Learning Objectives

- **What:** Discover the Biafra Conflict.
- **Who:** Know the major parties to this conflict.
- **Where:** Understand the territorial locations involved.
- **Why:** Decipher the issues in this conflict.
- **When:** Understand the historical background of this conflict.
- **How:** Understand the conflict processes, dynamics, and drivers.
- **Which:** Discover which ideas are appropriate for resolving the Biafra conflict.
Discover the Biafra Conflict
REPUBLIC OF BIAFRA

THE CASE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION

November 2001
Nnamdi Kanu (2015) and General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (1967): Civilian and Military Leaders of the Biafra Independence Movement
The Result of General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu’s strategy (1967-1970)
I’m Against Lugard, Would Die For Biafra — Nnamdi Kanu
Result of Mr. Kanu’s Strategy
Know the Major Parties to the Conflict

- The British Government
- The Federal Republic of Nigeria
- Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and their descendants who were not consumed in the war between Nigeria and Biafra from (1967-1970)
Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB)

The remnants of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and their descendants who were not consumed in the war between Nigeria and Biafra from (1967-1970) have many factions:

- The Ohaneze Ndi Igbo
- Igbo Leaders of Thought
- Biafran Zionist Federation (BZF)
- The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB)
- Radio Biafra
- The Supreme Council of Elders of Indigenous People of Biafra (SCE)
Understand the Territorial Locations Involved
Decipher the Issues in this Conflict

The Biafrans’ Arguments

- Biafra was an existing autonomous nation before the arrival of the British in Africa
- The 1914 amalgamation that united the North and South and created the new country called Nigeria is illegal because it was decided without their consent (it was a forced amalgamation)
- And the 100 years terms of the amalgamation experiment expired in 2014 which automatically dissolved the Union
- Economic and political marginalization within Nigeria
- Lack of developmental projects in Biafraland
- Security problems: killings of the Biafrans in the North of Nigeria
- Fear of total extinction

Arguments of the Nigerian Government

- All the other regions that form part of Nigeria also existed as autonomous nations before the arrival of the British
- Other regions were also forced into the union, however, the founding fathers of Nigeria unanimously agreed to continue with the union after independence in 1960
- At the end of the 100 years of the amalgamation, the past administration convened a National Dialogue and all the ethnic groups in Nigeria discussed the issues concerning the union, including the preservation of the union
- Any expressed intention or attempt to overthrow the federal or state governments is considered as a treason or treasonable felony
Demands of the Biafrans

- Majority of Biafrans including their remnants who were not consumed in the war of 1967-1970 agree that Biafra must be free. “But while some Biafrans want freedom within Nigeria just like a confederation as practiced in the UK where the four countries of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales are self-governing countries within the United Kingdom, or in Canada where the Quebec region is also self-governing, others want outright freedom from Nigeria” (Government of IPOB, 2014, p. 17).

Below is a summary of their demands:

- Declaration of their right to self-determination: Outright independence from Nigeria; or
- Self-determination within Nigeria like in a confederation as agreed at the Aburi meeting in 1967; or
- A dissolution of Nigeria along the ethnic lines instead of allowing the country to break up in bloodshed. This will reverse the amalgamation of 1914 so that everybody would return to their ancestral homeland as they were before the arrival of the British.
Learn about the Historical Background of this Conflict

- The Ancient Maps of Africa, specifically the map of 1662, show the three Kingdoms in West Africa from where the new country called Nigeria was created by the colonial masters. The three kingdoms were as follows:
  - The Kingdom of Zamfara in the North;
  - The Kingdom of Biafra in the East; and
  - The Kingdom of Benin in the West.
- These three kingdoms existed on the Map of Africa for more than 400 years before Nigeria was created in 1914.
- The fourth kingdom known as Oyo Empire was not contained in the ancient Map of Africa in 1662 but it was also a great kingdom in West Africa (Government of IPOB, 2014, p. 2).
• The Map of Africa produced by the Portuguese from 1492 – 1729 shows Biafra as a large territory spelt as “Biafara”, “Biafar” and “Biafares” having boundaries with such empires as Ethiopia, Sudan, Bini, Kamerun, Congo, Gabon, and others.

