



**ETHNO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS AND THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR, (1967–1970):
IMPLICATIONS FOR NATION BUILDING AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION.**

Morgan Ogbonna

Department of History and International Studies, Babcock University.

ogbonna0281@pg.babcock.edu.ng

Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), precipitated by deep-seated ethno-political tensions and the attempted secession of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra, remains a pivotal event in Nigeria's post-independence history. This paper explores the ethno-political dynamics that underpinned the conflict, focusing on the interplay of ethnicity, regionalism, political marginalization, and contestation for state power. Drawing on archival sources, scholarly literature, and post-war policy analyses, the study examines the structural causes of the war and evaluates its enduring effects on the processes of nation-building and national integration in Nigeria. It argues that while the end of the war was marked by the federal government's policy of reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation, the legacies of mistrust, uneven development, and exclusionary politics have continued to undermine national unity. The paper highlights how the lessons from the civil war remain relevant to contemporary debates on federalism, identity politics, and sustainable governance in Nigeria. Ultimately, it advocates for a more inclusive, participatory, and equity-driven approach to nation-building as a means of achieving lasting national integration.

Keywords: Nigeria Civil War, Biafra, ethno-political conflict, nation building, national integration, identity politics, post-conflict reconstruction.

Introduction

Since Nigeria is considered a single entity Geographical expression, it has been in a state of confusion, conflict/crisis (violence) all through the history of its existence, its experience had always been one of contending ethnic community clashes, political rifts, economic violence, social intolerance, student's violence, mass civil violence, Trade Union crisis and many others. The communities to a large extent have never been static, thus, constant cultural contact within/among each other and external groups continually bring about change in their character and personal albeit gradually. Corruption, confusion and unprincipled struggles for office had been quite an endemic feature of Nigerian lifestyle early before and after independence. However, the country has been held together, stumbling from one crisis to another, though always looking for some temporary compromise to avoid a total breakdown (collapse), (Mbanefo, 1981, p.8).

For discerning observers, the Nigerian Civil War, which was Africa's first modern and brutal civil conflict, was an event waiting to happen. Indeed, when one examines the socio-economic, cultural, and political history of the country, the crucial question should not be why there was a civil war in



the country, but rather why it took more than half a decade after independence before the contradictions in the body politic resulted in a civil war. However, as with most civil wars in Africa, the distinction between ‘facts’ and ‘fictions’ in the Nigerian civil war is blurred (Nnoli,1980, p.21).

Perhaps most of the debates about the civil war would have been minimized if there had been an official history of the war, but this, in itself, is problematic in a country where almost everything is in dispute and where there are alleged ulterior motives behind any action or inaction. Nigeria, like any other African nation, was carved up in such a way as to satisfy the European governments at the Berlin Conference of 1886 without any input from or consideration given to the people to be governed. The result was the division of families and ethnic groups, and their summary placement within different groupings, regions and countries (Ademoyega, 1981, 24).

Socio-culturally, each of the various ethnic groups that make up Nigerian society has its own different political, economic and cultural history and background. This was neglected or relegated by the British when Nigeria was being put together as a single political entity. British colonial policy, therefore, did not aim to forge a nation out of the numerous societies that made up Nigeria. This failure of colonialism was a signpost towards disaster for Nigeria following independence in 1960. The homogeneity of ethnic groups in terms of language, religion and culture breeds loyalty to the unit. This loyalty contributes to the development of negative attitudes, prejudices and discrimination towards members of other groups, and results in aggression and violence towards such groups. However, the way the country was constituted right from the colonial days brought the doctrine of ethnicity into greater prominence in Nigerian politics, and given the ability of Nigerian politicians and their military successors to master its use and dig deeper into their respective regions, it could not but lead to a crisis. Furthermore, this tension between the various regions was later intensified by the election of the first Federal Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, based on a disputed greater size of the Northern Region (Adedeji,1969,p.169).

In reflection, Adewale Ademoyega noted that ‘military aspirants from the South were frustrated. No wonder then that the Army was not as insulated from politics as it seemed to outside observers. The effects of these were made crystal clear by the events of 1966/67’(Ademoyega, 1981).

