
Sense and Senselessness of War: Aggregating the Causes, Gains and Losses of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970

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Abstract

This study is a post-mortem interrogation of the causes and impact of the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970. It was conducted to ascertain whether the war was sensible or not, and to what extent. The paper notes that despite the great losses and agonies suffered by the nation during the 'war of unity', Nigeria is still far from being united, forty-seven years after the end of hostilities. This is clearer judging by the recent altercations between the Northern youths and their Igbo counterparts calling for the exit of the 'alien' groups from their domains latest by 1 October, 2017. The paper notes that the current scenario of inter-ethnic conflagrations is a replica of the events that precipitated the 1966 pogroms suffered by people of Eastern Nigeria origin in various Northern Nigerian cities which was one of the major factors that accounted for the outbreak of war in 1967. The paper submits that the Nigerian civil war presents a mixed record. It could be regarded as sensible given the continued unity and sustenance of territorial integrity of the country since then till date, even though by force. It could also be regarded as senseless and wasteful in view of the unending agitations for the balkanisation of the country by most ethnic nationalities since the 1990s. Data for this study was sourced extensively from secondary sources. Data was analysed using descriptive and narrative methods of inquiry.

Keywords: Biafra, Civil War, Ethnic Rivalry, Nigeria, Pogrom, Propaganda, Starvation

Introduction

The Nigerian Civil War of 6 July, 1967 to 15 January, 1970 remains an episodic event of landmark impact on the post-independence history of the country. The war, which pitched the Federal Military Government of Nigeria against the secessionist Eastern Region, marked the climax of a series of unfolding turbulent events that occurred in the country since January 1966. It indeed posed the greatest challenge to the continuous existence, unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria as the largest multi-ethnic federation in Africa. However, while it is true that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) succeeded in taming the secession attempt; the war seems to have failed to resolve the salient issues that brought about it. This has necessitated this research for examining the causes of the war vis-à-vis the purported gains and losses brought by it. This will go a long way to appreciate the present state of the Nigerian Federation and the many problems confronting the unity agenda of the country since 1970.

Understanding The Concept Of Civil War

Numerous definitions of civil war exist. Gersovitz and Kriger (2013:160-161) see civil war as “a politically organized, large-

scale, sustained, physically violent conflict that occurs within a country principally among large/numerically important groups of its inhabitants or citizens over the monopoly of physical force within the country". In a similar vein, Kalyvas (2006) also defines civil war as an "armed combat taking place within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities". In a more elaborate dimension, the United Nations Security Council submits that, a civil war "consists of one or several simultaneous disputes over generally incompatible positions that (1) concern government and/or territory in a state; (2) are causally linked to the use of armed force, resulting in at least 500 battle-related deaths during a given year during the conflict; and (3) involve two or more parties, of which the primary warring parties are the government of the state where armed force is used, and one or several non-state opposition organization" (cited in Cockayne et al., 2010:43). Lastly, Doyle and Sambanis (2006), making further clarifications, define a civil war as an armed conflict that meets the following criteria:

- a) the war has caused more than 1,000 battle deaths;
- b) the war represented a challenge to the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state;
- c) the war occurred within the recognized boundary of that state;
- d) the war involved the state as one of the principal combatants;
- e) the rebels were able to mount an organized military opposition to the state

and to inflict significant casualties on the state.

Gersovitz and Kriger (2013:161) add that "civil wars usually have incumbent governments that control the state and have a monopoly of force before the civil war and challengers". They stressed further that the challengers may, however, seek to replace the incumbents in control of the monopoly of force within the extant territory of the state, or they may seek the secession of part of the original territory (Gersovitz and Kriger, 2013:161). The Nigerian civil war of 1967-70 was in tandem with the second motive as the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria had planned to exit Nigeria and set up their own independent State which they christened the 'Republic of Biafra'. The key interest of both Nigeria and Biafra in the war was based on the same philosophical ground of survival, though the goal diverged for, while Nigeria's basic aim was keeping the country united as one; Eastern Nigeria's key aim was to break Nigeria up to set up a new nation of theirs (Tedheke, 2007:416). Having accomplished the task of explaining the concept of civil war, it is expedient to attempt a detailed survey of the causes of the Nigerian civil war.

Causes of the Nigerian Civil War

A plethora of events, actions and inactions that took place in quick succession between January 1966 and July 1967 prompted the catastrophic Nigerian Civil War. These included: the 15 January, 1966 coup and its attendant ethnic connotations: Aguiyi Ironsi's miscalculated stabilization policy which necessitated the replacement of federalism with unitarism and the attendant reactions from the North; the 29 July, 1966 counter-coup and its ethnic connotation; emergence of Yakubu Gowon as military

leader and the refusal of Ojukwu to recognise his leadership; breakdown of the Aburi Accord and Gowon's creation of twelve states in May 1967 and; the secession of the Eastern Region to form the Republic of Biafra and Gowon's determination to foil the attempt. A full discussion of the factors follows.