• It was in 1843 that the Map of Africa showed the country spelt as “Biafra” having some parts of the modern day Cameroon within its boundary including the disputed Bakassi Peninsula.

• The original territory of Biafra was not restricted to the present Eastern Nigeria alone.

• According to the maps, the Portuguese travelers used the word “Biafara” to describe the entire region of the Lower Niger River and eastwards up to the Cameroon Mountain and down to the Eastern coastal tribes, thus including parts of Cameroon and Gabon (Government of IPOB, 2014, p. 2).
The British had diplomatic dealings with Biafrans before Nigeria was created. John Beecroft was the British Consul of the Bight of Biafra from June 30, 1849 to June 10, 1854 with his headquarters in Fernando Po in the Bight of Biafra.

The city of Fernando Po is now called Bioko in Equatorial Guinea.

It was from the Bight of Biafra that John Beecroft, eager to control the trade in the Western part and supported by Christian missionaries at Badagry, bombarded Lagos which became a British colony in 1851 and was formally ceded to Queen Victoria, the Queen of England in 1861, in whose honor Victoria Island Lagos was named.

Therefore, the British had established their presence in Biafraland before they annexed Lagos in 1861 (Government of IPOB, 2014).
Biafra was a Sovereign Nation

- Biafra was a sovereign entity with its own geographical territory clearly shown on the Map of Africa before the coming of Europeans just like the ancient nations of Ethiopia, Egypt, Sudan, etc.
- The Biafra Nation practiced autonomous democracies among its clans as practiced among the Igbo today.
- Actually, the Republic of Biafra which was declared in 1967 by General Odumegwu Ojukwu was not a new country but an attempt to restore the ancient Biafra Nation that existed before Nigeria was created by the British” (Emekesri, 2012, p. 18-19).
Understand the Conflict’s Processes, Dynamics, and Drivers

- An important factor in this conflict is the law. Is the right to self-determination legal or illegal based on the constitution?
- The law allows the indigenous peoples of the land to maintain their indigenous identities even though they have been conferred with the citizenship of their new country through the 1914 amalgamation.
- But does the law confer on the indigenous peoples of the land the right to self-determination?
- For example, the Scots are seeking to exercise their right to self-determination and establish Scotland as a sovereign nation independent from Great Britain; and the Catalans are pushing for secession from Spain to establish an independent Catalonia as a sovereign nation. In the same way, the Indigenous People of Biafra are seeking to exercise their right to self-determination and re-establish, restore their ancient, ancestral nation of Biafra as a sovereign nation independent from Nigeria (Government of IPOB, 2014).
Is the agitation for self-determination and independence legal or illegal?

- But an important question that needs to be answered is: Is the agitation for self-determination and independence legal or illegal within the provisions of the current Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria?

- Can the actions of the pro-Biafra movement be considered as Treason or Treasonable Felonies?
Treason and Treasonable Felonies

- Sections 37, 38 and 41 of the Criminal Code, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, define Treason and Treasonable Felonies.

- **Treason:** Any person who levies war against the Nigerian Government or the Government of a Region (or state) with the intention to intimidate, overthrow or overawe the President or Governor, or conspires with any person either within or without Nigeria to levy war against Nigeria or against a Region, or instigate a foreigner to invade Nigeria or a Region with an armed force is guilty of treason and is liable to the punishment of death upon conviction.

- **Treasonable Felonies:** On the other hand, any person who forms an intention to overthrow the President or Governor, or to levy war against Nigeria or against the State, or to instigate a foreigner to make an armed invasion against Nigeria or the States, and manifests such an intention by an overt act is guilty of a treasonable felony and is liable to life imprisonment on conviction.
Negative Peace - Elders in Biafraland

- To guide and facilitate the process of independence attainment through nonviolent, legal means, the Elders in Biafraland who witnessed the civil war of 1967-1970 created the Customary Law Government of Indigenous People of Biafra headed by the Supreme Council of Elders (SCE).