Ethnicity

The negative ethnic perception of one another by ethnic groups has often been a source of conflict, and Nigeria’s case is no different. In a bid to serve British administrative expediency, Northern Nigeria, which was predominantly Muslim, was merged with Southern Nigeria, which was predominantly Christian and Animist. Whilst Islam stresses obedience to authority and acceptance of predestination as virtues, Christianity encourages individual responsibility and achievement (Rupley,1981, p.257). These contradictory values held by Southern and Northern Nigerians have consistently fostered negative perceptions of each other. The Southerners comprising the Igbos and Yorubas have consistently perceived the Hausas as lazy, economically non-ambitious, and only interested in playing the role of a parasite exploiting the South by perpetually holding on to political power. This alliance of perception apart, the Yorubas and the Igbos see each other as



constituting a threat, especially in terms of commerce and political competition. However, given the level of development in both ethnic groups, the ability to compete on a level playing field did not engender, and has not engendered, a morbid fear of hegemony of one over the other (Natsiger, 1972, p.126). The Hausas, on the other hand, see the Yorubas and especially the Igbos as hegemonic and seeking to lord their will over the Northern region.⁹In an environment where the Hausa-Fulanis lag behind the Yorubas and the Igbos in educational and economic development, this psychological perception of the Igbos constitutes and reinforces a real or imagined threat (Petroleum Press Service, 1968, p.4).

It is this morbid fear of Southern hegemony that resulted in the massive massacre of Igbos in the North following Ironsi's promulgation of the Unification Decree in May 1966. Ironsi's failure to take action against the coup plotters, but quickness in setting up a commission of inquiry when the Igbos were massacred in the North in May 1966, served to reinforce the Northern regional perception that his regime was an instrument of Igbo domination. This consequently led to the July 1966 counter-coup by army officers from the Northern Region (Adedeji, 1969).

Revenue Allocation

The event which finally triggered secession was the creation of 12 new States by the Federal Military Government on 27 May from the previous four Regions and the Federal Territory. The new state structure cut off a major industrial port, the Ibo-dominated city of Port Harcourt, and the minority areas, including a large part of the oil-producing regions, from the Ibo majority in the East-Central State; this arrangement was considered by the Eastern leaders to be a violation of the agreement at Aburi to effect greater regional autonomy (Forsyth, 1969, p.41).

More so, the politics of revenue allocation had a contributory factor in the emergence of the political crisis that led to Nzeogwu's coup, which finally dovetailed into the civil war. There were two opposing views. The first was for revenue allocation to be based on population and need, and was actively supported by the North because it would be in its favor. The second view favored by the other regions wanted revenue allocation to be based on derivation (Williams, 2017, p.40). Prior to 1959, all the revenues from mineral and agricultural products (i.e. export duties) had been retained by the producing region. The Raisman Commission of 1958, which was set up to review the fiscal and revenue allocation arrangement between the Federal and Regional governments in preparation for independence and the inception of the 1960 Constitution, recommended that the Federal Government reduce the 100 per cent allocation accruing to the regions on revenues from regional mineral resources to 50 per cent (Aluko, 1976, p.28). The remaining 50 per cent was redistributed based on 30 per cent to the Federal Government and 20 per cent to the Distributable Pool Account to be shared equally amongst the regions. The reason given by the Commission for this recommendation was that as at 1958, the Eastern Region had begun to exploit oil in large commercial quantity and future oil development in the region would take place on a scale that would upset the balance of national development and give the region a source of income too sizeable to ignore (Aluko, 1976).



Note that the Eastern region was especially dissatisfied that after 1959, only a fraction of the revenue from crude oil – none of the profits tax and only one-half of the rents and royalties – was received by the region of production in contrast to all the revenue from agricultural exports which accrued to the Northern and Western Regions (Forsyth, 2000, p.40). This process of determining the percentage to be paid to each region out of the federal purse created wrangling among the regions and political parties.

Besides the issue of revenue allocation, each of the three regions was endowed with export cash crops – cocoa for the West, palm oil and kernel for the East, and groundnut for the North. With the establishment of marketing boards in the regions to take care of the local purchase and foreign sale of these crops, the revenues that accrued served to make the regions, or rather the regionally based political parties and their domineering ethnic groups, more powerful by giving them the economic strength to wage political war against each other (Aluko, 1976). The decline of cash and export crops as a steady source of revenue to the regions ushered in the emergence of petroleum oil as a foreign exchange earner. Oil was first struck in Oloibiri, an Ijaw village in the Niger Delta, by Shell-BP (now Shell) in May 1956. Commercial exploitation began in 1958, and the value output grew at an annual rate of 78 per cent between 1958 and 1966 (Dilora, 2014, p.44).