The 15 January 1966 coup and its attendant ethnic connotations:

Nigeria's first military coup d'état took place on 15 January, 1966. The bloody coup, which put paid to the civilian administration of Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa was staged by a group of five majors led by Major C.K. Nzeogwu (Mainasara, 1982:8). Nzeogwu and his cohorts had accused Balewa's government of corruption, inept leadership, ethnicity and nepotism.

The coup claimed the lives of notable Nigerian military and civilian leaders mostly from the Northern and Western Regions. Those killed included Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Brigadier Zak Maimalari and Lt. Col. Abogo Largema who were prominent Northern leaders; Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh (from the Mid-West Region) Lt. Col Unegbe (an Ibo from the Eastern Region) as well as Chief S.L. Akintola, Col. Shodeinde and Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun (all from the West) (Akinseye-George, 2002:451; Elaigwu, 2005:37; Achebe, 2012:276). It is unfortunate to note that the sectional nature of the killings raised the question of ethnic colouration of the coup. Without any doubt, the coup opened a sharp chapter of suspicion in the annals of Nigerian history creating suspicions about the intent of the coup plotters.

Aguiyi Ironsi's miscalculated introduction of unitarism as against federalism and the attendant reactions from the North.

The 15 January, 1966 coup was foiled by the military and the dissident soldiers were arrested. This brought Major General Aguiyi Ironsi to the corridors of power as Nigeria's first military ruler. In trying to stabilize the turbulent political atmosphere of the country, Ironsi suspended the constitution and by Decree 1 of 1966, the Federal Military Government was given the power "to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Nigeria or any part thereof with respect to any matter whatsoever" (FGN, 1966: A1 53 cited in Elaigwu, 2005:14). Furthermore, Ironsi abrogated federalism and instituted a unitary system of government through Decree No 34 of 24 May, 1966. The Decree abolished the regional structure, scrapped the regional civil service and created a harmonised National Public Service (Elaigwu, 2005:16; Achebe, 2012:80; Ikime, 2002:61).

Northern opposition to the Decree was vehement and sporadic because of the fear of marginalisation in the public service. This quickly provoked anti-Igbo sentiments in the North. There was growing anger and disaffection among officers from Northern Nigeria who wanted revenge for what they saw as an Igbo coup (Achebe, 2012:80). The Northern press also accentuated the level of grievance against Ironsi's government.

The electronic and print Medias of the North were reported to have unleashed a campaign of verbal hostilities against the South rejecting proposals for unitary government. (Abiola, 1990:9 cited in Olukotun, 2002:386) Northern leaders and the press

eventually succeeded in whipping up public sentiments against the unitary system of government. By the last week of May, 1966, suspicion had become rife in the North that the January, 1966 coup was an attempt by the Igbo to dominate Nigeria (Elaigwu, 2005:16; Ihunna, 2002:327; Abubakar, 2002:253; Ikime, 2002:61). This instigated violent demonstrations, riots and killing of Igbo elements in the North.

The 29 July, 1966 counter-coup and its ethnic connotation:

Between June and July 1966, the Northern ruling élite made a number of demands on the Ironsi government. These included the revocation of the controversial Decree 34 of 1966 by government; the court-martial and punishment of the leaders of the 15 January, 1966 coup; and discontinue any plans to investigate the May 1966 massacres of Easterners in the North (Achebe, 2012:81). The failure of Ironsi to meet these demands led Northern Military officers to stage a counter-coupon 29 July, 1966. It was essentially a vengeance coup against the Igbos. Aguiyi Ironsi was assassinated along with Adekunle Fajuyi of the Western region. Many senior Igbo military officers were reportedly killed in a bid to restore the hegemony of the North in Nigerian politics (Achebe, 2012:82, Ikime, 2002:61). Between July and November, 1966, Achebe (2012:82) reported that the killing of the Igbos became “a state industry in Nigeria” as Northerners turned on Igbo civilians residing in the North and unleashed waves of brutal massacres that Colin Legum of *The Observer* (UK), described as a program (Achebe, 2012:82). Over thirty-thousand Igbos-Civilian men and women as well as children were slaughtered. Hundreds of thousands were equally reportedly wounded and maimed just as they also suffered arson

and looting of their property (Ibid; Abubakar, 2002:204). The ineptitude of government to curb the attacks on Igbos made the Igbo intellectuals to regard it as a premeditated plan to exterminate their ethnic group. (Achebe, 2012:83). This led to a mass exodus of people of Eastern Nigeria origin from the North. They headed for the East for safety.

