

THE NEW BIAFRANS: HISTORICAL IMAGINATION AND STRUCTURAL CONFLICT IN NIGERIA'S SEPARATIST REVIVAL

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AUTHOR'S NOTE:

This paper was presented on 8th March 2016 as a seminar in the Changing Character of War series hosted by Pembroke College, University of Oxford. The intention was to point out some of the underlying issues which would merit further research if the current phenomenon of renewed campaigning for Biafran separatism is to be properly understood. Two disclaimers are necessary: Firstly, the author is not an expert in this area and intends the paper basically as a note which may be of use in prompting others to go beyond the abundant surface rhetorics and heated ideological positions to examine the deeper root causes of recent events. Secondly, the author is not a supporter of any political agenda and therefore this paper should not be construed as endorsing any of the positions it documents. On a personal note, the author's interest in this subject came about as a result of noting how initial fundamental misunderstandings of the root causes of previous state-contesting movements in Nigeria such as the Boko Haram insurgency caused a lag in identifying effective solution of the issues, and allowed the crisis to deepen. That suggests there is value in looking further into the drivers of radical movements in the service of enabling stakeholders to act in a timely manner to minimise needless conflict and loss of life.

The paper identifies four important areas which merit more study if we are to better understand the phenomenon. First, the powerful role of history, memory and myth in providing a template for interpreting the present. Secondly, economic issues including most importantly constriction and instability in the informal economy. Thirdly, failures of electoral politics and governance in the South-East of Nigeria. Fourthly, changes in patterns of national politics since the 2015 elections. Footnotes throughout the paper have been added to clarify areas about which audience members asked during the question and answer session.

PRESENTATION TEXT

The arrest of Nnamdi Kanu, fiery radical broadcaster behind the web-based Radio Biafra, on charges of terrorism and treasonable felony in late 2015 caused protests between November 2015 and February 2016 in Igbo-dominated regions of Nigeria, which point at the risks of further radicalisation and the risk of a new axis of stability and security concern in the country. Radio Biafra represents the

most high-profile and radical of a number of diaspora-based movements in alliance with street-based groups (of which the highest-profile has been Indigenous People of Biafra, usually referred to by the acronym IPOB) agitating for the revival of the separatist Republic of Biafra which existed in south-eastern Nigeria from 1967 to 1969. Such voices are currently on the ascendant, and the causes are both socioeconomic and political. The protests heightened security fears and tensions across the states of Nigeria's South-East and some parts of the Niger delta. The tensions also risk embedding an antagonism between the South-East and the central government, which may potentially be open to aggravation by political elites who feel excluded by the northern and south-western core leadership of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). Continued agitations will risk provoking reaction, spreading outside the region or entrenching a new longer-term axis of security concern which defies easy political solutions.

EVENTS

The recent events are a revival of interest in the separatism eastern Nigeria claimed between 1967 and 1969. After that disastrous civil war, which the eastern separatist movement lost and in which the region suffered huge human cost, that region of the country had a different profile in national public life and arguably a changed place in development policy.¹ Furthermore, the prewar civilian political leadership and ideological politics of the region was discontinued, with the region being politically represented by either nationalists of long-standing² or by brokers allied with national military governments who in some cases combined personal economic and public political interests. Groups agitating for a revival of Biafra reappeared shortly after 1999's return to democracy, alongside other ethno-nationalist movements across Nigeria, but some proved more persistent. MASSOB (Movement for the Actualisation of a Sovereign State of Biafra) was the strongest of this early generation of ethno-nationalist groups. Advocating non-violent protests, it employed strategies such as raising Biafran flags in public places, organising sports competitions, and issuing its own currency and passports in order to contest the writ of the Nigerian state, which quickly drew the attention of the Nigerian state and security services.

¹ Claims that the South-East was sidelined in national development policy or suffered a lack of 'federal presence' (government-funded infrastructure) need to be balanced with the observation that the same period saw many of the sectors on which the region's prosperity was based (for example coal or palm-oil) go into decline because of the evolution of Nigeria's political economy into a narrowly oil-based model.

² Nationalist here being used to refer to supporters of Nigerian nationalism, rather than the narrower sense of 'ethno-nationalists'. One example would be Chief Emeka Anyaoku, who was part of the agitation for Nigerian independence from Britain, attempted mediation between the warring sides during the civil war, and later served as Nigeria's Foreign Minister before heading the Commonwealth.