It was very evident that half of the revenue from oil exploitation went to the government of the Eastern Region, and the rest was appropriated by the Federal Government under a fiscal arrangement based partly on the principle of derivation. For the East, secession was a good idea because it would entail total control of the profits from oil, and a hundred per cent gain following its previous pursuit of a revenue allocation system based on derivation (Diamond, 1988, p.22). For the North, control of the centre meant control of the gains from oil, and an assurance of the steady flow of money to the North for development and a rapid catching up with its southern counterparts. Against this background, the Western Region, which had previously clamored for revenue allocation based on derivation, decided to change its tune as well, seeking a formula that was based on population and need in view of the rapid decline in revenue from cocoa and other agricultural products. In the middle of it were multi-national corporations and foreign investors who, to protect their economic interests were mounting pressure on both sides of the debate (Tamuno, 1970. P.231).

January 15, 1966 Coup

The coup of January 15th, 1966 ushered in a new dawn full of uncertainties, expectations and hope. According to Nzeogwu in his broadcast from Kaduna, the coup aimed to establish ‘a strong, unified and prosperous nation free from corruption and internal strife (Perham, 1970, p.21), but the succeeding events did not give Nigerians a chance to find out whether this claim was sincere or disingenuous. Whilst the coup did not succeed in bringing into power its planners and executors, it nevertheless opened a chapter in Nigerian history of successive coups, countercoups, and the emergence of the military as political leaders, as well as alternative political leaders. This political experiment was the foundation and platform on which future political crisis was built with its inherent distrust (Odemene, 2011, p.44). This sad situation brought further division in Nigeria body



politic, that culminated later in a war that saw about three million Nigerians dead, in estimation and most of them from the southeast.

July 29, 1966 Coup

The July 1966 coup was a big catalyst for the outbreak of the civil war in 1967. On July 29th, 1966, Nigeria's bloodiest coup happened and it is also referred to as the July counter-coup or the northern rematch and it took the life of Nigeria's first head of state, General Thomas Aguiyi Ironsi (Ademoyega, 1981).

Many officers of the Igbo extraction will also lose their lives and those who escaped lost their positions. By midnight of January 15, 1966, the coup that had happened had been seen as an Igbo coup. Both local and international press repeated and analyzed why the coup was an Igbo coup. For about three weeks, Radio Kaduna broadcast the speeches of the murdered Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa and stirred up negative feelings against the south. Even though the coup failed, lives had been lost and most of whom were the northerners (Awolowo, 1981, p.42). The coup plotters had neither been tried nor executed and there were rumors that they were still being paid even while in detention. The northerners said and thought that all that was happening was to give the Igbos dominance over the country. In fact, they said that when promotions of twenty officers were released by the Ironsi government, nineteen of them were Igbos even though they agreed that the recipients merited it and well deserved.

Also, the tipping point was Ironsi's idea to do away with regionalism and introduce a unitary government. Ironsi believed the Unification Decree 34 of 1966 would help restore peace to Nigeria. Though the General had been advised against this position earlier but he quietly ignored it and this angered the northern leaders and by May 22nd, 1966, the decree was passed into law.

Just like the "wild-wild west" the northerners decided to take the law into their own hands, they went on rampage killing southerners. The killings went on for months starting from May to September 1966. Igbos ranging from eight to thirty thousand were killed during the pogrom. The peak of the genocide was on September 26th, 1966, which was also referred as the "black Thursday" as about a million Igbos fled to the Eastern part of Nigeria to avoid the raging massacre. There were also retaliations in the South especially Port Harcourt where the northerners were murdered and this led also to the relocation and movement of northerners out of the East and flee for safety. Nigeria was barely six years old after independence and seem to have been falling apart already (Balogun, 2009, p.68).

On July 29th, 1966, a group of northern officers decided to oust the government. This coup, which was later called "the rematch," was led by northern officers would claim more than ten times the one claimed by the January coup. The code name for the coup was "Arabah" which in Hausa language means "Let's separate and let everyone stand on his own" was led by Lt Col Mutarla Mohammed. The head of state and the Governor of the western region were captured and executed in Ibadan even though Ironsi had tried all he could to pacify the northerners, but it seemed they



wanted their pound of flesh at all cost (Elaigwe, 1986, p.80). The mutineers had been warned not to kill Ironsi on northern soil, hence the choice of Ibadan in the West.

