Nations and Nationalism

WILEY

ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

Dread in the Homeland: Symbolic Politics and Ethnonationalist Struggles for Self-Determination in Nigeria

Promise Frank Ejiofor

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

Correspondence: Promise Frank Ejiofor (pfe22@cantab.ac.uk)

Received: 28 October 2024 | **Revised:** 31 March 2025 | **Accepted:** 23 May 2025

Keywords: Biafra | Indigenous People of Biafra | secessionism | Stuart Kaufman | symbolic politics

ABSTRACT

The revival of Biafran separatism in contemporary Nigeria is often explained with three leading theoretical frameworks: relative deprivation, political economy and state repression. Whereas relative deprivation and political economy perspectives posit that the resurgent separatism derives from the perception and empirical reality of socioeconomic deprivation amongst Igbos, the state repression perspective maintains that the state's repression of dissent is linked to the resuscitation of separatist agitations in the southeast region. Although these three frameworks elucidate varied facets of revived separatist tensions in the southeast region, they provide only partial explanations that do not connect the dots amongst symbolic predispositions, leaders' framing, public perception and separatist mobilisation. Drawing on symbolic politics theory advanced by Stuart Kaufman and focusing on the transnational Indigenous People of Biafra, I contend that the resurgent separatism in the southeast region is now driven by ethnic narratives of group annihilation that the separatist group instrumentalises to engender mobilisation against the state. For members of the Indigenous People of Biafra—the largest Biafran separatist movement in Nigeria—who instrumentalise hostile ethnic narratives in their separatist discourses, ethnic Igbos are a people under threat of extinction in a state run by other ethnic and religious groups that purportedly intend to dominate and eliminate Igbos—which necessitates the restoration of the defunct secessionist Biafran state to safeguard against such ethnic elimination. This novel perspective contributes to the existing literature on the reemergence of separatism in contemporary Nigeria.

> Fear all too often blocks rational deliberation, poisons hope, and impedes constructive cooperation for a better future.
>
> —Martha Nussbaum 2018, *The Monarchy of Fear*

1 | Introduction

Contemporary Nigeria faces potential division and collapse due in part to separatist conflicts in its southeast region. Indeed, the revival of Biafran separatism in Nigeria has worsened insecurity in the southeast region with many lives and livelihoods lost as Biafran separatists contest Nigerian state security agencies over the legitimate monopoly of violence (Amnesty 2021). Three dominant scholarly explanations have been generally given for the resurgence of Biafran separatism since Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999—namely, relative marginalisation, material deprivation and state violence. First, relative marginalisation theorists argue that resurgent Biafran separatism in Nigeria is the by-product of Igbos' perceptions of marginalisation relative to other ethnic groups in the federation (Onuoha 2013; Smith 2014; Obi-Ani 2024). Second, political economists explore resurgent Biafran separatism in the southeast region from the vantage

point of material deprivation and argue that the poor socioeconomic conditions of Igbos stir the separatist agitations (Nwangwu et al. 2020; Tuki 2024). Third, political scientists explain Biafran separatism as the result of state repression (Ukiwo 2009; Nwangwu 2023; Ojo 2024). From these three perspectives, resurgent Biafran separatism is analysed as the effect of relative deprivation, socioeconomic disparities and state repression.

Despite their obvious divergences, what the relative marginalisation, political economy and state violence theoretical frameworks share in common, I think, is that the recurrent separatist agitations amongst Igbo nationalists are a legacy of the gory Nigerian Civil War whose memories remain alive within Igbo communities (Okonta 2014; Ugwueze 2021). Indeed, Igbo nationalists' perception of relative marginalisation and material deprivation that explain their reversion to separatism coupled with the concomitant state repression to curb pro-Biafra separatist dissensions cannot be disentangled from the legacies of the Nigerian Civil War that marginalised Igbo communities and left much of the southeast region impoverished. Consequently, it is argued that Biafran separatist movements such as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) perceive the restoration of the defunct Biafran state by way of the secession of the southeast region—the homeland of Igbo people—from Nigeria as the only effective means to address what they perceive as the continued marginalisation, impoverishment and poor treatment of Igbos and Igboland since the end of the civil conflict. Although these frameworks seem cogent, they are single-factor and single-discipline explanations that provide only *partial*—incomplete—accounts of the resurgent separatism. Theories of relative deprivation, economic marginalisation and state repression cannot fully explain why many groups that are impoverished or repressed do not revolt against the state in large measure because they circumvent the pivotal role of leadership and organisation in ethnic mobilisation. Without leaders' framing of marginalisation, deprivation and state repression as physical threats to group survival, coupled with the presence of an organisation or movement with which to mobilise followers from an ethnic base, Biafran separatist conflict would not come into being. The symbolic politics theory transcends these monocausal explanations.

I adopt the symbolic politics theory of ethnic conflict in this study precisely because it is not a single-factor or single-discipline theoretical framework that provides partial explanation of events. The symbolic politics theory is a comprehensive, holistic, theoretical framework that synthesises the best insights from multiple disciplines such as neuroscience, sociology, evolutionary and social psychology (for instance, terror management and social identity theories), and political science and unites them into a coherent explanation of ethnic conflict. This synthesis enables us to grasp the plural dimensions and features of Biafran separatism in terms of the connections between biases, leadership and organisation that existing single-factor, single-discipline, theories do not explore in a holistic manner. Indeed, there is 'no simple answer—no silver bullet explanation of the causes of ethnic war and peace. Rather, ethnic war happens when many things go wrong, usually when the culture, psychology, sociology, and politics all work together to create a spiral of escalating violence' (Kaufman 2015:2). What has not been given much scholarly attention, then, is the role of symbolic politics in the renewed Biafran separatist conflict in contemporary Nigeria. The copious literature on Biafran separatism in postwar Nigeria is generally silent on separatist leaders' framing/instrumentalisation of hostile ethnic narratives and prejudices that designate the state and an ethnoreligious group—the Fulani and northern Muslims—as existential threats to physical security and how such ethnic narratives and prejudices fuel armed violence with Biafran separatists advancing separatism as *the* antidote to purported ethnic annihilation in the southeast region. This is oft-dubbed the 'Fulanisation and Islamisation' agenda of the Nigerian state, leading to the creation of regional security outfits such as the Eastern Security Network (ESN) by IPOB to stem perceived imminent ethnic and religious domination of Igbo people and Igboland.

In this research article, I foreground symbolic politics in the resurgent Biafran separatist conflict in the southeast region that has so far not been underscored in the existing literature. I contend that narratives and discourses of ethnic extinction are profoundly central to the Biafran separatist cause as they are instrumentalized in self-determination claims to justify contesting the state's monopoly of legitimate violence in the southeast region. I argue that addressing the crisis of ethnic separatism would require addressing the infrastructures of symbolic politics that promote separatism as the most effective strategy to inveigh against ethnic annihilation. I draw on symbolic politics theory of ethnic conflict advanced by Stuart Kaufman and the empirical case of IPOB's discourses and practices to demonstrate how hostile group narratives of imminent ethnic extermination fuel armed violence with dire consequences for peace in the now-troubled southeast region. The method for this research is qualitative. I rely on a combination of primary and secondary sources including historical sources, books, journal articles and content analysis of news on the various activities of Biafran separatists culled from local Nigerian newspapers, social media posts of X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook accounts associated with IPOB, videos, press releases, magazines, as well as radio broadcasts. For radio broadcasts, I rely heavily on transcriptions of pro-Biafra speeches of Biafran separatist activists including those of Nnamdi Kanu—IPOB's leader—available on IPOB Community Radio, Radio Biafra and Biafra Times, the three major media outlets that IPOB separatists utilise to diffuse their separatist discourses. These separatist discourses—like most political discourses (Fairclough 2010:3)—are themselves inherently dialectical in that they reveal social relations in the Nigerian state. Whilst this research analyses the symbolic politics of Biafran separatists, I do not make any judgement regarding the appositeness—that is, the moral rightness or wrongness—of Biafran separatists' discourses in their quest for self-determination. Further, the timeframe for the analysis is 2015–2023. This article is oriented around three sections. In the first section, I explicate the symbolic politics theory as proposed by Stuart Kaufman. In the second section, I provide the historical context of pro-Biafran activists' symbolic politics by assessing the history of the Nigerian Civil War and its aftermath which has engendered fears of ethnic annihilation amongst Igbo people in postwar Nigeria. In the third section, I discuss in detail IPOB's symbolic politics in postwar Nigeria. I conclude the article by recommending the dismantling of the infrastructures of symbolic politics as a strategy to curb insurrections.