It is instructive to note that the two coups of 1966, to a very large extent, “altered the political equation and destroyed the fragile trust existing among the major ethnic groups” in the country (Niven, 1970: Nwolise, 2002:164). The coups led to calls for secession by the Northern Region who named the 29 July coup as “Operation Araba” (meaning secession or call to separate and the outright declaration of secession by the Eastern Region on 30 May, 1967 (Abubakar, 2002:254; Ikime, 2002:61, Achebe, 2012:83).

The 15 January, 1966 coup was interpreted as a plot by the Igbo of the East to take control of Nigeria from the Hausa/Fulani North. On the other hand, the East felt marginalised and regarded themselves as subjects of extermination by the North. A battle line was almost drawn between the two ethnic groups.

Emergence of Yakubu Gowon as military leader and the refusal of Odumegwu Ojukwu to recognise his leadership.

Following the killing of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi in the 29 July, 1966 coup, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon emerged as the new Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria. Lt. Col. Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu refused to accept the authority of Gowon claiming that Gowon was his junior. Apart from Brigadier

Babafemi Ogundipe who was then Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters and the most senior officer in the Nigerian Army, other officers who were seniors to Gowon included Lt. Col. David Ejoor and Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu (Umoru-Onuka, 2002:288; Elaigwu, 2005: 17-18; Ikime, 2002:62).

The accession of Gowon over and above his seniors no doubt created the problem of control and command for the army as it violated, with impunity, the established military hierarchy in the Nigerian Armed Forces. (Onyeoziri, 2002:95; Onumonu and Anutanwa, 2017:44). Beginning from early November 1966, Ojukwu refused to accept Gowon's leadership and declined from attending the Supreme Military Council (SMC) meetings from now on (Ikime 2002, 2002:62, Eliagwu, 1986). However after much persuasion, Ojukwu indicated his willingness to attend the SMC meetings provided such meetings were held outside the country or within the territory of the Eastern Region. This, according to him, was because his personal security could no longer be guaranteed anywhere in the country except in the Eastern Region (Ojukwu, 1969:14). In December 1966, General J.A. Ankrah, the then Ghanaian Head of State, offered to host a mediation meeting to broker peace between Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu and Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon. Hence, Nigerian military leaders and senior police officials met at Aburi in Accra, Ghana between 4 and 5 January, 1967 with General Ankrah as the mediator (Madiebo, 1980, Gailey Jr., 1972:210; Forsyth, 2001; Uwechue, 2004; Ojukwu, 1969).

An agreement popularly called the Aburi Accord was signed at the end of the meeting. Its terms included: the Army

should be governed by the Supreme Military Council (SMC) under the Chairman of the Head of the Federal Military Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces; establishment of a military headquarters in which each region was to be represented which would be headed by the Chief of Staff; establishment of an Area Command in each region under an Area Commander; the SMC was to deal with all matters of appointment and promotions of people in executive posts in the Armed Forces and the Police and; Military Governors were to have control over Area commands in their regions for the purpose of internal security (Elaigwu, 2005: 18-19; Oluleye, 1985:42; Obasanjo, 1971:47; Aremu, 2014:53-54).

Breakdown of the Aburi Accord and the Unilateral Creation of Twelve States by

Yakubu Gowon in May 1967

It is interesting to note that the agreement was never implemented by the Federal Military Government because it was viewed as representing no more than a victory for Ojukwu. Gowon's refusal to carry out the Aburi Accord and Ojukwu's insistence that "on Aburi we stand, there will be no compromise" eventually led to the breakdown of the Accord (Aremu, 2014:54). On 27 May, 1967, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon announced the creation of twelve states in Nigeria and thereby abrogated the regional political structure. The Northern Region was divided into six states, the Eastern Region into three states, the Western Region into two states while the Mid-Western Region became the Mid-Western State. (Elaigwu, 2005:38:39). Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, the embattled

Governor of the defunct Eastern Region, declined to recognise the new states on the ground that Gowon created them unilaterally without his (Ojukwu) consent. Ojukwu regarded this act as a conspiracy and tactical declaration of war against the Igbo as the newly created Igbo State (East Central State) was landlocked.

Ojukwu quickly summoned the Eastern Region Consultative Assembly on same day (27 May, 1967). The Assembly mandated Colonel 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” (Achebe, 2012:91). On 30 May, 1967, the die was cast. Ojukwu, citing a good number of malevolent acts directed at the Igbo, proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria. (Ibid: 92). The secession of the Eastern Region from Nigeria and the determination of Gowon to foil the attempt, which he regarded as unconstitutional, eventually led to a full-blown war on 6 July, 1967.