Despite suppression of such groups, nostalgia for the promise of the stillborn Biafran state of the past was promoted both in Nigeria and in the large Igbo diaspora especially in the US. The revising of historical approaches to Biafra broke the surface of public debate in Nigeria and the diaspora in 2012 with the publication of Chinua Achebe's Biafra memoir *There Was A Country*, in which the late world-famous novelist's highly critical view of Obafemi Awolowo, among others, sparked a surprisingly heated series of historical debates between ethnonationalistic Yoruba and Igbo intellectuals. More recently, however, such discursive rethinking of historical legacies has been superseded by more radical movements such as the Biafra Zionist Movement and Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). As in the original Biafra, these groups have been adept in their use of publicity and propaganda, including making deft use of new social media formats. Foremost among these was the rhetoric of the web-based station Radio Biafra, whose ugly mix of mysticism, ethnoreligious bigotry and paranoia has drawn comparisons with the hate radio broadcasts which encouraged genocide in Rwanda. In October 2015, a clip³ showed the station's kingpin Nnamdi Kanu filmed at a diaspora meeting in the US asking explicitly for funds to buy arms following which he was arrested on arrival in Nigeria. Protests in cities including Onitsha, commercial capital of the south-east, and Port Harcourt followed his arrest and subsequent charging, with supporters waving placards and blocking roads. In the former, up to eleven people were variously reported killed in clashes with security forces when protestors attempted to block the region's main east-west bridge in December,⁴ and trucks belonging to northern industrialist Aliko Dangote were burned, while in the latter, protestors reportedly also attempted an attack on the Hausa (northern) community in the city.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ROOT CAUSES

Significantly, the Biafra project is primarily a youth issue, popular with the under-40 cohorts. Very few of those who actually lived through the civil war in the region show enthusiasm for renewed separatism. Beyond a mythologised historical nostalgia amid a context of 21st-century global identity-politics, neo-Biafranism is driven by a number of material concerns. Chief among these emotive flagship issues are the questions of perceived marginalisation and of insecurity.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XU2JtUF6M> (see portion between 10.05 and 11.46 mins)

⁴ The unclear reporting of such incidents has itself become part of the debate, with various news outlets reporting between zero and nine casualties in this particular incident; figures thus run the risk of becoming more representative of the political position of the publication than of the actual verifiable events, and underline the need for accurate and responsible journalistic coverage, especially in a social media age where newspaper stories are rapidly circulated as fact. See <http://thenationonlineng.net/two-policemen-nine-others-die-in-pro-biafra-protest-in-onitsha/> for the maximum casualty claim of nine protestors and two policemen killed, while Vanguard reported nine killed <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/12/9-killed-as-pro-biafra-protests-turn-bloody/> for the maximum casualty claim, and the Guardian (<http://guardian.ng/news/five-killed-20-injured-in-pro-biafra-protests/>) reported five killed.

Across the nation...

The lynchpin of Biafran ideology is a narrative of marginalisation in national political life, manifesting in ways such as alleged government under-investment in the region. Such claims are resonant even if they do not stand up to close scrutiny – the five states of the South-East as a whole receive more of Nigeria’s central government revenue than the region produces.⁵ Additionally, despite the longstanding presence of ‘Federal character’ provisions designed to ensure equal representation of all ethno-regional groups in state employment, Biafran activists point to the careful filtering of Igbos into the top levels of security institutions and political posts, alleging that the rest of Nigeria still penalises them for the civil war and their consequent suspect loyalties.⁶ Interestingly, this is a highly gendered debate, often couched in terms of ‘the Igbo man’; it is notable meanwhile that women from the South-East have excelled in mainstream politics since 1999, with many leading lights of the Obasanjo, Yar’Adua and Jonathan cabinets being Igbo women such as Finance Minister Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and Education and Solid Minerals Minister Obiageli Ezekwesili.