2 | The Symbolic Politics Theory of Ethnic Conflict

The symbolic politics theory of ethnic conflict was developed to counteract rationalist explanations which maintain that 'all civil wars result from a struggle between essentially rational groups of individuals over tangible interests, such as wealth and power' (Kaufman 2006a:203; Fearon 1995). From the rationalist perspective, ethnic war is 'the (collectively suboptimal) result of the rational pursuit of individual and group self-interest' (Kaufman 2006b:49). For instance, Fearon (1995) argues that commitment problems and information failures make it difficult to prevent ethnic conflicts as individuals or groups choose war over peace given their mistrust of one another's motives. Rationalist accounts are typically grounded in the economistic assumption of individuals and groups as self-interested entities who always want to minimise costs and maximise profits. In contrast to the rationalist explanation—which is, by and large, hegemonic in the political science literature on ethnic conflict—the symbolic politics theory advanced by Stuart Kaufman draws its inspiration from social psychology and neuroscience and prioritises emotion over rationality. In his scholarly oeuvres—*Modern Hatreds* (2001) and *Nationalist Passions* (2015)—Kaufman posits that rationality is not the best predictor of ethnic conflict. Political behaviour, Kaufman argues, is scarcely rational not least because 'people make decisions primarily on the basis of their biases, prejudices, values, and emotions' (Kaufman 2015:3). In this sense, '[p]olitics is largely about politicians responding to changes in popular mood—status anxieties, security fears, and so on that lead to changes in priorities. It is also about politicians seeking, usually by manipulating popular emotions, to get people to change their preferences to support the politician's program' (Kaufman 2015:12). The assumption of fixed preferences or rational decision-making is, for him, antithetical to politics and political analysis as 'different people react differently to similar circumstances based on their biases, prejudices, values, and ideology—their symbolic predispositions' (Kaufman 2015:12). Ethnic conflict, for Kaufman, stems from biases, prejudices, stereotypes and fears that are manipulated by leaders and political elites to mobilise for protection against the existentially threatening ethnic out-group.

There are four main components of the symbolic politics theory: (1) symbolic predispositions, (2) perception of threat, (3) leadership and (4) organisation (Kaufman 2015:12). For ethnic conflict to occur, there must be congruence between these four factors which unfold in four steps (see Figure 1). First, there must be common symbolic predispositions—that is, prejudices, biases and stereotypes—amongst ethnic groups that depict members of this or that ethnic group as a threat. Second, these symbolic predispositions within a group must be accompanied by perceptions of threat from the behaviour of other ethnic groups. Third, leaders' framing of other ethnic groups as threats to influence public opinion is requisite to mobilise people to conflict. Fourth, ethnic conflict is impossible without the presence of organisation such as a social movement, army, or paramilitary organisation. Ethnic conflict occurs—or is likely to occur—in volatile contexts where groups feel physically threatened and resort to defence to counter such perceived threats. The mere presence of prejudices and

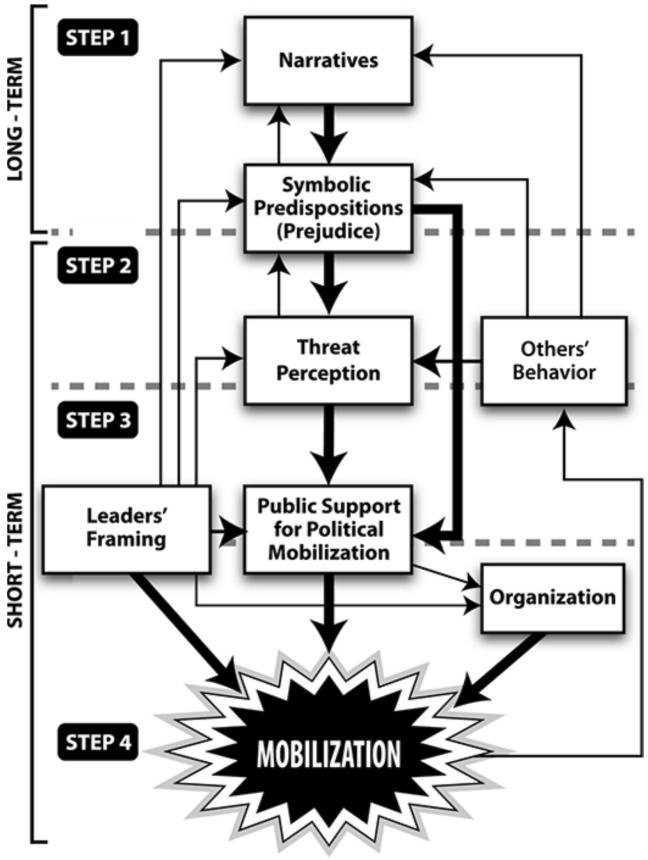

FIGURE 1 | The symbolic politics of ethnic mobilisation. Source: Kaufman (2015:20).

perceptions of threat within a society is not sufficient to mobilise people to ethnic conflict; rather, leaders' framing and use of organisational resources are necessary to trigger ethnic conflicts. This precisely why Kaufman (2017) contends that '[h]ostile narratives, prejudices, and other symbolic predispositions, perceived threats, hostile framing by credible leaders, and strong ethnic organisations are all necessary conditions for war, needing to be present on at least one side if war is to occur' so that '[t]he main process that generates war is symbolic politics, with leaders using threat frames to appeal to hostile symbolic predispositions to justify the fighting'. These four factors and steps provoke ethnic conflicts.

Once ethnic conflict commences, there is the likelihood that parties to it are entrenched in what Kaufman (2006a) calls the 'symbolic politics trap' which makes it rather intractable or difficult to resolve as one or both groups frame conflict as a matter of survival or ethnic preservation against extinction. To escape the 'symbolic politics trap', Kaufman argues that leadership is indispensable. Leaders of the parties to a conflict must reframe issues in a manner that is not hostile and indicative of an ethnic identity under physical threat. In this sense, the 'more the leaders of the rival groups frame the other group as hostile and threatening, the more they increase their followers' threat perceptions and support for continued conflict. In other words, aggressive and hostile rhetoric by a group's leadership creates a political environment that makes peace unlikely' (Kaufman 2015:23). Reconciliation initiatives should, Kaufman (2001) maintains, focus on reducing

prejudices, stereotypes and hostile group myths by imploring leaders of the parties to a conflict to de-escalate tensions and carve out a space for dialogue and mutual understanding devoid of threat perceptions. Given the explanatory power of the symbolic politics theory of ethnic conflict, it has been applied to myriad conflicts including the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the Muslim rebellion in the Philippines (the Moro War), the North–South War in Sudan, the Rwandan Genocide, the end of apartheid in South Africa (Kaufman 2015) and diplomatic conflicts between South Korea and Japan (Kim 2014). In all these cases of ethnic conflict, symbolic predispositions, threat perceptions, leadership and organisational networks worked in tandem to instigate conflicts.

Despite the cogency of the symbolic politics theory, it has not evaded criticisms, particularly from rational choice theorists who insist that greed, opportunity and commitment problems by political actors are the main determinants of ethnic conflicts (Laitin 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003). However, as Kaufman (2017) has convincingly contended, the quantitative data upon which rationalist explanations of ethnic conflict are founded are flawed. In addition, the fact of political leaders manipulating the populace in the quest for wealth and power is not incompatible with symbolic politics theory. Indeed, Kaufman's symbolic political theory indicates that leaders' framing of prejudices and threat perceptions is critical not only to the precipitation of conflict but also to conflict resolution. Besides, leaders' manipulation of the population is more often than not rooted in the symbolic predispositions of the masses, which the leader invariably exploits. To discard the assumptions of symbolic politics theory simply because it does not depend on quantitative data grounded in economist–rationalist assumptions is to miss the forests for the trees, to underestimate the power of prejudices, leadership and organisation in conflicts, and to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Symbolic politics theory is, I think, the better non-rationalist explanation of resurgent Biafran separatism compared to rationalist and social identity theories for two reasons. First, it is difficult to see how the revival of Biafran separatism stems from commitment problems and information failures as rationalists often argue. IPOB's leader Nnamdi Kanu and his supporters within the Igbo community are very deliberate and obvious in their hostility such that misperception and distrust are quite irrelevant in explaining separatist conflict in the southeast region. Second, social identity theory, which explains conflict as a product of prejudice between in-groups and out-groups, is quite insufficient in the explanation of Biafran separatism because it is a single-factor, single-discipline theory that does not explore the significance of factors such as threat perceptions, leadership and organisation in the production of violent conflict. In that regard, symbolic politics theory is a multi-factor, multi-discipline theory that draws not only on social identity theory but also on insights from neuroscience, sociology and political science to explicate how resurgent Biafran separatism stems from a hodgepodge of factors such as prejudices, threat perceptions, leadership and organisation.