Note that Ironsi had surrounded himself with northern officers to dispel the rumor of favoritism. Major Theophilus Danjuma was his Chief Security Officer. In Abeokuta, Igbo soldiers were singled out and executed. The same is said to have happened in Lagos, Ibadan Kano and Kaduna. The coup plotters had planned to secede from Nigeria after a successful execution of the coup. In fact, there were rumors that Murtala was planning to evacuate Northerners living in Lagos with a British Jet stationed at the Ikeja airport. It is also on record that Gowon was the officer who assigned officers for the security of the Commander in Chief on his tour of the western region, thereby leading him into the hands of his captors and the cold hand of death. Note also that it took about six months before Irons and Fajuyi's deaths were announced and eventually given a state burial. The coup was also planned to take place in the East, but hold. Lt Col Ojukwu, the Governor of the Eastern region, was targeted for elimination and execution. Like the January 15 coup, the July coup failed in the East because of the perseverance and gallant nature of the commanding officers there (Ademoyega, 1981).

It is important to state here that the north had insisted on secession after the coup but after a protracted negotiation, Lt Col Yakubu Gowon emerged the head of state. He was only thirty-one years and lower in rank to most other senior officers to the late head of state. This created another crisis that seriously contributed to the outbreak of the civil war.

The Aburi Accord

The military coups d'état of January 15, and July 29, 1966, the regional election crisis in Western Nigeria in 1965, the involvement of Military men in the killings of Igbo people living in Northern Nigeria from May to September 1966, the structural imbalance of the Nigerian Federation and Ojukwu's doggedness in the pursuit of achieving sovereignty for the South East all set the stage for what later became a cataclysmic civil war in Nigeria. There was, therefore, the need to initiate a diplomatic means of solving the problem by bringing all dramatist personae in the ensuing conflict to the negotiating table, hence the 1967 meeting at Aburi. It was billed to be the last chance of averting an all-out war in the country (Forsyth, 1969, p.68). It was the platform on which the much-needed peace and harmony in Nigeria would have been built through talks and not war. It was held between 4th and 5th January 1967.

Ghana was chosen as a venue because Colonel Ojukwu's safety could not be guaranteed anywhere within the western or northern part of the country (Mann, 2005, p.102). But the results of the Aburi talks which would have assuaged the civil war failed massively due to its non-implementation. Ojukwu had scored all his points in the meeting, if Gowon were to be faithful to the resolutions, the Nigerian civil war might have been averted. But as soon as Gowon stepped down in Lagos, he gave his ears to the Federal civil servants in Lagos and to his western masters, who advised that he had conceded too much to Ojukwu. There and then he was prepared to dishonor his own words and break the terms of the Aburi agreement (Stremlau, 1977, p.64).



On the other hand, Ojukwu held tenaciously to the agreements made at Aburi. In a speech aired on the Eastern Nigerian Broadcasting Service on May 30, 1967, He rejected Decree 8 promulgated by Gowon. He was persuaded by the Ghanaian Government through a three-man delegation to modify his stand on the Aburi Accord, but he insisted on its full implementation (Aremu and Buhari, 2017, p.15).

The conflict took a new turn when Ojukwu enacted, “The Revenue Collection Edict,” in which he demanded that all companies operating in the Eastern Region should pay their taxes into the purse of the Eastern Region instead of the Federal Government’s account. The Federal Government reacted swiftly to the Edict. First, it declared it illegal and ordered an economic and diplomatic blockade of the Eastern Region. Lt. Colonel Ojukwu in a counter-reaction, gave the Federal Government until 31 May 1967 to put into effect the terms of the Aburi Accord for a loose federation and assist Igbo refugees, among others. On 26 May 1967, the Eastern Region Consultative Assembly voted to secede from Nigeria. It mandated Ojukwu to declare, at the earliest practicable date, Eastern Nigeria a free, sovereign and independent State by the name and title of “The Republic of Biafra”. Subsequently, on 30 May 1967, Ojukwu declared the secession of the Eastern Region from Nigeria, naming the new country the Republic of Biafra. Vowing to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of the Nigerian federation, General Gowon declared war against the so-called Republic of Biafra on 6 July 1967 (Forsyth, 1969). This signalled the commencement of the Nigerian civil war, which lasted until 15 January 1970.