The rhetoric of separatists makes much of the precarious position of Igbo diaspora communities in Northern Nigeria. Overwhelmingly Christian (often Catholic), frequently residentially segregated, and visibly different, Igbo communities in northern Nigeria have been among the numerous and varied targets of militants in the Boko Haram insurgency. Before that, in the early 2000s, they were also major victims in incidents of public order breakdown in major Northern cities. Yet those situations have largely stabilised in the last decade, with a gradual improvement of community relations seen in some areas where threats like communal riots were previously a major issue, such as Kaduna city. Significantly in recent times, the most controversial issues have instead come up in the country’s economic capital Lagos, where Igbo traders and transport operators who feel that they have made a large contribution to the city’s economy for generations often feel like they face everyday prejudice manifest through, for example, higher charges by transport protection rackets than those levied on Yoruba-speakers perceived to be natives. However, here again more research is needed to establish whether this is discrimination against Igbos *per se*, or non-indigenes in general. As the Nigerian constitution’s Federal Character principles recognise a citizenship which paradoxically generates

⁵ The SBMorgen report quoted below shows that in 2014 if the South-Eastern states had been allowed to keep 100% of oil revenues produced in that region, they would have had N40.2 billion; however in the same year the region received nearly twice as much - N81.4 billion - in Federal Allocation.

⁶ It is clear that South-Eastern states are as strongly represented as other areas of Nigeria in government employment as mandated by federal character provision, and in similar informal arrangements such as the ‘zoning’ employed to maintain national balance within political parties. Instead, the grievance is more usually that those integrated into national elites in the political sphere do not have strong organic links to grassroots constituencies in the South-East and thus lack legitimacy in the eyes of regional publics. As regards the security agencies, it seems evident that Igbo officers were unlikely to be appointed to certain sensitive posts at least until the late President Yar’Adua appointed first Mike Okiro and then Ogbonna Onovo as Inspectors-General of police, an act for which he was widely praised for allowing the accepted seniority principle to trump ethno-regional affiliation as grounds for promotion.

discrimination between those perceived to be ‘indigenes’ and ‘settlers’ in any given state, it could be either that Igbos in states outside their traditional core areas face discrimination because they are Igbos, or that they face the same discrimination as any other non-indigenes, but that it is more prominent because the Igbo diaspora is so widespread.

This rhetoric of prejudice has been increasingly legitimated of late, as it seems that the politics of the Lagos street may be changing, perhaps in the light of increasing competition in the informal economy, although this too requires further research. The changes can be marked in political events – when former Lagos Governor Tunde Fashola was sworn in in 2007, much was made of his inclusive government, which featured prominent figures such as Anambra-born Ben Akabueze as Commissioner of Budget and Planning among other non-indigenes. Yet it is clear that communitarian relations in the city remained sensitive, as evident in a 2013 furore caused when as part of a city street clean-up campaign, a number of destitute Igbo street traders were forcibly ‘repatriated’ to Anambra state, causing protests and a later apology from Governor Fashola.

Much more shockingly, by 2015’s election, Lagos’ Oba (traditional king) Rilwan Akiolu was captured on film threatening Igbo community leaders with death in the city’s lagoon if they did not mobilise their communities to support the ruling APC party⁷. This is not to suggest that such rhetoric is acceptable to most Nigerians – the Oba’s comments were widely condemned, including by senior figures within the APC. But Igbo nationalist political activists cite such barely-hidden prejudices as evidence of everyday discrimination across the country. Meanwhile others have questioned whether this is by any means unique, or simply typical of inbuilt discrimination against ‘non-indigene’ internal migrants common in Nigeria, including within in the South-East itself, which occasionally resurfaces in electoral politics. At the same time numerous Igbo individuals and families remain prominent and highly successful in spheres such as public administration, banking and oil in the political and financial capitals of Abuja and Lagos, in which latter city they have often been resident for generations. To such groups, there is very little that is attractive in aligning with the new separatist movements.

... And at home.

However, the main support for separatist agendas is not happening in those locations, but in the South-East itself where Igbos comprise the vast majority of the population and control the structures of state and local government, as well as neighbouring states. Here, a very different set of issues are at play, centred on human and economic insecurity. Regional economies previously based on agriculture, mineral extraction, and the professions have over the past half-century been largely reduced to dependency on trade (formal and informal), government employment, and some hardy but

⁷ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCLKm8UZCcU>.