For purposes of clarity, I apply the four steps of Stuart Kaufman's symbolic politics to the case of resurgent Biafran separatism in contemporary Nigeria as follows. In the first step, Igbos harbour hostile ethnic narratives and prejudices toward northern Muslims—especially the Fulani—and this is the result of long-term conflictual interactions with other ethnic groups in post-colonial Nigeria. Put simply, Igbo prejudices toward northern Muslims were activated during the anti-Igbo pogroms in northern Nigeria in 1966 and the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) that led to thousands of deaths in Igbo communities (Wolff 2024; Uchendu 2011b). Historical and anthropological evidence of prevalent anti-Muslim prejudice amongst Igbos due to negative historical encounters with northern Muslims during the civil war has been provided by Uchendu (2010:80–81) who shows that the majority of Igbos associate Islam with violence and fear that conversions to Islam would endanger the survival of Igbo culture; thus, they resist Islam and Islamic conversions in Igboland.

In the second step, this anti-Muslim prejudice interacts with the behaviour of other groups to breed perceptions of threat amongst Igbos in the short-term. The behaviour of other groups that nurture perceptions of threat amongst Igbos include the adoption of sharia in northern Nigeria, Islamist militancy such as Boko Haram terrorism in the northeast region and the violent farmer-herder conflicts all of which tend to pit Muslims against Christians (Ejiofor 2023). In contemporary Nigeria, these violent conflicts present further evidence for Igbos that there is a clandestine agenda by northern Muslims to eliminate and Islamise ethnic Igbos. For instance, employing surveys and qualitative interviews to explore the relationship between Biafran separatism and religious identity amongst Igbos most of whom are Christians, Ossai and Okwueze (2024:20) find that the majority of Igbo Christians 'view Biafra's restoration as a means of protecting the Igbo from threats originating from Islam and the Muslim population in northern Nigeria'.

In the third step, leaders' framing of public perception of threat garners support from majority of Igbos. Nnamdi Kanu and other IPOB separatist leaders have been instrumental in shaping public perceptions of threat in Igboland through radio broadcasts and the media mostly from the diaspora (Onyemechalu and Ejiofor 2024). Biafran separatism is widely accepted amongst ethnic Igbos. Indeed, 'data from Afrobarometer reveal that more than 70% of Igbos either "strongly agree" or "agree" that Nigeria's Eastern Region should be allowed to secede—equivalent to three out of every four Igbos' (Tuki 2025:2). And, in the fourth step, Nnamdi Kanu and IPOB leaders have been able to mobilise support for separatist conflicts in the southeast through organisations such as IPOB and ESN. Obi-Ani (2024:550) asserts that 'IPOB's relevance in Igbo[land] is anchored on the claim that its armed wing, Eastern Security Network (ESN), has stalled the overrunning of Igboland by Fulani herdsmen and their ultimate Islamisation of the zone'. Since the establishment of ESN by Nnamdi Kanu in December 2020, the southeast region has been embroiled in violent conflicts as the separatists contest state security agencies over monopoly of legitimate violence.

From the foregoing detailed discussion of the four steps of symbolic politics theory, it is clear that the resurgent Biafran separatist conflict in the southeast region is nurtured by a conjunction of factors such as anti-Muslim prejudice, perceptions of the threat of massacre and Islamisation by northern Muslims, Nnamdi Kanu's framing of public perceptions of threat, and

the mobilisation of ethnic Igbos to fight for physical protection through ESN, the armed wing of IPOB founded by Nnamdi Kanu. These four steps are intricately intertwined and jointly shape separatist mobilisation in the southeast region. What this means, I think, is that theoretical explanations of resurgent separatism that foreground one factor—marginalisation, socioeconomic deprivation or state repression—are *necessarily* incomplete as they fail to account for the crucial role of leadership and organisation in the mobilisation of Igbos. In the section that follows, I trace the genesis of Biafran separatism to symbolic politics as Igbo people who were physically assaulted in various parts of Nigeria in 1966 viewed the Nigerian state and northern Muslims as sources of physical insecurity, and this necessitated the creation of the secessionist Biafran state as a bulwark against ethnic elimination that eventually engendered the Nigerian Civil War and conflict spirals in the southeast.

3 | Biafran Separatism and Symbolic Politics: The *Longue Durée*

It is incontrovertible that symbolic politics precipitated Biafran separatism in postcolonial Nigeria. Prior to British colonialisation of Nigeria that started after the annexation of Lagos by way of the Lagos Treaty of Cession in 1861, there was no Nigerian statehood as Nigeria was a conjunction of various ethnic groups that inhabited various territories: the predominantly Muslim Hausa and Fulani (concentrated in the northern region), the predominantly Christian Igbo (concentrated in the southeast region) and the relatively religiously mixed Yoruba (concentrated in the southwest region). The construction of Nigerian nationhood and identity is the result of the amalgamation of two protectorates—the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Northern Nigeria Protectorate—in 1914 by British colonialists so as to balance the budget deficit of the Northern Nigeria Protectorate (Agbiboa 2013:12; Bourne 2015:12–14). However, the amalgamation of these two protectorates with many different identity groups engendered conflicts amongst various ethnicities. For instance, there was a 1945 Hausa-Igbo riot in Jos (Plotnicov 1971). Further, Igbos were attacked in Kano in 1953 which led to several deaths (MAR 2004). The fear of domination—the mutual suspicion of ethnoregional domination that existed between northerners and southerners—led northern political elites to institute the 'Northernisation Policy' in 1954 that 'aimed to reduce the [northern] region's reliance on southern civil servants and professionals by expanding educational opportunities for northerners and curtailing employment of southerners, often by replacing them with more expensive expatriates while northerners received training' (Anthony 2010:48). Many southerners including Igbo people who opposed the 'Northernisation Policy' regarded it as a tool weaponised by northern Muslims to dominate other ethnoregional groups (Falola and Heaton 2008:165). Political elites from the three main ethnoregional groups jostled for political power (Nafziger 1973).

With a coup by mostly Igbo military officers and a countercoup by mainly northern military officers in 1966, ethnic bigotry became the new normal in the postcolonial state. The suspicion by many northerners—elite and non-elite—that Igbos nurtured a clandestine motive to dominate the entire federation exacerbated anti-Igbo sentiments in the northern region where many Igbos had established businesses and worked in the civil service (Daly 2020:40–41; Anthony 2002). The anti-Igbo sentiments were worsened by the 1966 coup d'état was organised by predominantly Igbo soldiers which was later dubbed, however wrongly, 'the Igbo coup'. The complicated nature of ethnic relations after the 1966 coup d'etat meant that there was an anti-Igbo pogrom perpetrated by other ethnoregional groups in various parts of northern and southwestern Nigeria between May and September 1966—just 6 years after Nigeria's independence—that left tens of thousands of Igbos dead in what some scholars call an 'anti-Igbo genocide' (Korieh 2013:728; Daly 2020:38). The anti-Igbo massacres were, to a large extent, the beginning of negative symbolic predispositions and perceptions of physical threat amongst Igbos in the political history of the postcolonial state.

The anti-Igbo pogrom of 1966 forced tens of thousands of Igbos in the northern region to flee to Igboland—their ancestral homeland—in order to evade persecution. The physical insecurity Igbo people faced in other parts of Nigeria engendered fear amongst them as they saw themselves as a persecuted group under threat of ethnic extinction. It is little wonder that the anti-Igbo pogrom in 1966 birthed calls amongst Igbos for a Biafran state that would safeguard them from massacres. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu—an Igbo military leader who was the Governor of Eastern Region and later become the president of Biafra—framed the anti-Igbo pogrom as a genocide and as a threat to Igbos' physical security, declared the independence of the secessionist Biafran state, and organised an army to facilitate the creation of the Biafran state to protect Igbo people (Daly 2023). Ojukwu's declaration of Biafran independence plunged Nigeria into a civil war that ended with the military defeat of the Igbo-dominated Biafran state. The plight of Igbos during the civil war—especially starvation weaponised by the Nigerian state against Biafrans—compelled some international observers to call Igbos the 'Jews of Africa' (Heerten 2017; see also Okpoko 1986:23). In this sense, the four components and steps of Kaufman's (2015) symbolic politics theory—prejudices, threat perceptions, leaders' framing and organisation—explain the genesis of Biafran separatism in the late 1960s as Ojukwu's framing and use of an army to accomplish the separatist cause were embedded in symbolic predispositions and threat perceptions amongst Igbos in relation to violent episodes that targeted them in the postcolonial state (Figure 2).