Positive Peace – Biafran Youths

- On the contrary, some Biafran youths led by the Director of Radio Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu, claim that they are fighting for justice using all means and wouldn’t mind if it results to violence and war. For them, peace and justice are not simply the absence of violence or war. It is mostly the action of changing the status quo until the system and policies of oppression are overthrown, and freedom is restored to the oppressed. This they are determined to achieve by all means even if it means through the use of force, violence and war.
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<th>Negative Peace - Elders in Biafraland</th>
<th>Positive Peace – Biafran Youths</th>
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<td>To show their disapproval of violence and war against the Nigerian Government, and their determination and intention to operate within the laws of Nigeria, The Supreme Council of Elders ostracized Mr. Kanu and his followers by a Disclaimer dated 12th May 2014 under Customary Law.</td>
<td>To intensify their efforts, this group has mobilized themselves in millions, home and abroad using social media;</td>
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<td>By the rule of Customary Law, when a person is ostracized by the elders, he or she cannot be accepted in the community again unless he repents and performs some customary rites to appease the elders and the land.</td>
<td>set up online radios and televisions; established Biafra Houses, Biafra Embassies abroad, Biafra government both within Nigeria and in exile, produced Biafra passports, flags, symbols, and many documents; threatened to have ceded the oils in Biafraland to a foreign company; set up Biafra national soccer team, and other sports teams including Biafra Pageants competition; composed and produced Biafra national anthem, music, and so on;</td>
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<td>If he or she fails to repent and appease the elders of the land and dies, the ostracism continues against his descendants (Government of IPOB, 2014, p. 5).</td>
<td>used propaganda and hate speech; organized protests which have sometimes turned violent – especially the ongoing protests that started in October 2015 immediately after the arrest of the Director of Radio Biafra and the self-proclaimed Leader and Commander-in-Chief of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to whom millions of Biafrans give full allegiance.</td>
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Discover which Ideas are Appropriate for Resolving the Biafra Conflict

- Irredentism
- Peacekeeping
- Peacemaking
- Peacebuilding
Irredentism

- **What is irredentism?**
  The restoration, reclaiming, or reoccupying of a country, territory or homeland formerly belonging to a people. Often the people are scattered across many other countries as a result of colonialism, forced or unforced migration, and war. Irredentism seeks to bring at least some of them back to their ancestral homeland (see Horowitz, 2000, p. 229, 281, 595).

- Irredentism could be realized in two ways:
  - By violence or war.
  - By due process of law or through the legal process.
Irredentism through Violence or War

Supreme Council of Elders

- The Nigerian-Biafran war of 1967-1970 is a good example of a war fought for the national liberation of a people even though the Biafrans were compelled to fight in self-defense. It is clear from the Nigerian-Biafran experience that war is an ill-wind that blows no good to anyone.
- It is estimated that more than 3 million people lost their lives during this war including significant number of children and women as a result of a combination of factors: direct killing, humanitarian blockade that resulted in a deadly sickness called kwashiorkor. “Both Nigeria as a whole and the remnants of Biafra who were not consumed in this war are still suffering from the effects of the war.
- Having experienced, and fought during, the war, the Supreme Council of Elders of Indigenous People of Biafra does not accept the ideology and methodology of war and violence in the Biafra struggle for independence (Government of IPOB, 2014, p. 15).