precarious sectors of manufacturing and transport. Long-term underdevelopment in the region has both produced and been locked-in by a decade-long wave of crime and kidnapping, which has not been particularly visible to Nigerians outside the region but has affected everyday lives and linkages with distant extended families. Igbo people have traditionally valued strong links to home, and even for those who live far away, building a house in the ancestral village is a key sign of success and social legitimacy.⁸ But in recent years, growing numbers of Igbo businesspeople resident overseas or in other parts of Nigeria have avoided travelling home for important holiday periods due to security fears and in part to the high financial demands they face from struggling extended-family members. Meanwhile subsistence in the south-east has long been under pressure from population growth, the decline of regional economies, and environmental degradation. Now, this constituency has been further hit by Nigeria's recession. Key groups such as the apprentices to informal-sector businesses who are the main vector of employment for youths have been hard-hit as work for those businesses dries up. It is perhaps no coincidence that the protests drew crowds during an especially painful continuing period of economic constriction. All of these factors have underlined a growing gap between the fortunes of the Igbo diaspora and those residing in the historic home regions which is not well-understood.

A recent survey by Lagos-based researchers SBMorgen⁹ highlighted the resulting split in political attitudes between the South-Eastern states and the diaspora. Face-to-face surveys conducted in Igbo areas of the South-East and South-South showed 63% of respondents supported independence, with 24% preferring autonomy and only 12% supporting the status quo, while an online poll which surveyed a more diasporic (and mainly more highly-educated) section of the Igbo public revealed that such groups are much more moderate in their ideals – 52% thought limited regional autonomy should be a goal, with more (25%:23%) supporting the constitutional status quo than supported independence demands.

Underlying all of this is a failure of ordinary politics. Biafran groups' ire is also directed at a second target – established politicians in the South-East who mouth platitudes about discrimination while brokering their political positions to financially benefit themselves without delivering for their constituencies. Within the regional political landscape, neo-Biafran groups place themselves as an alternative to such establishment politicians and to elite-led socio-cultural groupings such as

⁸ See for instance Daniel Jordan Smith, "Legacies of Biafra: Marriage, 'Home People' and Human Reproduction among the Igbo of Nigeria." *Africa* 75(1):30-45, 2005.

⁹ SBMorgen, *The Biafra Question: sifting facts from sentiments*, January 2016. This author notes that the samples were relatively small in the surveys, 191 respondents to the online poll and an undocumented number in the on-ground poll. However this is to date the only independent data on this issue available.

Ohanaeze Ndigbo; separatism is thus cast as a radical and youth-led alternative to the version of ethno-nationalism articulated by a conservative older-generation.¹⁰

South-Eastern politics is also notable for the lack of a unified ‘progressive’ political party which credibly claims to own and represent a developmental agenda. The main political tendencies are either the APGA party which positions itself as the heir to a regionalist tradition, or the PDP which ruled at the national level from 1999 to 2015. The APC which came to power nationally by positioning itself as a progressive and pro-poor voice currently runs one state (Imo) but across the region including in that state it has encountered perception problems, often being labelled a party representing South-Western and Northern interests which, it is implied, were also the same interests which defeated the Biafra of the 1960s. The alternative, a party which combines regional appeal with national reach, and embraces alienated youths with a progressive agenda aimed at their concerns, would require overcoming another problem which has plagued the Igbo political elite over the years, i.e. disunity and competition between localised factions over who would lead it.

For those continually disappointed and alienated by these failures of politics, Radio Biafra’s simplistic rhetoric which directs blame outwards, depicting Nigeria as an animalistic and compassionless ‘zoo country’ strikes a chord. Yet the paradoxical aims of the neo-Biafrans are clear in seemingly incompatible demands firstly for independence, and secondly in the often simultaneous outcry for more ‘Federal presence’ - i.e. infrastructural investment in the region by central government.

THE POLITICS OF PROTEST

One area on which more needs to be known is on the immediate drivers of pro-Biafra protests. It is clear that the 2015 elections have been significant in the realignments of power they have outlined between the States and the Federal Government in Abuja. The South-East was the biggest source of electoral support for Goodluck Jonathan’s PDP, even more so than his home South-South region, due to a combination of factors. One is the deep investment that elite political structures in the region had made in the PDP and their generally shallow presence in the APC, as evident from the small number of APC Governors (Imo and for one term, Anambra) in the South-East.