Furthermore, the creation of the short-lived secessionist Republic of Biafra and the concomitant emergence of Biafran identity in 1967 was tinged with anti-Muslim prejudices and perceptions of threat that Biafran separatist leaders employed to frame the conflict as a genocide by northern Muslims against the Igbo, which necessitated Biafra to protect Igbos from elimination (Wolff 2024; Daly 2023:476; Anthony 2010:46; McCauley 2017:164; Walls 1978:209). Omenka (2010:367–389) contends that the Biafrans analysed the civil war not only from a Christian vs Muslim standpoint but also from a Christian Igbo vs Muslim Fulani stereotypical perspective despite the fact that the conflict had little or nothing to do with religion. Indeed, Biafrans under the leadership of Oxford-educated Ojukwu framed their struggle for self-determination as a resistance to Islam with the contention that the Biafran revolution was inherently antagonistic to Muslim domination (Ojukwu 1969).

FIGURE 2 | Biafran refugees in line to receive food distribution inside a refugee camp during the Nigerian Civil War. Source: ICRC/Max Vaterlaus. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

With Biafran leaders' framing of the war as a resistance to Islam and Muslims, Muslims were expelled from the region (Uchendu 2011a:214). Analysing the war through the crude Muslim vs. Christian prism, many Biafrans comprehended the conflict as a war of liberation from Muslim despotism.

After the civil war ended on 15 January 1970, Igbo nationalism in postwar Nigeria centred on the reintegration of Igbos in Nigeria (Onuoha 2011:403). However, the war left difficult legacies in terms of Igbos' prejudice toward Islam and Muslims (Uchendu 2010:80–81). The rise of Islamist fundamentalism in the 1970s and 1980s (Igwara 1995; Ibrahim 1989) coupled with several ethnic and religious riots in the 1990s which targeted Igbos reinforced Igbos' symbolic predispositions toward northern Muslims (Aguwa 1997; Anthony 2002; Onuoha 2013). It equally shaped the reemergence of Biafra as Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999 (Harnischfeger 2019:348). In the next section, I explain how resurgent Biafran separatism is tied to historical symbolic predispositions and threat perceptions as northern Muslims' clamour for sharia implementation in northern states was perceived by Igbo nationalists as a veiled agenda to Islamise Nigeria, to purge the postcolonial state of Igbos and to subjugate Igbos in democratic Nigeria.

4 | Symbolic Politics and the Resurgence of Biafran Separatism in Postwar Nigeria

The sharia riots in the 2000s led to the death of approximately 5000 Igbos resident in northern Nigeria (Ukiwo 2009:25; for more information on the sharia riots, see Human Rights Watch 2004; Kendhammer 2013). It is no coincidence, then, that Biafran separatism was resuscitated in 1999 at the same time that sharia was being discussed and implemented in some northern states in Nigeria. Resurgent Biafran separatism can be considered, at least in part, a response to the ethnoreligious violence in northern states following sharia implementation that negatively affected many ethnic Igbos ordinarily resident in those states. *Biafran separatist ideology and modus operandi in postwar democratic Nigeria largely derive from the symbolic predispositions and threat perceptions of ethnic Igbos who dread the twin menaces of ethnic persecution and Muslim domination that characterise the postcolonial Nigerian state*. The sharia riots that claimed the lives of hundreds of Igbos brought MASSOB—the first Biafran separatist movement founded in 1999 by Ralph Uwazuruike to 'restore' the Biafran state—to the limelight as the movement 'became the most popular political organisation in Igboland, among intellectuals as well as among ordinary people' (Harnischfeger 2019:348–349). At its inception, MASSOB was—for Igbo nationalists such as Uwazuruike—the apposite answer to the sharia riots in northern Nigeria. In the early 2000s, MASSOB succeeded in resurrecting the 'ghost' of Biafra and transformed Biafra—the idea—into 'a rallying point, common myth, and source of identity and grievance among Igbo against the Nigerian system within and outside Nigeria' (Oyewole 2019:8). But internal dissensus within MASSOB coupled with state repression when Ralph Uwazuruike was detained by the federal government in 2006 precipitated the proliferation of Biafran secessionist movements as well as to the democratisation of separatist discontent amongst Igbo nationalists (Oyewole 2019:8) as various separatist organisations emerged (Oyewole 2019:8).

There is continuity, I am inclined to think, between Biafran separatism during the Nigerian Civil War and its resurgent variants in democratic Nigeria through MASSOB, IPOB and other Biafran separatist movements. Without doubt, the current phase of Biafran separatism spearheaded by IPOB is rooted in the symbolic predispositions and threat perceptions of Igbo people as much in the past as in the present. IPOB separatists, as I will show, generally frame Igbo people as a 'race' and a people at risk of extinction by the state in collaboration with the minority Fulani ethnic group whom they believe run the entire polity. The 'restoration' of the defunct Biafran state is—for IPOB separatists within Nigeria and in the diaspora—the panacea to prevent the extermination of the 'Igbo race' and the concomitant subjugation of Igboland. Such ethnic fear produces not only violent conflicts but also a racialised politics geared toward eliminating the designated threat—the Fulani—who ply their trade in the southeast region. Hence, recent analyses that tend to ground IPOB-led Biafran separatism to conventional theoretical models such as marginalisation, political economy and state repression tend to ignore the separatist group's symbolic politics in relation to its framing of the Nigerian state as a political entity controlled—and dominated—by the Fulani to exterminate the Igbo. It is little wonder that President Muhammadu Buhari is depicted in IPOB's media as an enabler of Fulani-led genocide against the Igbo in the southeast region or 'Biafraland' as IPOB separatists would call it (Figure 3).

Founded in 2012 in the United Kingdom by the British–Nigerian activist Nnamdi Kanu who was dissatisfied with MASSOB's political strategy for restoring the Biafran state, IPOB's separatist ideology is rooted in nativism as is axiomatic from the 'I' in IPOB that stands for 'Indigenous'. In the Nigerian context

FIGURE 3 | President Muhammadu Buhari and Fulani pastoralists depicted as co-conspirators in the ethnic extermination of Igbo people. Source: Biafra Times (2016). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

an 'indigene' is 'a person who belongs to the group of people who were the original inhabitants of a particular place and who therefore claim to be its rightful "owners"'(Human Rights Watch 2006:5). Indigeneity is the vernacular for autochthony which is somewhat widespread in postcolonial Africa (Bøas and Dunn 2013). The indigene–non-indigene polarity is exploited by 'indigenes' to discriminate against 'non-indigenes' in politics, education, employment and access to social services in Nigeria (Kraxberger 2005). By employing the word 'indigenous' in their description of Igbos who inhabit or have genealogical ties to southeast Nigeria since time immemorial, IPOB indulge in symbolic politics to further their separatist agenda. Nigeria is categorised—in the discourses of IPOB leadership—as a vicious colonial imposition by the British Empire to obliterate Igbos' 'traditional' institutions that had existed in the precolonial era. Indeed, for IPOB separatists led by Nnamdi Kanu—who considers himself a Jew and has been labelled as the 'King of the Biafran Igbo Jews' (Mayer 2021)—the 'non-indigenes' are non-Igbos in general and Muslims and Fulanis in particular who purportedly dominate Nigerian politics and harbour sinister desires to 'Fulanise' and 'Islamise' Igboland. Kanu and IPOB have framed the Nigerian state and the Fulani as a threat to Igbo people and Igboland which necessitates ethnic defence. Kanu 'rages angrily and emotionally as he attacks what he perceives as Fulani (Muslim) domination of Nigeria. He often conflates former generals, oil rig owners, political bosses, and nomadic herders all as the same Fulani' (Mayer 2021). For instance, Nnamdi Kanu solicited 'guns and bullets' at the World Igbo Congress in Los Angeles, the United States in 2015 to defend Igbos and Igboland from Fulanis and Muslims whom he described as existential threats to the survival of Igbo people as a 'race' (see News 2015). When asked why he solicited weapons, Kanu commented in the following way: 'How do you intend to defend yourself against Fulani herdsmen without guns and bullets? They have been killing our people, raping our women, destroying crops in the farms and no one does anything about it. Is that how human beings are supposed to live? Self-defence is recognised even by all the known laws at the UN' (Jannah 2017). In the same vein, Chinazu (2021)—an IPOB separatist writer—posits that the 'problem of Nigeria is the Fulani race—a race with a horrible history of conquest'.