An X-Ray of the Gains and Losses of the Nigerian Civil War

Without mincing words, the Nigerian civil war appears like a paradox. On the one hand, the war restored the political map of Nigeria that was earlier redrawn by the seceding Eastern Region. At the same time, death, destruction of property and estranged relations among Nigerian nationalities, among others were very common. A historical documentation of the perceived gains and losses recorded in the aftermath of the war form the focus of discussion of this section of the paper.

The Gains

Unity of Nigeria maintained

One major good brought by the Nigerian civil war was that the unity of Nigeria was restored and its territorial integrity was sustained. During his official surrender speech on 12 January 1970, Biafra’s Chief of Army Staff, Major General Phillip Effiong declared openly that the ‘people of Biafra’ consent to the “authority of the Federal Military Government,” and accept the “existing administrative and political structure of the federation of Nigeria”. By this declaration, Oko (1988, cited in Afinotan, & Ojatorotu, 2014: 214) submits that the Igbo people once again became “a governable part of the Nigerian federation”. Nigeria once again became united, even if by force. To Yakubu Gowon, the end of hostilities marked the end of the “futile attempt to disintegrate the country” and was no more than a “great moment of victory for national unity” (*New Nigerian Newspaper*, 13 January, 1970 cited by Momoh (ed) 2000: 152-3; cited by Course 12 National War College Abuja 2004; Tedheke, 2007:441-442). According to Decker (2016:108), the Nigerian civil war was “one of the earliest conflicts that tested a newly bequeathed statehood and to which Nigeria raised to the challenge”. It was no doubt a test of the resilience of the Nigerian nation-state at infancy. It was a war of survival for the Nigerian state which the Gowon-led government fought to a logical conclusion. The secessionist Biafra was not allowed to break away from the country. Without mincing words, the war succeeded in preserving the territorial integrity and unity of Nigeria. But apart from enhancing the political dignity of the country, it equally promoted the economic viability of the nation. Perhaps, if Biafra had succeeded, Nigeria’s economic survival could have been greatly jeopardized as the country has

relied almost exclusively on oil wealth for survival since 1973. The current economic downturn being experienced in the country due largely to dwindling oil revenue is a good testimony of the economic evil that Biafra secession could have brought on Nigeria. Thanks to the courage and gallantry displayed by Gowon in the war years. Though it is true that the nation could have devised other means of economic survival without oil, it is equally true that could not have taken place in a jiffy.

Threat of secession reduced drastically, though not totally eliminated since 1970.

Secession threats are not new in Nigerian politics. Indeed, Ojo (2004: 75-89) in a research work reports that secession threats have been a potent weapon in Nigerian political bargaining between 1950 and 1964. Ayoade (2010) corroborates this fact adding that the Northern Region which considered “big, strong and reliable” issued an “Eight Point Programme” threatening secession in 1953. Similarly, the West had also threatened secession in 1953 on the status of Lagos. Unfortunately, Col Odumegwu Ojukwu, Governor of the Eastern Region felt pushed beyond mere threat and led ‘Biafra’ in real secession from Nigeria in 1966. However, the Nigerian government ably demonstrated its agility and ability to match the terror of the Biafra forces during the civil war.

As Ken Saro-Wiwa noted in 1989, the Nigerian civil war “has taught everyone several lessons one of them being that secession of any part of Nigeria is impossibility” (cited in Oriaku, 2002: 49). In 1990, Ibrahim Babangida, Nigeria’s military leader, authoritatively declared that Nigeria no longer faces the threat of secession because “since 1970, the option of secession

was engineered out of the Nigerian set of options” (Babangida, 1991:163 cited in Agbese, 2002:125). Johannes Harnischfeger (2012) also shared a similar testimony about the elimination of secession threat in Nigeria since the civil war era. He said: “when I was living in Igboland in 1993 and from 1994 to 1996, there was not much talk about Biafra. Not one Igbo politician suggested that his people in the South-East of Nigeria should secede again”.

Judging from the three observations cited above, it is right to see that up till the late 1990’s, secession threat was no longer potent in the Nigerian political landscape. However, the story has changed drastically today. Apart from the recurrent agitations of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) since the early 2000 calling for the secession of the East and establishment of an independent state of Biafra; the current quit notice given by the Arewa Youth Group to people of Igbo descent to leave Northern Nigeria on or before 1 October, 2017 is indeed a pointer to the fact that secession ambition and call for separation are still very much alive and potent in Nigeria. The Northern youths, made up of: Arewa Citizens Action for Change, Arewa Youth Consultative Forum, Arewa Youth Development Foundation, Arewa Students Forum and Northern Emancipation Network on the Igbo Persistence for Secession also asked Northerners in the South-East to leave the area, warning that as from 1 October, they will begin implementation of ‘visible actions’ to prove they are no longer part of a federal union that includes the Igbo (SaharaReporters, 2017). The Igbo’s have since issued a reprisal notice to all people of Northern elements to leave Southern Nigeria on or before 1 October, 2017 to avoid mishap. Judging from the

above, all is not well with the Nigerian polity any longer. However, the Federal Government of Nigeria says the situation is still under control and that Nigeria will still remain as one indivisible entity after the conflagrations (Crest News, Nigeria, 2017). One cannot but hope so.