The failure of the agreement meant that overnight, the outcome of the Aburi meeting radically altered the contours of the political landscape of Nigeria. It had in effect inaugurated a confederal and extensively decentralized constitutional solution to the Nigerian impasse, to the consternation of the British, who had followed the talks with nervousness. The federal civil service vigorously opposed the Aburi Agreement (Mann, 2005).

A British Political analyst and writer, Frederick Forsyth, wrote:

“Within few days of Gowon’s return to Lagos, the Aburi agreements began to die on the vine. The technocrats at home took a second look at what had been agreed and realized that Gowon had gone far further than they would have wished him to go. The drawing apart of the army and populace for the cooling down period gave the regions in their view far too much autonomy. Thus, weakening the authority of the Central Government. The Permanent Secretaries set to work on Gowon to get him back on track on the agreement” (Forsyth, 1969).

While it is instructive to say that one of the greatest enduring myths in Nigeria is the lie that Yakubu Gowon fought the Nigeria-Biafra war to keep Nigeria united, whereas in reality not only did Yakubu Gowon whose Northern region had originally intended to secede after the July 1966 counter-coup cause the unnecessary war through his failure of leadership, his aim for fighting the war was never in the least a genuine desire to keep Nigeria united but purely because of Northern economic interests. The economic interests of the hitherto secessionist North became the principal reason for the volte face from secession to “one Nigeria” after the British government advised the



Northern leadership of the economic disadvantages of secession. Thus unlike most civil wars where there is a genuine desire to keep the nation united for patriotic reasons, the Nigeria-Biafra war was an opportunistic war instigated by Yakubu Gowon and the North; not out of a genuine desire for a united Nigeria but for the selfish aims of British imperialism and Northern economic interests which remains the reason and reality of their presence in Nigeria to date (Osadola and Asiyanbi, 2022, p.56).

On the whole, Aburi was a big success but the interpretation of what transpired in the meeting devalued the success. The failure of Aburi led to the outbreak of one of the most avoidable wars of the 20th century. Unlike many unavoidable conflicts, there were many opportunities to avoid the Nigeria-Biafra war, which needlessly consumed the lives of about 3 million people, entrenched an unhealing generational bitterness and caused severe social, political and economic dislocation from which the nation is yet to recover. Wars carry with them the worst of human tragedies and scars that endure for all time. It is an evil that must be avoided except it is necessary (Balogun, 2009, p.68).

Impacts of the war on Nation Building

Nation-building is conceived as the creation or development of a nation, especially one that has recently gained independence. This could also be the construction and structuring of a national identity using the power of the state. It is incontrovertible that a civil war is the exact opposite of these. A civil war tends to destroy the state through the deliberate secession of a part or the toppling of the recognized government and its replacement with a new state government radically different from the status quo. Civil wars, therefore, usually have a catastrophic impact on national development and nation-building and the case of Nigeria is not an exception (Nafziger, 1972, p.104).

Before the secession of Biafra, the gory experience of the Igbo was amplified by Ojukwu's propaganda, which fueled public discontent against the Federal Military Government (FMG), thereby shifting loyalty away from the central government to the Eastern Regional Government. This is a gross breach of what nation-building entails, and to date, the Nigerian state has been unsuccessful in its efforts at convincing the Igbo that they truly have a place in the Federation (Lodge, 2018, p.44).

Though the Biafran Civil War was the second revolution against the British contraption called Nigeria and was born out of the need for self-preservation and self-determination, the Biafran state was the first time a major ethnic group would be pulling out of the Nigerian union. This "divorce" turned out to be more agonizing than the brutal maiming of innocent Easterners that preceded the war (Aremu, et al, 2017, p.45).

The civil war led to the wanton destruction of valuable lives on both sides. Sometimes termed as genocide, the Biafran side suffered more casualties as a result of the FMG indiscriminate use of sophisticated weapons to prosecute the war. Conflicting figures put the death tolls at hundreds of thousands or millions on the Biafran end. Whereas some of these individuals had lost their lives



on the battlefield, the real battle was at the home front where thousands more lost their lives as a result of starvation.²³ Kwashiorkor, diarrhea and wartime court martial all combined to deprive the country of highly skilled manpower, willing or unwillingly trapped in the civil war (Dapo, 2022, p.62).