IPOB leadership's framing is centred on discourses of anti-nomadism and anti-Muslimism so that the separatist movement's creation of a security outfit such as ESN is geared toward stamping out the twin menaces—existential threats—of nomadic pastoralism and Islam in southeastern Nigeria. IPOB separatists contend that the Biafran state would not come to life without the elimination of these designated existential threats. It is noteworthy that IPOB leadership's framing draws on the symbolic predispositions of the Igbo populace for whom the Nigerian Civil War is a genocide with intent of exterminating the Igbo. IPOB leadership's framing of its separatist agitations claims that its objective is to protect and circumvent the extermination of Igbo people in the present time as happened in the past through the military tactics of the federal government (see Daly 2023:490). The 'separatist leaders appeal to their members' Igbo and Christian identities. They urge that they ought to be paying their tithes to the "altar of Biafran restoration"' (Adebajo 2024). For Nnamdi Kanu and his pro-Biafra IPOB sympathisers, the rejuvenation of the Biafran state is a panacea to the malaises of the postcolonial state whose myriad security woes—banditry, Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts—and deep-seated anti-Igbo discrimination are antithetical to the survival of Igbos. Separatist leaders' framing of threat perceptions is oftentimes amplified by the persecution of ethnic Igbos living in other parts of Nigeria. For instance, in June 2017, Arewa Youth Consultative Forum (AYCF) issued a three-month ultimatum for ethnic Igbos living in 19 northern states to vacate the region and threatened to forcibly appropriate landed properties that belong to persons of Igbo descent (Haruna 2017). In a similar vein, in August 2024, Yoruba ultranationalists campaigned for the eviction of ethnic Igbos in Lagos, a cosmopolitan city which they (Yoruba ultranationalists) described in ethnic terms as part and parcel of Yorubaland (Duru 2024). These threats to forcibly evict Igbos in various parts of feed into IPOB leadership's framing of Igbo people as a 'race' under threat of extinction that can be countered only via recreating the Biafran state. For our purposes, I divide IPOB's symbolic politics into two interconnected parts: (1) anti-Fulani and anti-Muslim prejudice; and (2) the establishment of the ESN, a paramilitary organisation. The conjunction of these discourses and practices are—for IPOB separatists—aimed at defending Igbo people from extermination in contemporary Nigeria.

4.1 | Anti-Fulani and Anti-Muslim Prejudice

IPOB leadership frames the Fulani in general and Fulani nomadic pastoralists in particular as jihadists and agents of Islamisation. It is worthy of note that nomadic pastoralism is the traditional cultural practice of the Fulani (Adebayo 1991:2). In the context of the southward movement of Fulani pastoralists in search of grazing areas for their cattle that sometimes

lead to violent conflicts with farmers in southern Nigeria coupled with the political leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari—a Muslim politician of Fulani descent—negative stereotypes have produced sentiments revolving around a federal government-backed 'Fulanisation and Islamisation' agenda that should be resisted and eradicated by Igbo people via the creation—or, as IPOB separatists would have it, 'restoration'—of the secessionist Biafran state. Nwankpa (2021) clarifies that the notion of 'Islamisation' in the Nigerian context 'relates to the aggressive expansion of Islamic social and political systems or the imposition of shari'a rule on a non-Muslim society and non-practicing Muslims. It is a form of forced conversion or assimilation into an Islamic society, different from proselytisation and voluntary conversion'. The supposed 'Fulanisation and Islamisation agenda' of the Nigerian state that IPOB separatists frame as existential threats to the survival of Igbo people stem from their perception of both Fulani political elites and Fulani nomadic pastoralists as religious fundamentalists who harbour ulterior motives to 'Fulanise' and 'Islamise' Igbo people and Igboland. IPOB leaders' framing posits their agitation for the Biafran state as a form of resistance against the 'Fulanisation and Islamisation' of Igbos. During his visit to Nri in Anambra State, for instance, Nnamdi Kanu stated that '[t]he struggle for Biafra which I proudly lead is not a secessionist aspiration of Ndigbo only as some erroneously think. Biafra is not just a living agitation but a fight for the survival of Christians in Nigeria against the entrenched threats of radical Islamic fundamentalists and their political collaborators within and outside Nigeria' (Ewubare 2017).

Kanu's framing depict the Fulani and the postcolonial state as Islamist fundamentalists and existential threats to Igbo people and this equally saturates the discourses of his disciples—that is, his fellow IPOB separatists and Biafran activists—who have employed his canards to mobilise people. In the *Biafra Times*, IPOB separatists frequently draw on the history of the nineteenth century jihads of Usman dan Fodio to underscore that the Nigerian state is governed by supposed Fulani jihadists to rid Igbos of their cherished cultural values (Ebiri 2018). This explains why IPOB separatists antagonise nomadic pastoralism as they perceive the Fulani's cultural practice as part of a longstanding clandestine or subterranean agenda by the federal government to use Fulani pastoralists to dominate Igbo people in the southeast region The presuppositions of one IPOB activist demonstrate the framing of the Fulani as existential threats: '[T]he Fulani society are not a people to be given free access to live in your land. If you do, you will still end up like those people that welcomed them in history. Reason being that the people that mistakenly accommodated the Fulani people in the past were overthrown by the Fulani people' (Chinazu 2018; see also Ebiri 2018). Hence, the discursive framings of IPOB separatists designate the Fulani as physical threats to Igbos and Igboland.

Because IPOB leadership regards the Fulani as a 'menace' (Agangan 2018), nomadism is typically considered a ploy to Islamise Igbos. An IPOB writer posits that 'the Fulani herdsmen and their gambits are pawns in an axe to grind (hidden motive), to hem in non-Islamic territories; then they would install emirs in Agatu, Jos, Enugu, and other towns that would abruptly endorse the Fulani ploys' (Ikpe 2018). Based on IPOB leaders' framing that designates the postcolonial Nigerian state and the Fulani as existential threats, the Biafran state that the separatist movement aims to establish in southeastern Nigeria is (re)packaged not only as a right to self-determination but also as a right to self-defence: 'Self-defence is peremptorily the right of every human, even "animals," for the purpose of defending one's life or the lives of others. Hence, the use of "defensive force" is justified. If a defendant whose life is on the line, owing to a threat of grievous harm by the other person, eventually uses a defensive force; the defendant is said to be justified vis-à-vis the instruments of "perfect self-defence"' (Ikpe 2018). For IPOB separatists, the Nigerian state itself is a source of threat—it is detrimental to the survival of Igbo communities in the southeast—hence the need to defend militarily against any policies proposed by political elites.

It is unsurprising that IPOB separatists see attempts by the federal government to curb the resource conflicts between farmers and pastoralists over access to natural resources such as land and waterby establishing grazing reserves for pastoralists as symptomatic of the Nigerian state's 'Fulanisation and Islamisation' agenda. IPOB's framings which, as I have said, are anti-nomadic, anti-Fulani and anti-Muslim can be gleaned from the separatist group's overt hostility toward the Nigerian state's proposed RUGA policy in May 2019. IPOB separatists believe that there is no such thing as 'farmer-pastoralist conflict' in large part because—in their peculiar framing—it is a ruse to cache the real 'Fulani-cum-Muslim threat' that they want to extirpate in Igboland: 'Climate [c]hange is not the cause of mass migration of Fulani Herdsmen Terrorists nor is it the cause of Fulani Herdsmen Jihadist Terrorism in Nigeria that is being falsely described as "farmers and herders clash." There is nothing like "farmers and herders clash" arising from [c]limate [c]hange. It is a lie from the pit of hell .... Biafrans have decided not to allow the Fulani to grab any inch of our land. IPOB won't allow them to take over our ancestral land by crook, force, or deceit' (Powerful 2022). When the federal government decided to institute RUGA settlement policy in May 2019 whose aim—like similar federal policies such as the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP)—was to 'curb the movement of cattle by encouraging predominantly nomadic herders to switch to sedentary, more mechanised livestock production and thereby to minimise conflict between them and crop farmers' (International Crisis Group (ICG) 2021), the federal proposal was fiercely lambasted by IPOB leadership who viewed the policy with extreme suspicion. The term 'RUGA'—which is just an acronym for Rural Grazing Areas—became a topic of contestation with IPOB separatists going as far as contending that it is a Fulani word for 'cow settlement' with the intent of handing over Igboland to the 'dangerous' Fulani. In other words, it was equated with land grabbing. As IPOB's leadership put it: 'This Ruga is a Fulani term, it is a secret plan to occupy indigenous land of our people and that is why we say no .... No matter what they call this their evil plan, we reject every Islamic agenda' (Aliuna 2019). The separatist group further stated that they would never accept RUGA policy: 'IPOB can never and will never allow the establishment or implementation of RUGA Settlement anywhere on Biafran soil. We shall continue to confront and drive them away wherever they are found even with their police and army support' (Powerful 2019). Moreover, Emma Powerful—IPOB's media and publicity secretary—speaking on behalf

of IPOB rejected RUGA on the grounds that it is an attempt to give free rein to Fulanis with the support of the federal government to Islamise Igboland (Nebeokike 2019). Nnamdi Kanu also described RUGA as an Islamisation plot to invade Igboland and, in so doing, slammed nomadic pastoralism: 'RUGA, or whatever new name the cow-loving Fulani regime in Aso Rock may have christened their Fulanisation agenda, is a brazen attempt by Sokoto Caliphate to forcefully displace and supplant indigenous populations in the disastrous British manufactured contraption known as Nigeria with Fulani migrants from across West Africa' (Opanwa 2019).