Biafra's goal of saving itself from extinction as a people eventually came to pass.

It is true that Lt. Col. Usman Katsina, the then Military Governor of Northern Region reportedly stated that "the Army could 'crush' the East in a few hours if the Supreme Commander gave the go ahead". But thanks to the large hearts and maturity of Yakubu Gowon, the Igbo ethnic group is still very much around with us. In fact, as a way of re-enlisting the faith of the Igbos in a united Nigeria, Gowon instituted the popular 3Rs of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation programme of Igbo to ease their sufferings. The next step was a general amnesty granted to all the soldiers that fought on Biafra's side during the war. Whether government was sincere or not with the implementation process is definitely a subject of debate. But suffice to note that the Igbo's were saved from extinction by Yakubu Gowon's generous administration that never considered Biafra forces and people as enemies but rather as brothers and sisters that should be integrated.

The Losses

Loss of lives and property

The Nigerian civil war has been described as one of the bloodiest wars in sub-Saharan Africa (Akresh, et al.,2012: 273; Okafor,2014:8). Okocha (nd) described it as the first "black on black genocide in

postcolonial Africa" as most of the dead was from the Eastern region of Nigeria. Suffice to state that at the end of the war in 1970, the exact number of lives lost remains a subject of speculation and debate with estimates ranging from a one to two millions on both sides. These included uncountable number of innocent children, nursing mothers and pregnant women who were not killed by the bullets of gun but by starvation and disease; apart from soldiers who died in combat (Uzokwe, 2003). These are undoubtedly, people of great futures and destinies hacked down by the avoidable cold hands of death in their prime. That the Nigerian nation-state has missed their inestimable mental and physical contributions to the socio-political, economic and technological growth and development of this great country, very rich in milk and honey, is no doubt an understatement. The trauma which their remembrance has brought to the families, relatives and friends left is even more horrendous. Without any exaggeration, Nigerians will live to regret the war years with respect to these fallen heroes and heroines who could have deployed their potential talents to transform the destinies of the country for good.

The Nigerian civil war also resulted in the loss of valuable properties and means of livelihood. According to Decker (2016:109), the total cost of the war was about three hundred million naira. Most of the survivors lost their means of economic survival and may live as scavengers and paupers for the rest of their lives.

The cost of post war reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction

Following the end the civil war on 12 January, 1970, General Yakubu Gowon made his famous announcement of “no victor, no vanquished”. Government also granted a general amnesty to those who fought on the side of Biafra. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) launched the post-war programme of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, the 3Rs (Tedheke, 2007:440). The rationale behind the programme was not far-fetched. The programme was an initiative intended to: appease the hostilities between Nigeria’s ethnic groups; restore infrastructure and homes destroyed in combat, as well as relocate internally displaced people and rectify the socio-economic challenges of poverty, disease and malnutrition among the victims. (Thomas, 2010, cited in Afinotan, & Ojatorotu, 2014: 214; Tedheke, 2007:446; Falola & Genova, 2009:97). In other words, the plan aimed to serve largely as a means of reconstructing the facilities damaged by war and promoting economic and social development throughout the Nation in the post-war period.

Afinotan, and Ojatorotu (2014: 214) have accused the Gowon’s administration of insincerity and lackluster implementation of the scheme, which in their opinion, instigated sentiments of wariness and a lack of trust in the government’s ability to deliver on its promises, among the Igbos. It is essential to note here, therefore, that whether the FGN was sincere or not about implementing the programme has been a subject of intense debate to which this paper is not inclined to join. Suffice to say that reconciliation without justice and compensation, which granting of amnesty implied, could at best be regarded as a ruse. The mere memory of the horrors of gun sounds, panic, fear and death of the war-

time, and its destructive impact may definitely affect the rate of reconciliation if any, between the warring parties.

But apart from the socio-psychological impact which the war had on inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria, the country also suffered a great set back in terms of socio-infrastructure and economic development. In the first instance, the fact that government intended to embark on ‘re-construction’ at all was enough evidence of a culture of waste of hard-earned resources of the nation. However, the most agonizing part of the post-war policy of 3Rs was that it was implemented with the fund earlier set aside for the Second National Development Plan (1970 - 1974). This implies that funds that were meant for further development of infrastructures were committed to rebuilding damaged structures and facilities destroyed by war. It is pathetic to note that the 3.192 billion naira earmarked for the Second National Development Plan just went down the drain of re-construction. The oil-price boom in the world market of 1973 was thus wasted on rebuilding old, dilapidated edifices destroyed by war instead of embarking on new projects that could have added value to the development agenda of the country.