Another is the problem of the APC’s ‘toxic brand’ for some sections of South-Eastern publics, for many of whom Buhari is still remembered as an officer in an invading army, and to whom the Yoruba lynchpins of the APC may be labelled as heirs to those who allied with the north against Biafra in the civil war. A third may be electoral manipulations by local elites in PDP’s favour – in 2011 results from the South-Eastern states stood out in statistics as some of the least credible – however in 2015

¹⁰ Godwin Onuoha, Cultural interfaces of self-determination and the rise of the neo-Biafran movement in Nigeria, *Review of African Political Economy*, 40:137, 428-446, 2013.

they seem to have more closely accorded to national trends. Overall, despite a number of APC successes in the region, it is undeniable that the party has its weakest foothold in the region,¹¹ and therefore the counterpart view, that the region is not well-linked to national government, has become current. For those of this view, President Buhari's first political appointments, which were notably non-diverse, confirmed their opinions. There are however two schools of thought on the effects of this on pro-Biafra sentiment.

The first is that this power shift at the national level combined with the worldview of radical groups to apparently confirm their worst fears about marginalisation, and with diaspora enthusiasm for an emotive agenda about the historical past to generate spontaneous and low-level protest within Nigeria. This assumes a small-scale, loosely-networked, highly mediated and 'entrepreneurial' model of protest similar to groups such as the Congolese diaspora protestors known as *Les Combattants*,¹² and an equally networked and social-media-linked public for whom such messages are falling on ready ears.

The second theory is that this is combined with something much more instrumental, suggesting that recent agitations also represent a bid for re-inclusion by political actors excluded from power. Fiscal crises and the new government's severe anti-corruption stance have shut off the incomes on which some career politicians have survived, so some observers contend that such actors may see it as tempting to use instability as a form of political leverage, hoping that Federal Government would turn to them as the only ones able to provide a solution, which would inevitably involve their own political inclusion. Such 'political' explanations should be approached with care, as we have already seen that separatist groups depict themselves as opposed to 'conventional' politicians, and we should remember that such theories were also commonly used to explain away the rise of Boko Haram, until it became obvious to all observers that the phenomenon was much more complex, organic and generated its own agendas. The initial misinterpretation of that issue also arguably led to misaligned policy approaches. Therefore, it would be dangerous to understand the current sentiments as wholly explicable by such conspiracy theories, but the question requires further research.

Faced with this, the government in Abuja has a dilemma, being genuinely unsure whether it is unpopular in the region or just a target of elite machinations; a dilemma which is compounded by the inability of more legitimate-sounding political groups in the region to articulate a more rational and

¹¹ See <http://www.nigeriaelections.org/result> for a map of the distribution. Rhetoric from extremist narratives such as that of Radio Biafra even seeks to portray Imo State's Governor Okorochoa, the APC's sole State Governor in the region, as the bridgehead of a (variously) Yoruba, Hausa or Islamic fundamentalist plot to take over the region.

¹² On *les Combattants*, my thanks to Katrien Pype, University of Leuven.

moderate agenda to address the root causes.¹³ In the interim, Federal Government has adopted perhaps the wisest strategy in the circumstances – allowing the situation to be publicly handled by regional authorities in the states affected, as well as security officials of Igbo and neighbouring regional backgrounds in order to prevent a ‘them-and-us’ dynamic developing in the process of managing the tensions; and hoping in the long-term to be able to wait the instability out.

RISKS

If interpreted as a bid for elite re-inclusion, Biafran agitations are doomed to fail, simply because the current government does not operate that kind of political model; so even if such excluded elites managed to be reincorporated, the new dispensation functions under different norms and fiscal constraints. As for the explicit populist demands, real independence for the South-East is both politically unfeasible and economically unviable. As we have already seen above, the region would lose money, and as a landlocked, over-populated, erosion-struck region would likely have similar viability problems to underdeveloped states like Malawi, South Sudan or Lesotho;¹⁴ while the region’s enterprising traders would face more barriers to their trans-regional businesses. So separatism is an ideology hugely at odds with economic realities.¹⁵ Instead the neo-Biafran movement could even be interpreted more as a radical call for political inclusion which underlines the unfortunate experiences the region has had for some years and the alienation of its own political elites from mass publics. But in the long-term, a movement meant to draw attention to the plight of south-eastern Nigeria may only hurt it in the short term, not least because security problems are a prime means of putting off investors.¹⁶

However the real risk is in the long-term. Collier and Hoeffler’s famous 2004 article on drivers of conflict¹⁷ gives a checklist of factors likely to enhance the chances of conflict drawn from 79 examples across the globe. Although there are debatable issues with the methodology, it remains a handy pointer to some salient risk factors. Among the eleven proxy factors they list as significantly

¹³ This author was present at a recent academic meeting in which panellists from the South-East discussing the problems of the region were repeatedly asked by audience members what measures might help redress popular grievances, deliver development, and stem radicalism. None were able to suggest any concrete measure.