Due in large part to opposition by separatist movements like IPOB as well as by stakeholders in the Middle Belt and southern regions of Nigeria, the RUGA policy was terminated by the federal government in July 2019 less than 2 months after it was announced. Despite the cancellation of the RUGA proposal, IPOB's framing of the Nigerian state as an instrument of Fulani domination and Islamisation of Igboland has continued unabated. The separatist movement has interdicted the consumption of beef and any cattle by-products produced by Fulani pastoralists. For instance, in January 2022, Emma Powerful issued an injunction in reference to the consumption of Fulani pastoralists' cows in the southeast region: 'The ban placed on Fulani cows will take effect in April 2022 ... Fulani cows will not be used for any social or ceremonial events and festivals in Biafraland. Our native cows will be used instead for these events .... We cannot continue to bring curse and damnation upon ourselves by consuming cows that were used for bestiality' (Opejobi 2022). As I will demonstrate in the next subsection, IPOB separatists have moved further to address the supposed existential threat through the establishment of a security outfit to enforce its interdictions on nomadic pastoralism—including cattle by-products such as beef. This was done—in IPOB leadership's framing—with the intention to ward off the presumed existential threat to survival of Igbos in the southeast region.

4.2 | The Creation of the Eastern Security Network

IPOB's framing, as I have shown, designates the Nigerian state and the Fulani as physical threats to the existence and survival of the Igbo—and this has been accepted by the separatist movement's members drawn mostly from the Igbo ethnic group within Nigeria and in the diaspora. It must be noted that IPOB has a huge following among members of the Igbo diaspora who fund most of the separatist group's activities (see Onyemechalu and Ejiofor 2024). IPOB separatists are not only convinced that the Nigerian state cannot monopolise legitimate violence on its territorial space à la Max Weber and protect Igbo communities in the southeast but also that Fulani pastoralists—and this sentiment, as I say, derives from the symbolic politics engrained in IPOB's separatist ideology—in collaboration with the Buhari administration harbour a clandestine agenda to terrorise Igboland under the guise of nomadic pastoralism. For this reason, in December 2020, IPOB separatists under the auspices of Nnamdi Kanu capitalised on their security framing to establish the ESN for the 'defence' of Igbo—or, as is often used in the separatists' discourses, 'Biafran'—people in the southeast region. Nnamdi Kanu—the founder of IPOB's ESN—argued that the fundamental reason for establishing the security outfit is to defend Igbo communities as well as to eradicate all forms of crime—especially terrorism —in Igboland that the Fulani purportedly symbolise (Nzeagwu 2020).

Furthermore, to extirpate nomadism that the separatist group associates with terrorism in Igboland, IPOB enforced its ban on nomadism and the consumption of cattle by-products in April 2022: 'our decision to ban the movement, sale and consumption of Fulani cows throughout Biafraland with effect from April of this year [2022] is not borne out of hate but we are safeguarding our land and our people from the evil agenda of Fulani. Our decision is born[e] out of the *natural desire to preserve our race from being wiped out* by the Fulani terrorist [h]erdsmen' (Powerful 2022, my emphasis). Since December 2022, IPOB separatists enforce these bans through the ESN (the armed wing of the separatist movement). Fulani camps and cows have been frequently raided by members of ESN in a bid to the 'secure' the homeland—Igboland—from the incursion of perceived terrorists, marauders and invaders who—by definition—are Fulani and Muslim in the framing of IPOB separatists (Chiedozie 2021). IPOB separatists suppose that Igboland is in a state of war with Islamist fundamentalists who are, in short, backed by Fulani political elites. This sentiment saturates the discursive framing of the movement's leadership and their audience: 'The WAR has begun! We shall defend Biafra and we shall triumph! No inch of Biafraland will be taken by the [i]nvaders. We have vowed never to relinquish any inch of Biafra ancestral land to Fulani Herdsmen from Sahel. Their evil Fulanisation agenda shall perish with them. God of the Jews shall defend us against the enemies. This war will be different from the 1967 genocide!' (Oko 2021). Similarly, in a radio broadcast on Radio Biafra entitled *We Are in A State of War*, Nnamdi Kanu (2021) not only asserts that Igboland is existentially threatened by Fulani Muslims who ostensibly run the Nigerian state and back the geographical expansionism of Islamist groups such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram but also admonishes his pro-Biafra audience to be vigilant with regard to imminent Muslim invasions.

However, 'the ethnoreligious framing of Nigeria's security crises as ones of either "Fulanisation" or Fulani-led Islamisation is simplistic at best and disingenuous at worst' (Nwankpa 2021) and stigmatises the Fulani who are sometimes the victims of attacks from jihadist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP even whilst they are labelled as a 'suspect community' (Ejiofor 2022). Nnamdi Kanu's rhetoric is not just vitriolic as his 'separatist stance and online comments have also been criticised in the media as being unfortunately tribalistic and overtly unprofessional' (Chiluwa 2018:362). In 2021, Facebook deleted the page of Nnamdi Kanu for contravening its rules on hate speech (Dahiru 2021; BBC 2021a). Kanu himself has occasionally recommended violence as a strategy to ward off the purported insecurity foisted upon Igbos by Fulani pastoralists—and his discursive framing has been criticised by some scholars as hate speech akin to the discourse of ethnic or racial hatred that triggered the Rwandan genocide (Chiluwa et al. 2020). IPOB separatists believe they are freedom fighters defending their homeland from jihadist invasion. These 'wars' that IPOB perceive between Igboland and the Nigerian state—the entity that IPOB frame as an existential threat to the survival of Igbo people—are fought by the ESN on behalf of IPOB. This has led to intractable violent conflicts in the southeast region (BBC 2021b).

5 | Conclusion

Existing explanations of resurgent separatist agitation in the southeast tend to foreground relative marginalisation, material deprivation, or state repression as the driver or cause of the problem in contemporary Nigeria. In contradistinction to these single-factor, single-discipline theoretical explanations that have become quite hegemonic and almost incontestable, I turned toward a novel epistemological foundation grounded in Stuart Kaufman's symbolic politics theory that centres on prejudices, perception of threat, leadership and organisation in studies of ethnic conflict. I argued that Biafran separatist agitations have been revived due in large measure to a conjunction of myriad factors such as symbolic predispositions, public perception of threat, leadership and organisation. I traced the constitutive role of symbolic politics in the generation of Biafran separatism during the Nigerian Civil War and how it has continued to drive separatist agitation in postwar democratic Nigeria through the discursive and security practices of IPOB, the most renowned and active of all Biafran separatist movements. Indeed, IPOB leadership has not only tapped into the symbolic predispositions and threat perceptions of Igbos with regard to other ethnic groups—especially Fulani Muslims—but has also framed the restoration of Biafra as a matter of ethnic preservation. Such symbolic politics precipitated the establishment of ESN, a paramilitary organisation aimed at protecting ethnic Igbos from extermination. This has produced a symbolic politics trap whereby both the state and IPOB separatists engage in violent confrontations as each entity wrangles over the legitimate monopoly of violence in the southeast region. It seems to me that to counter the emergent conflict spirals and restore peace, the Nigerian state and IPOB must engage in reconciliation initiatives that address the symbolic politics trap by tamping down on the symbolic predispositions and threat perceptions that exist amongst various ethnoreligious and ethnoregional groups. Political leaders on both sides ought to halt the framing of various ethnic groups as threats to national sovereignty or to ethnic survival. This will create room, I think, for mutual dialogue and understanding between warring parties and enable peace to flourish in the now-troubled communities in the southeast region.