Radio Biafra

- The pro-Biafra movement led by Radio Biafra London and its Director, Nnamdi Kanu, are most likely to resort to violence and war as this has been part of their rhetoric and ideology.
- Through their online broadcast, this group has mobilized millions of Biafrans and their sympathizers both in Nigeria and abroad, and it is reported that “they have called on Biafrans all over the world to donate millions of dollars and pounds to them to procure arms and ammunition to wage a war against Nigeria, especially the Northern Muslims.
- Based on their assessment of the struggle, they believe that it may be impossible to achieve independence without violence or war.
- And this time, they think they will win Nigeria in war if eventually they will have to go to war to achieve their independence and be free.
- These are mostly young people who did not witness or experience the civil war of 1967-1970.
Irredentism through the Legal Process

Supreme Council of Elders

- Having lost the war of 1967-1970, the Supreme Council of Elders of Indigenous People of Biafra believe the legal process is the only method by which Biafra could achieve its independence.

- On September 13, 2012, the Supreme Council of Elders (SCE) of the Indigenous People of Biafra signed a Legal Instrument and filed it to the Federal High Court Owerri against the Nigerian government.

- The case is still in court. The basis of their argument is the portion of the international and national laws that guarantee the right to self-determination to indigenous peoples “pursuant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 and Articles 19-22 Cap 10 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990, of which Article 20(1)(2) says:

  “All peoples shall have the right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination. They shall freely determine their political status and shall pursue their economic and social development according to the policy they have freely chosen”

  “Colonized or oppressed peoples shall have the right to free themselves from the bonds of domination by resorting to any means recognized by the international community.”

Radio Biafra

- On the other hand, Nnamdi Kanu and his Radio Biafra group argue that “the use of legal process to gain independence has never happened before” and will not be successful.

- They say that “it is impossible to achieve independence without war and violence” (Government of IPOB, 2014, p. 15).
Peacekeeping

- According to Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall (2011), “peacekeeping is appropriate at three points on the escalation scale: to contain violence and prevent it from escalating to war; to limit the intensity, geographical spread and duration of war once it has broken out; and to consolidate a ceasefire and create space for reconstruction after the end of a war” (p. 147).

- In order to create space for the other forms of conflict resolution – mediation and dialogue for example-, there is need to contain, reduce or minimize the intensity and impact of violence on the ground through responsible peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.

- By this, it is expected that the peacekeepers should be well trained and guided by ethical deontological codes so as to neither do harm to the population they are expected to protect nor become a part of the problem they have been sent to manage.
Peacemaking & Peacebuilding

- After the deployment of peacekeepers, efforts should be made to utilize the different forms of peacemaking initiatives – negotiation, mediation, settlement, and tracks of diplomacy (Cheldelin et al., 2008, p. 43; Ramsbotham et al., 2011, p. 171; Pruitt & Kim, 2004, p. 178, Diamond & McDonald, 2013) to resolve the Biafra conflict.

- Three levels of peacemaking processes are proposed here:
  - Intragroup Dialogue within the Biafra separatist movement using track 2 diplomacy.
  - Conflict settlement between the Nigerian government and the pro-Biafran movement using a combination of track 1 and track two diplomacy
  - Multi-Track diplomacy (from track 3 to track 9) organized specifically for citizens from different ethnic groups in Nigeria, especially between the Christian Igbos (from the Southeast) and the Muslim Hausa-Fulanis (from the North)
Conclusion

- I believe that using military might and the judicial system alone to resolve conflicts with ethnic and religious components, especially in Nigeria, will rather lead to further escalation of the conflict.
- The reason is because military intervention and the retributive justice that follows neither have within themselves the tools to uncover the hidden animosities that fuel the conflict nor the skills, know-how and patience required to transform the “deep-rooted conflict by eliminating structural violence and other underlying causes and conditions of deep-rooted conflict” (Mitchell & Banks, 1996; Lederach, 1997, cited in Cheldelin et al., 2008, p. 53).
- For this reason, a paradigm shift from retributive policy to restorative justice and from coercive policy to mediation and dialogue is needed (Ugorji, 2012).
- To accomplish this, more resources should be invested in peacebuilding initiatives, and they should be led by civil society organizations at the grass root levels.
References