Incidentally again, corruption and inept leadership further prevented the fund’s application to designated projects. Much was thus spent by the government to do little or no development for the country. It was indeed a case of one step forward, two steps backward in the development history of Nigeria. This conforms largely to the submission of Ojeleje (2016:27) that “civil wars destroy the structures that are needed for the development of the society... Such wars divert much needed ‘scarce’ resources away from development projects”.

National question remains unresolved

It is apt to note that the Nigerian civil war did not resolve the national question. By the national question we refer to the claim by various nationalities that they were being denied of their rights to equitable participation in governance and national life in general (Oriaku, 2002:46). According to Fedoseyev (1997) as quoted in the Leadership Newspaper (Abuja) of 4 June, 2012, national question "is first and foremost a question of solving vital problems of social development, abolishing national oppression and inequality, eliminating obstacles to the formation of nations and assuring freedom for the development of people, including achievement of factual equality." The national question in Nigeria may also be defined as the extent to which the citizens think Nigeria, instead of their ethnicities or localities. Evidently, before and after the civil war, the issue of nationality question and the attendant crisis of instability have gained resonance in Nigeria's national political discourse. Nigeria indeed provides a framework for examining the central paradox in post-colonial nation-building project in Africa, namely, the tension between majority rule and minority rights. It has also been used to refer to the totality of problems and challenges emanating from the imbalance nature of the Nigerian federation and the nature of inter-ethnic relations among Nigerian peoples (Akinseye – George, 2002:452). This is well exemplified by the many inter-ethnic and religious conflicts, too many to mention, that occur in all the nook and crannies of the country intermittently over the years. This perhaps prompted Albert (2002:321) to report that inter-ethnic relation in Nigeria then "suggests quite readily that many of the groups in the federation were in a state of

relationship fatigue". Osadolor (2002:74) also puts it succinctly that "Nigeria appears to be far less united politically than ever before and the spectre of disintegration continues to haunt the country..." (quoted in Osadolor, 2002:74).

If that was true as it were as far back as then, what do we have to say about the exit notice given to the Easterners living in the North on 6 June, 2017 that they should leave latest by 1 October, 2017. Definitely, as the Arewa Youth Forum claimed in their riot act, the Hausa – Fulani are tired of living with the Igbos. Whether or not the government will be able to manage this brewing crisis successfully is now the main ball game in the country today. It need be recalled that a similar development reared its ugly head during the April 1990 coup led by Gideon Okar against the government of Ibrahim Babangida. Then, Okar and his cohorts had declared their intention to excise some states in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria from the country. Perhaps the plan would have worked if the coup had been successful. But the nation survived that onslaught of balkanisation as the coup failed. But suffice to note that Nigeria is probably on the verge of total disintegration and collapse, given this call for separation. But even if the nation survives this brewing conflict between the Igbo and the Hausa – Fulani groups, it has none-the-less succeeded in exacerbating mutual distrust, suspicion, hatred and disunity among the many ethnic groups in the country. It is pathetic to note that these grievances have been largely unaddressed by the political leadership of the country. The negative impact of these conflicts on the level of development of the country is better imagined than real.

Politicisation of the armed forces

There is no doubt the fact the Nigerian Armed Forces did not stay the same after the civil war. Ethnic cleavages became pronounced in appointments, promotions and postings of military officers and men soon after the first military coup of 15 January, 1966. Nwolise (2002:164) noted that this politicisation of the Army could be traced to the 15 January, 1966 coup when the military entered what he referred to as the “unfamiliar terrain of politics and governance”. The military soon became “politicised” along ethnic and religious lines. (Nwolise, 2002:164). This course of ‘command and discipline pollution’, within the Nigerian military that began in 1966 has remained unchecked ever since then. *Esprit de corps* became finally eroded and military personnel became more of politicians and lobbyists than professional soldiers.

Proliferation of arms

I am convinced the illicit movement of Small and Light Weapons (SALW) has had a dramatic impact on peace and security in Nigeria, threatening not only the existence of the state, but also the livelihoods of millions of people across the country. The trafficking and wide availability of these weapons fuel communal conflicts, political instability and pose a threat, not only to security, but also to sustainable development. The widespread of small arms is contributing to alarming levels of armed crime, and militancy with grave consequences on Nigeria’s socio-political and economic fortunes (Aderinwale, 2005:111; Yacubu, 2005:55; Nte, 2011, cited in Okeke & Oji, 2014:419).