More so, rarely discussed is the impact of the war on the biodiversity of the Eastern Region. In the quest for survival, Biafrans feasted on any animal in sight. Even dogs, rats and lizards were not spared. At the end of the war, survivors' accounts attest to this low biodiversity and the reduced presence of domestic animals in the Eastern Region. Also, the FMG and the Biafran troops, in their bid to eliminate the other, indiscriminately dropped bombs on forests, destroying a host of animal colonies and rare herbs. Even after the war, some undetonated bombs continued to wreak havoc in the Biafran Forests in the post-war years.

Corollary to the destruction of lives is the destruction of property. Awolowo estimated the calculable loss at £300 million. Imagining the infrastructural development the country could have through these resources, they were channeled into more constructive national projects. It would make one conclude that the war was nothing but a national nightmare. National landmarks like the Niger Bridge and the University City of Nsukka were destroyed. Sadly, a lot of human and material resources were invested in the annihilation of the opponent, leaving a lot of ghost towns in its wake. At the end of the war, arms proliferation and different strands of criminality and social vices became the order of the day (Forsyth, 1969). Many youths resorted to drug use and prostitution as survival tactics. All these listed issues left the country with a major social problem in the post-war years.

Important to note is the fact that the civil war left the country with a set of federal war veterans who continued to impose their will on the country through military coups. Muhammadu, Olusegun Obasanjo, Theophilus Danjuma, David Mark, Hassan Katsina, Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sanni Abacha, to mention a few, are some of the civil war veterans who fall into this category. Occasionally, a few have successfully transformed from military dictators to elected government officials. This has prevented the influx of fresh blood and ideas by forestalling a radical transformation of the country's political landscape (Rabiu and Obonna, 2024, p.104).

On the positive side, the war saw to the reunification and liberation of some Nigerian people who may not have subscribed to the Biafran dreams of Ojukwu's conception. Aside from the Igbo, the Eastern Region is home to the Efik, Anioma, Ibibio, and other minority groups who vehemently resented the idea of living under an Igbo dominion. Also, rather than liberate Nigerians from the Northern oligarchy, a victory for the Biafra state they believed would have turned the country into Ojukwu's empire in which he would easily partitioned amidst his loyalists.²⁷ Some scholars believe that Ojukwu's defeat marked an end to this imperial ambition thereby providing an opportunity to re-fashion the country into a more stable polity. Gowon's post-war policies built around the 3Rs: Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction, were a bold initiative to actualise this objective. 120 million pounds were allocated for this task in the first fiscal year after the war (1970-



1971), and Gowon ensured that there were no summary trials or executions of Biafran war veterans in the spirit of “No Victor, No Vanquished” (Osha, 2017, p.45).

Financially, the civil war victory led to the reinstatement of the country’s ownership and control of rich oil fields in the Niger-Delta. Revenue from oil would go on to define Nigeria’s post-war policies. Domestically, oil rents were used to embark on ambitious infrastructural projects and to reconstruct some of the state infrastructures destroyed during the fratricidal war. Many scholars have disappointedly argued that the Nigerian Civil War was a war fought on the ground for the control of something below the ground (Rabiu and Ogbonna, 2024). Such a simplistic explanation falls short of the national fervor that inspired the violent events that culminated in the Nigerian Civil War.

Diplomatically, the war broadened the country’s international networks from the limited pro-Western First Republic cleavage to a broader one that incorporated states with Socialist ideology. The country also deemed it proper to improve relations with other neighbouring West African countries to forestall a repeat of the civil war experience where some of these countries covertly supported the Biafran State (Ohadike, 2001, p.28).

To foster internal peace and encourage peace, the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was also formed after the civil war. The NYSC deploys fresh Nigerian graduates from their region of birth/education to other parts of the country to broaden their knowledge of the country. This scheme has significantly strengthened the bond among the country’s educated elite and has led to broader national integration. Sadly, the merit of the scheme is gradually waning with the years, and like the Nigerian state, the NYSC is in a continuous battle to legitimize its existence.

