in the hands of the Nigerian federal government dominated by the power-elite from the North, leaving the environmental consequences of oil production to the ethnic minorities, which has been the heart of the crisis in that region (Chiluwa 2011b). This reminder of blatant injustice is mostly likely to incite further hatred and disunity. So, Nnamdi Kanu, who describes himself as an 'orator', indeed, takes advantage of his understanding of the Nigerian ethnic diversity problems to bolster his hate speech rhetoric.

## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The spread of hate speech has made it a major concern for Nigerian leaders because of its implications for democratic practices and the country's unity. There is no doubt that hate speech thrives more in the context of weak democratic structures, structural inequalities and discrimination against groups and underlying conflicts among relevant groups (Benesch 2012). It is clear that inflammatory speeches have implications for peaceful co-existence of different groups in Nigeria. For instance, hate speech has the tendency to exploit grievances and fears built on long-standing suspicion and competition among groups for resources and recognition as in the case of the Niger Delta resource control question. Ultimately, derogatory and pejorative expressions over time can incite violence because of the way they are able to propagate negative sentiments against a particular group.

Hate speeches also have implications for conditioning a cognitive bias against persons and institutions from the out-group, thereby, leading to deviations from the standard rationality that could initiate and exacerbate emotions of intense hatred, victimization and mass violent attacks. An example is the consistent negative representations of the Yoruba and Hausa and the constant reminder to the Igbos of the roles of 'enemy' tribes in the civil war in which millions of Igbos died. Metaphors used in this way can lead to mass violence and genocide as in Rwanda and Burundi. Also, the constant reference to tribal and ethnic stereotypes and differences can also affect the youth's psyche as well as create a pattern or legacy of hate and suspicion that might be passed on to the successive generation. The promotion of hate speeches becomes even worse on the social media, in situations when persons or groups sympathetic to a political interest set up websites, blogs and forums for the purpose of denigrating the opposition. The Biafra group makes vigorous use of their



websites and their online Radio and TV to deride the Nigerian government and other ethnic groups.

However, in comparison with Rwanda's case, hate speech in Nigeria worked against the Biafra group not only because the Igbos are divided in their freedom struggle but also because several factions of IPOB emerged who disagreed with Kanu's aggressive approach. Unlike in Rwanda, there was no major conflict between the Igbo and any tribal group prior to the years before IPOB's agitations. In Rwanda, there was an outstanding ethnic crisis following the death of the Hutu President, whose plane crash was blamed on the Tutsi, so hate speech against the Tutsi gathered so much widespread influence. In contrast, in Nigeria, the Igbos were not at war with any ethnic group; the Igbo population and economic investments in the North (Hausa land) and southwest (Yoruba land) are still quite huge. This accounts for why Igbos in these regions dissociated themselves from Kanu's hateful and divisive approach. While this suggests that there were many obstacles to the actualization of the Biafra independence dream in addition to hate speech, this study argues that the use of hate speech and abusive language compounded the Biafra problem. The application of constitutional processes and the involvement of the Igbo political class in the pursuit of the freedom struggle would have attracted widespread support for Biafra, including the support of the Igbo businessmen from the North.

As earlier noted, hate speech is usually context-sensitive and while the features of hate speech in IPOB's discourse do not significantly differ from the general concept of hate speech, its effectiveness in IPOB's discourse was undermined because of factors such as Nigerians' complex religious sensibility and affiliations that proved to supersede ethnic consciousness. Therefore, when Kanu suggested that the Igbos should boycott non-Igbo churches, for instance, the people began to question the legitimacy of Kanu's agitations as it seemed to counter their deep-seated religious cognitions. Also, IPOB lacks self-sustained economic or military capacity to actualize their threats to break up Nigeria, and the group's constant failure to fulfil their threats has made them appear to the Nigerian people and government as empty threats, even if their otherization strategy might have previously swayed people's opinion to support the Biafran cause.

Moreover, despite the use of threats by Nnamdi Kanu, IPOB lacks a strong and definite ideological framework for action. The different factions of the group have their different ideological stances and approaches. While some advocate gradual cessation process, others espouse the immediate dissolution of Nigeria. As pointed out above, IPOB isolates itself from the Igbo political elite and those in government, often describing them as 'fools' and saboteurs. Consequently Igbo politicians (such as the governors and ministers) do not give their supports, and generally, they view IPOB's activities and hate comments as an embarrassment. The group (IPOB) also dissociates itself from the 'Ohaneze Ndigbo', which is the highest sociocultural group of the Igbos in Nigeria and the diaspora. This group appears to provide the answer to the 'Igbo question'. However, IPOB does not consult them. So the failure of IPOB with their aggressive approach is attributable not only to their lack of ideological foundation but from the lack of support from the majority of Igbo who disagrees with IPOB hate speech approach. The lack of strong ideology could have been responsible for the lack of direction of their utterances, other than to forcibly break up Nigeria.

This does not diminish the fact that hate speech can overtime result in violence, especially in Nigeria's weak democracy, but at present, IPOB's strength is visibly weakened as it now operates underground and is visible only in the social media. News about them shows that many more factions are still springing up and there have been calls to re-name IPOB and appoint new leadership.

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