Oyetimi (2016), citing Dr Moses Ikoh, traced the origin of proliferation of arms in Nigeria to the end of the civil war. He substantiated his claim by stressing that

incidences of violent crime associated with arms increased substantially from 2,315 as at 1967 to 12,153 after the war (cited in Oyetimi, 2016). Since small arms proliferation results from mix of large numbers of arms in circulation and a number of incentives for people and groups to resort to violence, Freedom Onuoha (cited in Mohammed, Idris & Alli, 2016) has recommended that Government at all levels – federal, state and local – also need to partner with the private sector to undertake an aggressive job creation programme for Nigeria’s teeming and idle youths. This should be complemented with mass enlightenment and orientation programmes as well as security consciousness among citizens as major keys to reducing the proliferation of arms in the country.

Ethnic nationalism and the exacerbation of mutual distrust in Nigeria’s ethnic relations

Since the beginning of the fourth Republic in May 1999, one relatively permanent characterisation of the country’s political landscape has been ethnic militancy (Gilbert, 2013). Decades of marginalisation and injustice allegedly foisted on the citizenry by the Nigerian state have been cited as precipitating a spectre of frustration and deprivation, which eventually triggered creation of militant groups as extra-constitutional method for negotiation, and redressing the political cum socio-economic dehumanising conditions of the people, with great commitment to self -determination (Aremu, 2012; Afinotan, & Ojatorotu, 2014: 219). Prominent among such groups in the South are: The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), one of many secessionist movements with the aim of securing the resurgence of the defunct state of Biafra

from Nigeria (Murray, 2007); The Oodua Peoples' Congress (OPC), a militant Yoruba Nationalist Organization in Western Nigeria; the Oodua Republic Front (ORF) which is a secessionist movement based in the Western part too, and advocates the creation of the Oodua (or Oduduwa) Republic of the Yorubas; The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), a campaign organization representing the Ogoni people in their struggle for ethnic and environmental rights and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which has proved to be a militant people's movement dedicated to armed struggle against the exploitation and oppression of the people of Niger Delta and the ruin of its natural environment by foreign multinational corporations involved in the extraction of oil in the Niger Delta (Ezeji-Okoye, 2009:55; Agwuele, 2002:354). In the North, the story remains the same, violent ethnic movements and militant Islāmic bodies dot the area and these developments stem from the perception of marginalization and non-accommodation of pure Islāmic way of life by the Nigerian political system. Prominent among these organizations are the Arewa People's Congress (APC) which emerged to counter the OPC, the 'hambada' and 'hisbah' which enforce sharia compliance in northern states (Duruji, 2010). It is sad to note that these ethno-based militia groups have been highly instrumental to the heightening of mutual distrust in Nigeria's inter-ethnic relations. It is essential to note that these ethnic militant groups have exacerbated the challenge of internal insecurity; and have continued to weaken the corporate existence of Nigeria as a united, strong and virile nation-state (Gilbert, 2013; Badmus, 2009).

Unending agitation for states creation

As mentioned earlier in this paper, States creation exercise started in Nigeria on 27 May, 1967 when the Yakubu Gowon regime created twelve states to replace the four regions in existence then. It was ostensibly done to nip the secession bid of the Eastern Region in the bud. On 3 February, 1976, General Murtala Mohammed's government increased the number of states to nineteen. Osaghae (1991: 249) notes that this gave rise to a phenomenal increase in the demand for even more states as various ethnic groups as elites struggled to maximise their share of the national cake. General Ibrahim Babangida added two more states in September, 1987 to raise the number of states in the country to twenty-one. The number increased to thirty in August, 1991 when Babangida added nine new states. The last states creation exercise took place on 1 October, 1996. Then, late General Sani Abacha announced the creation of six more states to bring the number of states in the Nigerian Federation to thirty-six. Agitation for creation of more states has continued unabated, suffice to say that no new states have yet been created in the past twenty-one years largely because civilian governments in Nigeria have no tradition of success at state's creation.

It is expedient to make some salient observations on states creation exercises in Nigeria. In the first instance, since Gowon's masterful creation of states on the eve of the Nigerian civil war in 1967, there has been a continued obsession with the creation of states largely for self-determination and economic purposes by Nigeria's ethnic groups. No ethnic group is exempted from this craze. Secondly, besides being a vehicle for extending political and economic self-governance to distinct ethnic communities, states creation became an administrative strategy for the devolution of Federal

generosity to an unstructured array of territorial communities and coalitions. This probably explains why the politics of state creation in the country has not taken into account the ability of these states to sustain their existence. Furthermore, state creation exercise has been largely employed as a legitimizing force for military regimes in the country, largely intended to galvanise support for particular regimes, whose strength was ebbing and to compensate close allies.