Whereas it is incontrovertible that all these secessionist tendencies have their origin in the frail and faulty 1914 amalgamation, the country’s leadership would have averted these crises through equitable justice and stringent adherence to the rule of law. Rather than resort to the reactionary way of tackling the nation’s problem, Nigerian leadership would be better served using consensus-building and the teaching of history to enlighten or shape national discussion (Forsyth, 1969). By teaching the civil war’s history, the nation stands to gain the benefit of hindsight in the navigation of the country’s ship out of the troubled waters it has sunk since 1914; and obviously to avert a repeat of the politics that drove the country to a thirty-month avoidable fratricidal war.

However, the scenario that ended the war was through a surrender of the Biafran protagonists. On the 10th January 1970, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, the self-proclaimed Head of State of Biafra, on realizing the total chaos and hopelessness of the situation, handed over to the Commander, Biafran Army, Maj. Gen. Phillip Effiong, the administration of Biafra, and flew out of the enclave with his immediate family members in search of peace (Aremu, 2017).

Maj. Gen. Effiong consulted with the Biafra Strategic Committee on the situation, and they decided that enough was enough and that the only honorable way out was to surrender. In his surrender announcement to the people of Biafra on Radio Biafra, part of Maj. Gen. Effiong's address said:



“Fellow Countrymen, as you know I was asked to be the officer administering the government of this republic on the 10th of January, 1970. Since then I know some of you have been waiting to hear a statement from me. Throughout history, injured people have had to result to arms in their self-defense where peaceful negotiations have failed. We are no exception. We took up arms because of the sense of insecurity generated in our people by the events of 1966. We have fought in defense of that cause. I am now convinced that a stop must be put to the bloodshed which is going on as a result of the war. I am also convinced that the suffering of our people must be brought to an end. Our people are now disillusioned and those elements of the old regime who have made negotiations and reconciliation impossible have voluntarily removed themselves from our midst. I have, therefore, instructed an orderly disengagement of troops. I urge on Gen. Gowon, in the name of humanity, to order his troops to pause while an armistice is negotiated in order to avoid the mass suffering caused by the movement of population. We have always believed that our differences with Nigeria should be settled by peaceful negotiation. A delegation of our people are therefore ready to meet representatives of Nigerian Government anywhere to negotiate a peace settlement on the basis of OAU resolution” (Elaigwe, 1986, p.71).

On the other hand, part of Maj. Gen. Yakubu Gowon, the Head of the Federal Government's speech to formally accept the declared surrender and the end of the civil war read:

“Citizens of Nigeria, it is with a heart full of gratitude to God that I announce to you that today marks the formal end of the civil war. This afternoon at the Dodan Barracks, Lt. Col. Phillip Effiong, Lt. Col. David Ogunewe, Lt. Col. Patrick Anwunah, Lt. Col. Patrick Amadi and Commissioner of Police, Chief Patrick Okeke formally proclaimed the end of the attempt at secession and accepted the authority of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. They also formally accepted the present political and administrative structure of the country. This ends thirty months of a grim struggle. Thirty months of sacrifice and national agony. (Forsyth, 2000)”

Gowon said that the world knows how hard we strove to avoid the civil war. Our objectives in fighting the war to crush Ojukwu’s rebellion were always clear. We desired to preserve the territorial integrity and unity of Nigeria. For, as one country, we would be able to maintain lasting peace amongst our various communities; achieve rapid economic development to improve the lot of our people; guarantee a dignified future and respect in the world for our posterity and contribute to African unity and modernization. On the other hand, the small successor states in a disintegrated Nigeria would be victims of perpetual war and misery and neo - neo-colonialism. Our duty was clear. And we are today, vindicated. The so-called "Rising Sun of Biafra" (Forsyth, 2000) is set forever. It will be a great disservice for anyone to continue to use the word "Biafra" to refer to any part of the East Central State of Nigeria. The tragic chapter of violence is just ended. We are at the dawn of national reconciliation. Once again, we have the opportunity to build a new nation.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), deeply rooted in ethno-political tensions, exposed the fragility of national unity in a multi-ethnic state. The war's outbreak and its devastating



consequences were fueled by a combination of ethnic mistrust, political marginalization, and the struggle for control over national resources and power. Although the conflict officially ended with the slogan of "No Victor, No Vanquished," the underlying issues that led to the war have continued to shape Nigeria's post-war politics and social cohesion (Diamond, 1988, p.45).