Acknowledgments

This work received support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation under grant no. OPP1144.

References

Adebajo, K. 2024. "*The Internet Fundraising Marathons Behind IPOB'S Armed Struggle in Nigeria*." Accessed October 27, 2024. https://humanglemedia.com/the-internet-fundraising-marathons-behind-ipobs-armed-struggle-in-nigeria/.

Adebayo, A. G. 1991. "Of Man and Cattle: A Reconsideration of the Traditions of Origin of Pastoral Fulani of Nigeria." *History in Africa* 18: 1–21.

Agangan, V. O. 2018. "*Biafra: The Fulani menace*." Accessed June 1 2023. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2018/01/biafra-fulani-menance.html.

Agbiboa, D. E. 2013. "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Elusive Quest for National Identity in Nigeria." *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 1: 3–30.

Aguwa, J. C. 1997. "Religious Conflict in Nigeria: Impact on Nation-Building." *Dialectical Anthropology* 22, no. 3/4: 335–351.

Aliuna, G. 2019. "IPOB Vows to Resist President Buhari's Alleged Plan to Establish Ruga, Islamisation of Southeast Region." http://dailypost.ng/2019/07/29/ipob-vows-resist-president-buharis-alleged-plan-establish-ruga-islamization-southeast-region/.

Amnesty. 2021. "*Nigeria: At Least 115 People Killed by Security Forces in Four Months in Country's Southeast*." Accessed May 20, 2024. Available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/08/nigeria-at-least-115-people-killed-by-security-forces-in-four-months-in-countrys-southeast/.

Anthony, D. A. 2002. *Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity, Power, and Violence in a Nigerian City, 1966 to 1986*. James Currey.

Anthony, D. A. 2010. "'Resourceful and Progressive Blackmen': Modernity and Race in Biafra, 1967-1970." *Journal of African History* 51, no. 1: 41–61.

BBC. 2021a. "*Nigerian Separatist Nnamdi Kanu's Facebook Account Removed for Hate Speech*." Accessed June 20, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55934277.

BBC 2021b. "*Orlu Crisis: Imo Eastern Security Network [ESN] Clash Wit Soldiers, Uzodinma Impose Curfew-Wetin We Know so far*." Accessed June 20, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/tori-55804529.

Biafra Times, 2016. "*Muhammadu Buhari Is the Chief Terrorist in Charge of Murderous Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria*." Accessed June 20, 2024. Available at: https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2016/05/muhammadu-buhari-is-chief-terrorist-in.html.

Bøas, M., and K. Dunn. 2013. *Politics of Origin in Africa: Autochthony, Citizenship and Conflict*. London: Zed Books.

Bourne, R. 2015. *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century*. London: Zed Books.

Chiedozie, I. 2021. "Farms, Cows, and Blood: Untold Story of Reprisal Attacks on Fulani Herdsmen in the South-East." https://www.icirnigeria.org/farm-cows-and-blood-untold-story-of-reprisal-attacks-on-fulani-herdsmen-in-the-south-east/.

Chiluwa, I. 2018. "A Nation Divided Against Itself: Biafra and the Conflicting Online Protest Discourses." *Discourse & Communication* 12, no. 4: 357–381.

Chiluwa, I., R. Taiwo, and E. Ajiboye. 2020. "Hate Speech and Political Media Discourse in Nigeria: The Case of the Indigenous People of Biafra." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 16, no. 2: 191–212.

Chinazu, E. C. 2018. "*The Fulani Game of Conquests: A Fact Beyond The Comprehension Of Our Enslaved Eastern Leaders*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2018/03/the-fulani-game-of-conquests-fact.html.

Chinazu, E. C. 2021. "*The Fulani Must Go Campaign Necessary for the South*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2021/03/the-fulani-must-go-campaign-necessary.html.

Mar, Chronology for Ibo in Nigeria. 2004. Accessed June 1, 2024. https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38c3467.html.

Collier, P., and A. Hoeffler. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4: 563–595.

Dahiru, A.. 2021. "*IPOB Accuses Facebook of Collusion for Deleting Nnamdi Kanu's Account*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://humanglemedia.com/ipob-accuses-facebook-of-collusion-for-deleting-nnamdi-kanus-account/.

Daly, S. F. C. 2020. *A History of the Republic of Biafra: Law, Crime, and the Nigerian Civil War*. Cambridge University Press.

Daly, S. F. C. 2023. "Secession and Genocide in the Republic of Biafra, 1966–1970." In *The Cambridge World History of Genocide*, edited by B.

Kiernan, W. Lower, N. Naimark, and S. Straus, 476–496. Cambridge University Press.

Duru, E. A. 2024. "*The Mischievous Igbo-Must-Leave-Lagos Campaign*." Accessed October 27, 2024 https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/08/the-mischievous-igbo-must-leave-lagos-campaign/.

Ebiri, G. . 2018. "*Biafra: Why Do You Think They Stopped History Lessons in Schools?*" Accessed June 1, 2024. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2018/01/why-do-you-think-they-stopped-history.html.

Ejiofor, P. F. 2022. "'Fulanis Are Foreign Terrorists': The Social Construction of a Suspect Community in the Sahel." *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 15, no. 2: 333–355.

Ejiofor, P. F. 2023. "The Fear of Ethnic Domination: Explaining the Persistence of Natural Resource Conflicts in Nigeria." *Ethnopolitics* 22, no. 1: 1–21.

Ewubare, K. 2017. "*Plot to Islamise Nigeria is Real–Nnamdi Kanu*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.legit.ng/1115698-plot-islamise-nigeria-real-nnamdi-kanu.html.

Fairclough, N. 2010. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Routledge.

Falola, T., and M. M. Heaton. 2008. *A History of Nigeria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fearon, J. D. 1995. "Rationalist Explanations for war." *International Organization* 49, no. 3: 379–414.

Fearon, J. D., and D. D. Laitin. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97, no. 1: 75–90.

Harnischfeger, J. 2019. "Biafra and Secessionism in Nigeria: An Instrument of Political Bargaining." In *Secessionism in African Politics: Aspiration, Grievance, Performance, Disenchantment*, edited by L. de Vries, L. P. Englebert, and M. Schomerus, 329–360. Palgrave Macmillan.

Haruna, A.. 2017. "*Arewa groups ask Igbos to leave Northern Nigeria, threaten violence*." Accessed October 27, 2024. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/233266-arewa-groups-ask-igbos-to-leave-northern-nigeria-threaten-violence.html?tztc=1.

Heerten, L. 2017. *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Human Rights Watch. 2004. ""Political Shari'a"? Human Rights and Islamic Law in Northern Nigeria." Accessed October 27, 2024. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/09/21/political-sharia/human-rights-and-islamic-law-northern-nigeria.

Human Rights Watch. 2006. ""They Do Not Own This Place": Government Discrimination of "Non-Indigenes" in Nigeria." *Human Rights Watch* 18, no. 3(A): 1–64.

Ibrahim, J. 1989. "The Politics of Religion in Nigeria: The Parameters of the 1987 Crisis in Kaduna State." *Review of African Political Economy* 45, no. 46: 65–82.

ICG. 2021. "*Ending Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Crisis: The Livestock Reform Plan*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/302-ending-nigerias-herder-farmer-crisis-livestock-reform-plan.

Igwara, O. 1995. "Holy Nigerian Nationalisms and Apocalyptic Visions of the Nation." *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 3: 327–355.

Ikpe, C. O. 2018. "*Biafra: Fulani Herdsmen Attacks and the Quest for Cattle Colonies Are Wilful Curricula And Contrivances of Buhari's Islamisation Agenda*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2018/01/biafra-fulani-herdsmen-attacks-and.html.

Jannah, C. 2017. "*Biafra: Why I Asked for Guns from US-Based Nigerians–Nnamdi Kanu [VIDEO]*." Accessed June 1, 2024. https://dailypost.ng/2017/06/27/biafra-asked-guns-us-based-nigerians-nnamdi-kanu-video/.

Kanu, N. 2021. "*We Are in a State of War*." Accessed June 1, 2024. https://broadcast.radiobiafra.co/#google_vignette.

Kaufman, S. J. 2001. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Cornell University Press.

Kaufman, S. J. 2006a. "Escaping the Symbolic Politics Trap: Reconciliation Initiatives and Conflict Resolution in Ethnic Wars." *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 2: 201–218.