There is no gainsaying the fact that states are important variables in a federation, and thus a pre-requisite for its existence (Noser, 1975: 170). Nevertheless, creation of states in Nigeria has so far not succeeded in satisfying all interest groups in the country. As a matter of fact, the paradox of the exercise is that each new state which satisfies the desires of a nationality creates new minorities which breeds new agitations. Another crux of the matter suggested by Ezeji-Okoye (2009:12) is that the political atmosphere and intra-personal relations are further poisoned by the language of propaganda employed to prove the agitation for new states. This normally centers on allegation of persecution of the nationality making the allegation. These allegations, according to him, usually breed antagonism. This marginalization phenomenon has always led to new minority formations and as such intensified the agitation for more states (Ezeji-Okoye, 2009:12). In all, the state creation exercises have not addressed the problems of inequality, the minority question and underdevelopment. Paradoxically, the agitations are unending.

Disconnect from scientific development in Biafra by the Nigerian Government

Due to lack of war arsenals, Ojukwu mobilised local scientists and charged them to use their scientific ingenuity to research on and develop both conventional and unconventional weapons. Armed with this mandate, the scientists who were drawn from universities, ministries, private companies, polytechnics, technical and even secondary schools, set out to work in groups known initially as “Science Group”. The Science Group was officially inaugurated in Enugu in June 1967, after the proclamation of Biafra (Arene 1987; 29 cited by Mbachu, 2006:13-14). As the war loomed, the various “Science Groups” were merged together into what was later known as “Research and Production (RAP) Directorate” in Enugu in June 1967 headed by Late Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna (Tedheke, 2007:274).

They manufactured the most dreaded homemade mine christened “Ogbunigwe”, rockets, rifles, pistols and above all, the Biafran “Red Devil” armoured tanks and other armaments. The strategic role played by these physical scientists in the Biafran War effort cannot be down played. However, the unfortunate thing is that so far, Nigeria has failed to use the rear opportunity of “capturing” and utilising the Biafran Scientific wizardry. This is regrettable because Nigerian indigenous technology would have developed greatly if the scientific achievements of the Biafran scientists were well harnessed and nurtured (Tedheke, 2007:278). This could probably have launched Nigeria into the world stage of technological and industrial development.

Conclusion

The uneasy political climate in Nigeria beginning with the 15 January, 1966 coup finally culminated in a three-year bloody war between July, 1967 and January, 1970.

The two parties to the war were the Federal Government of Nigeria, whose aim was to defend Nigeria's national unity and territorial integrity; and the secessionist Eastern Region of Nigeria christened the 'The Republic of Biafra' that fought essentially to defend its right to self-determination. Though the territorial integrity and political map of the country remained unaltered at the end of the war; it was never-the-less fatal. About two million lives were lost while property worth millions of naira was destroyed.

The above summary informs that the Nigerian civil war was full of contradictions. Without necessarily repeating the gains and losses of the war, which are well addressed in the body of the paper, it is apt to run a brief commentary on three salient contradictions involved in the war. In the first instance, Biafra fought essentially in search of security. It meant to secure the Igbos against annihilation and extermination. Ironically, instead of security, Biafra suffered death and displacement. The mortality rate was so high that there were cries of genocide against the FGN. Infants, toddlers, teenagers, pregnant and nursing mothers were not even spared in the craze of wanton killings. Many children became orphans just as most women and some men became widows and widowers. Majority of Biafrans also suffered displacement. Life became difficult after the war as most of the survivors lost their sources of livelihood and their bread winners to the war. It was a tale of woes for Biafrans in the aftermath of the war. The level of insecurity that pervaded the Eastern region after the war was worse than could be imagined.

On the side of the FGN, government declared war against Biafra to restore the

unity of the country. The reality on ground after the war, however, is that fear, mutual distrust and suspicion and hatred have permeated inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria since the end of hostilities. As a matter of fact, after five decades since the war came to an end, national unity and integration is not yet in sight. At best, one may say that it is still on the agenda for the future.

Furthermore, in lieu of preservation of territorial integrity and stability of the country, the Nigerian nation-state got incessant religious, inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts. Similarly, agitations for sovereign national conference, calls for excision of some parts from the federation as well as threats of secession by some nationalities have become part of the nation's political landscape. The summary of the episode is largely as presented by Oriaku (2002:49) that "the war may have ended, but the nation is still ill at ease and has not 'quite survived the peace'".

Let me end this write-up by echoing the view of Bishop David Oyedepo cited in Ayuba & Okafor (2015:79): "War is a sucker. It has the capacity for sucking the resources of nations... it erodes human dignity, destroys and devastates mankind". On the contrary, peace is priceless and its blessings are unquantifiable. In this wise, elders of Nigeria must convey the horrors, pains and agonies of the 1967-1970 war to the younger generation to avoid the errors of our past. Nigerian ethnic nationalities should embrace peace.

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