Nation-building and national integration in the aftermath of the war have been significantly challenged by the persistence of ethnic rivalries, uneven development, and political exclusion. While efforts such as the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the federal character principle, and state creation were aimed at promoting unity, their success has been limited by ongoing ethnic sentiment and elite manipulation of identity politics.

To achieve sustainable nation-building and genuine integration, Nigeria must confront the legacies of the civil war by promoting inclusive governance, equitable development, and inter-ethnic dialogue. Only by fostering a sense of shared identity and addressing structural inequalities can the country move beyond the shadows of its divisive past and realize the vision of a truly united nation.

References

- Nnoli, O. (1980) *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books Ltd, p. 121
- Ademoyega, A. (1981) *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*, Evans Publishers Ltd, p.24
- Mbanefo, (1984) p. 8
- Forsyth, F. (1969) *The Biafran Story*, p.41
- Streamlau, J. (1977) *The International Politics of the Nigeria Civil War, 1977-1970*, p.64
- Ohadike, S.N. (2001) *Conflict and Reconciliation: The Nigeria-Biafra War*, p.28
- Okpevra U. (2003) *Historicising Foreign Powers Intervention in the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970*, p.7
- Rupley, (1981) 257
- Osadola, O. S and Asiyanbi, S.B (2022) *The Nigeria War of Unity, 1967-1970: Strategies and Diplomacy*
- Aremu, J.O. and Buhari, L. O. (2017) *Sense and Senselessness of War: Aggravating the Causes, Gains and Losses of the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970*, p.15
- Dapo, T. (2022) *The Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970; A Theoretical Resurrection*, p.62
- Rabiu, J. and Ogbonna, C.L. (2024) *The Nigeria Civil War: A Historical Analysis 1967-1970*, p.105
- Adedeji, A. (1969) p.169
- Petroleum Press Service (1969) and 1968 Pearson 1970 and Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, p.4
- Nafziger, (1972) p.126
- Williams, A. M.(2017) "The Aburi Accord and the Role in the Nigeria Civil War", Uyo, p.2
- Aluko, O. (1976) *Ghana and Nigeria, 1957-1970: A Study in Inter African Discord*,



- Forsyth, F. (2000) *The Biafran Story: The Making of An African Legend*, London: Leo Copper Publications Ltd, p.40
- Diliorah, C. (2014) *Last Train To Biafra*, Ibadan: Constellation Publishers, p. 76
- Diamond, L. (1988) *Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic*, London; Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Tamuno, T. (1970) "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria Since 1914", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, p. 563.
- Perham, M. (1970) "Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War" *International Affairs Journal*, p. 231
- Odemene, A. (2011) "The Nigeria-Biafra Civil War" in *Perspective in Nigeria History*, edited By C.B.N Ogbogbo, Ibadan: Bookwright Publishers, p.211
- Awolowo, O. (1981) *Awo On the Nigeria Civil War*, Lagos: Johnwest Publishers, p.42
- Balogun, M.T. (2009) *Route to Power*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, p.68
- Elaiigwe, J. I. (1986) *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*, Ibadan: Westbooks, p.80
- Mann, M. (2005) *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Clensing*, p 485
- Bird E. and Ottanelli, F.(2011) "The History and and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacre, *African Study Review*, p.84
- Ohadike, D.C. (1994) "Anioma; A Social History of the western Igbo People" Athens: Ohio University Press, p.46
- Ogunkeye, G. (2009) Interview, 11 December, Lagos
- Okwudiafor, F.D. (1996) Testimony made 20 January; included in *The violations of human and civil rights of Ndi Igbo in the federation of Nigeria (1966–1999)*, October 1999, p. 78, available at: <http://www.asabamemorial.org/data/ohanaeze-petition.pdf>. Ohanaeze Ndigbo, a pan-Igbo rights group, presented this 'Ohaneze petition' to the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (known as the Oputa Panel). In subsequent endnotes, 'Testimony' refers to 1969 depositions included in this document.
- Okafor, S. (2010) 12 October 2011 (Ibadan); Medua Uraih, 13 December.
- Chukwura, P. (2010) 10 December (Lagos).
- Nicholas A. (2011) 5 October.
- Testimony of John Kanayo Hudson Odittah, p. 90.
- Uchendu, (1986) *Women and conflict*, p. 76, notes that several midwest communities had staged formal shows of support for 'One Nigeria', hoping to avoid reprisals, p.26