¹⁴ Equally, separatists’ claims to also represent peoples of the oil-bearing and coastal Niger Delta within their visions for a new Biafra have proved extremely controversial to say the least.

¹⁵ Yet as the popularity of separatism in Scotland or anti-EU feeling in England shows, emotive appeals can persuade publics to support issues against their own best economic interests.

¹⁶ At the same time, as regards those political commentators who observe that the perception of separatism may ruin the chances of a credible South-eastern candidate being able to put themselves forward for the Presidency in 2019 – this is actually not a good thing for anybody, as a credible non-radical leadership from the region is much to be preferred to radical and potentially violent street politics. Protests also risk fulfilling their own fears by raising chances of discrimination outside, as witness comments on the internet about boycotting Igbo-run shops posted underneath articles about pro-Biafra protests.

¹⁷ Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, Greed and Grievance, *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, 563-595, 2004.

likely to enhance the chances of conflict are several pertinent to Nigeria today and particularly to that region: the presence of primary commodities (natural resources in the form of oil which is extracted in some states of the region and in illicit flows of locally-refined and ‘bunkered’ cargoes through it); slowing growth rates; slowing rates of male secondary schooling¹⁸; and a large overseas diaspora in the US.¹⁹

When it comes to Nigeria, additional dynamics are manifest in the several similarities between the dynamics of the Biafran agitations with the conditions in which the Boko Haram insurgency began nearly a decade ago. First among these is a heady and emotive message with resonance in deeply-cherished localised beliefs about world orders, justice and equality; critical framings of Islam in the case of Boko Haram, and the historical memory of ethno-nationalism and war in the case of the Biafran movements. Second is the direct appeal to a ready-made and growing constituency of disenfranchised youths with little to lose. Third is the potential for spread in a region in which the government of the day is not perceived as being deeply rooted and in which it has limited organic channels of communication. Fourth are the international connections which facilitate separatist networking in both cases. Fifth is the growing social and geographical distance between a region’s mobile middle class and elite and those left behind in the village. Sixth is the fact that regional elites are faced with an ideology (Islamist social critique in the first case, Biafran history and myth in the second) which is so emotive to the public that they are reluctant to oppose it openly. And the final similar ingredient is a regional political class who seem to have long taken their constituency for granted, and are much further out of touch with their own youth than they have yet realised.

WHAT NEXT?

For moment, the situation is calm. However, as the prosecution of Kanu continues, such protests may flare again. Lots depends on whether the reaction of government – both Federal and in the states affected – is careful or unthinkingly reactive. The loss of life which has so far occurred is sad, but some signs so far have been positive. The Federal Government policy of delegating the issue to State Governments and in large part to security officials from the same region allows those closer to the issues to determine the most effective ways of engaging with them. But it is important to end by pointing out an optimistic note: The tolerance and capacity for dialogue within Nigerian society itself is a powerful inhibitor of conflict. We should note that elders from both the South-East and areas such

¹⁸ This factor is not proven – literacy rates in the South-Eastern states remain reasonably high against Nigerian averages; however a number of studies over recent years have pointed to the trend of the decreasing attraction of further education to males who see their life chances as better served by more quickly entering work and business.

¹⁹ It is also worth noting that Collier and Hoeffler’s famous study shows that religious and ethnic differences are not a very powerful explanation for conflict by themselves, so they argue that no matter what the rhetoric says, the actual chances of conflict are based more on opportunity than ideology.

as the North-West in which Igbo communities may feel vulnerable have worked hard together to prevent reactions and escalation which could have lent more credence to extremists.

It remains to be seen what direction this issue will take, and it is to be hoped that it does not become a long-term security concern similar to those which plague the North-East and North-central zones, impeding everyday life and economic development there. It could be that the movement loses steam, with splits emerging on positions, claims, leadership or the morality of tactics such as the use of violence. However even if that happens, the power of historical memory and myth is such that the issue is unlikely to go away. Instead, this author suggests that the most important ways to inhibit the growth of radicalisation and the opportunity for conflict lie in more ordinary directions such as improving the quality of local governance and creating the conditions for economic growth which generates employment across Nigeria.