Kaufman, S. J. 2006b. "Symbolic Politics or Rational Choice? Testing Theories of Extreme Ethnic Violence." *International Security* 30, no. 4: 45–86.

Kaufman, S. J. 2015. *Nationalist Passions*. Cornell University Press.

Kaufman, S. J. 2017. "Symbolic Politics as International Relations Theory." In Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics. Accessed October 27, 2024. https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-323.

Kendhammer, B. 2013. "The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria and the Politics of Islamic Law in New and Uncertain Democracies." *Comparative Politics* 45, no. 3: 291–311. https://doi.org/10.5129/001041512X13815255434898.

Kim, J. Y. 2014. "Escaping the Vicious Cycle: Symbolic Politics and History Disputes Between South Korea and Japan." *Asian Perspective* 38, no. 1: 31–60.

Korieh, C. J. 2013. "Biafra and the Discourse on the Igbo Genocide." *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 6: 727–740.

Kraxberger, B. 2005. "Strangers, Indigenes and Settlers: Contested Geographies of Citizenship in Nigeria." *Space and Polity* 9, no. 1: 9–27.

Laitin, D. D. 2001. "Secessionist Rebellion in the Former Soviet Union." *Comparative Political Studies* 34, no. 8: 839–861.

Mayer, A. 2021. "*The King of the Jews*." Accessed June 1, 2024. https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/nnamdi-kanu-nigeria-biafra-igbo.

McCauley, J. F. 2017. *The Logic of Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Africa*, 2017. Cambridge University Press.

Nafziger, E. W. 1973. "The Political Economy of Disintegration in Nigeria." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, no. 4: 505–536.

Nebeokike, C. . 2019. "*Implementation of Fulani RUGA Settlement: IPOB Blast Gov. Ugwuanyi and Other Governors*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://radiobiafra.co/implementation-of-fulani-ruga-settlement-ipob-blast-gov-ugwuanyi-and-other-governors/.

NEWS. 2015. "*Video: Nnamdi Kanu Begs for Guns and Bullets*." Accessed June 1 2023. https://thenewsnigeria.com.ng/2015/10/28/video-nnamdi-kanu-begs-for-guns-and-bullets/.

Nussbaum, M. 2018. *The Monarchy of Fear*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nwangwu, C. 2023. "Neo-Biafra Separatist Agitations, State Repression and Insecurity in South-East, Nigeria." *Society* 60: 40–53.

Nwangwu, C., F. C. Onuoha, B. U. Nwosu, and C. Ezeibe. 2020. "The Political Economy of Biafra Separatism and Post-War Igbo Nationalism in Nigeria." *African Affairs* 119, no. 477: 526–551.

Nwankpa, M. 2021. "*The North-South Divide: Nigerian Discourses on Boko Haram, the Fulani, and Islamisation*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/the-north-south-divide-nigerian-discourses-on-boko-haram-the-fulani-and-islamization.

Nzeagwu, U. 2020. "*Why IPOB Formed Eastern Security Network, by Kanu*." Accessed March 27, 2024. https://guardian.ng/news/why-ipob-formed-eastern-security-network-by-kanu/.

Obi-Ani, N. A. 2024. "Unforgotten Shadows: Exploring the Dynamics of Biafra Agitation in South-East Nigeria." *Africa* 94, no. 4: 532–555.

Ojo, J. S. 2024. "Transforming Pacifists Into Warmongers? Separatist Movement, State Repression, and the Politics of Framing Terrorism in Nigeria: Evidence from IPOB and Yoruba Nation's Freedom Frontiers." *Journal of Applied Security Research* 19, no. 3: 377–412.

Ojukwu, C. O. 1969. "*The Ahiara Declaration: The Principles of the Biafran Revolution*." Accessed March 27, 2023. http://www.biafraland.com/ahiara_declaration_old.htm.

Oko, S. 2021. "*Orlu Military Raid: 2nd Nigeria/Biafra War Has Begun—IPOB*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/02/orlu-military-raid-2nd-nigeria-biafra-war-has-begun-ipob/.

Okonta, I. 2014. "'Biafra of the Mind': MASSOB and the Mobilization of History." *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 2–3: 355–378.

Okpoko, J. 1986. *The Biafran Nightmare: The Controversial Role of International Relief Agencies in a War of Genocide*. Delta Publications.

Omenka, N. I. 2010. "Blaming the Gods: Christian Religious Propaganda in the Nigeria-Biafra War." *Journal of African History* 51, no. 3: 367–389. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853710000460.

Onuoha, G. 2011. "Contesting the Space: The "New Biafra" and Ethn-Territorial Separatism in South-Eastern Nigeria." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 17, no. 4: 402–422.

Onuoha, G. 2013. "The Presence of the Past: Youth, Memory Making and the Politics of Self-Determination in Southeastern Nigeria." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 12: 2182–2199.

Onyemechalu, S. J., and P. F. Ejiofor. 2024. "Long-Distance Nationalism, Diaspora Mobilisation, and the Struggle for Biafran Self-Determination in Nigeria." *Ethnicities* 24, no. 3: 309–339.

Opanwa, C. 2019. "*RUGA, a Brazen Attempt by Sokoto Caliphate to Forcefully Supplant Indigenous Populations*." Accessed June 1, 2024. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2019/07/ruga-brazen-attempt-by-sokoto-caliphate.html.

Opejobi, S. . 2022. "*IPOB* Bans Nigerian Anthem in Southeast Schools, Slaughtering of Cows for Ceremonies." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://dailypost.ng/2022/01/03/ipob-bans-nigerian-anthem-in-southeast-schools-slaughtering-of-cows-for-ceremonies/.

Ossai, E. C., and M. I. Okwueze. 2024. "Biafran Separatism in Post-War Nigeria: Religious Identity, Intergroup Threats, and the (In)compatibility of Christianity and Islam." *African and Asian Studies*: 1–31.

Oyewole, S. 2019. "The Fracturing of Pro-Biafra Nationalist Movements." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 9, no. 1: 1–23.

Plotnicov, L. 1971. "An Early Nigerian Civil Disturbance: The 1945 Hausa-Ibo Riot in Jos." *Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, no. 2: 297–305. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00024976.

Powerful, E. . 2019. "RUGA: We Can Never and Will Never Allow the Establishment or Implementation of RUGA Settlement Anywhere on Biafran Soil-IPOB Blast Gov. Ugwuanyi & Ikpeazu." Accessed June 1 2023. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2019/07/ruga-we-can-never-and-will-never-allow.html.

Powerful, E. 2022. "*Do not Be deceived, What is Happening Is Sponsored Islamic Conquest not Herders/Farmers Clash-IPOB Tells America*." Accessed June 1, 2023. https://www.thebiafratimes.co/2022/12/do-not-be-deceived-what-is-happening-is.html.

Smith, D. J. 2014. "Corruption Complaints, Inequality and Ethnic Grievances in Post-Biafra Nigeria." *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 5: 787–802.

Tuki, D. 2024. "Undead Past: What Drives Support for the Secessionist Goal of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria?" *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 9, no. 1: 26–54.

Tuki, D. 2025. "Regional Differences in Support for Secession Among Members of the Igbo Ethnic Group in Nigeria." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*: 1–15.

Uchendu, E. 2010. "Being Igbo and Muslim: The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria and Conversions to Islam, 1930s to Recent Times." *Journal of African History* 51, no. 1: 63–87. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853709990764.

Uchendu, E. 2011a. "Negotiating Relationships in a Mixed Religious Society: Islam Among the Igbo of Southeast Nigeria." *Journal of Third World Studies* 28, no. 2: 207–231.

Uchendu, E. 2011b. *Dawn for Islam in Eastern Nigeria: A History of the Arrival of Islam in Igboland*. De Gruyter.

Ugwueze, M. I. 2021. "Biafra War Documentaries: Explaining Continual Resurgence of Secessionist Agitations in the South-East, Nigeria." *Civil Wars* 23, no. 2: 207–233. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2021.1903781.

Ukiwo, U. 2009. "Violence, Identity Mobilisation and the Reimagining of Biafra." *African Development* 34, no. 1: 9–30.

Walls, A. F. 1978. "Religion and the Press in 'the Enclave' in the Nigerian Civil War." In *Christianity in Independent Africa*, edited by E. Fasholé-Luke, R. Gray, A. Hastings, and G. Tasie. Rex Collings.

Wolff, R. 2024. "Visual Propaganda and Biafran National Identity: Artists Constructing a Nation During Wartime." *African Studies Review* 67, no. 4: 888–919.