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*Full Length Research Paper*

## The Nigerian Civil War: A Historical Interpretation

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores and interpreted the series of events that culminated into the Nigeria civil war from 1967 to 1970, with emphasis on the remote and the immediate causes of the war. In pursuance of the foregoing, this paper examined the following: the Niger Committee; Colonial structure; political cum military factors, the role of oil; why Biafra lost the war; the no-victor and no-vanquish: Truth or Illusion and the significance of the war. The analysis revealed that the course of the war was as a result of the kind political legacy bequeathed to Nigeria by Britain. It also revealed that the nationalistic elites that struggled and won independence recoiled into their various ethnic enclaves once they got political power and used ethnicism and tribalism to polarize the political landscape for their selfish political end. Furthermore, these elite's politicians created a favorable atmosphere for the military to take over political leadership of Nigeria. This military incursion into politics erased Regionalism or fiscal Federalism and replaced it with unitary form of government which Nigeria still practices till date. It also watered down professionalism in the Nigerian Army and the wounds of the war is yet to be healed, while the causes of the war are reoccurring decimal still threatening the unity of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Civil War, military, Colonial Power, Coup, Britain, oil, Ethnicism, Tribalism, Political Parties, Politicians, Igbo, Hausa, History.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1967, Nigeria was embroiled in a civil war as a result of some irreconcilable differences between some political actors. This war is the aftermath of the sum total of Nigeria's political history and not an isolated event or single crisis that constituted it. In the same vein, on the genesis of the Nigerian civil war I agree with Kirk-Green when he observed that:

*In seeking the genesis of the Nigerian civil war, it is possible to locate it in a variety of different sources and levels. The origins may for instance, be explained in terms of political competition, of inter-personal economic rivalry, of elitist in-fighting; more arguably, of class or religious struggle, of military anomaly and ambition; of personal, ethnic and personal conflict or in terms of social malaise and disenchantment with the golden age that*

*never materialized in the aftermath of colonialism; or of colonialism itself, the outcome of fifty years of divine and rule in brief, a diagnosis of a series of expectations, aroused, frustrated and finally sinking into a slough of despondent and cut-throat competitiveness (Green, 1975).*

The war was between the Federal Government of Nigeria led by Major Yakubu Gowon and those of the Eastern Region known as the Biafrans led by Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu. The war lasted for 30 months; it started from the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1967 and ended on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July, 1970 when the Biafran soldiers surrendered unconditionally. This war was very devastating, many social amenities and infrastructural facilities were destroyed, and the loss of human lives was very high on the side of the Biafran's who's Eastern Region

was the major war zone. Besides, the Nigerians that took part in this war, there were other foreign countries within and outside Africa that either participated covertly or overtly in supporting the belligerents. The purpose of this paper is to attempt to give a historical interpretation to the cause of this war. And in pursuance of the foregoing, this study will highlight; the Niger Committee; Review the Colonial Structure; examine the Political and Military Factors; The Role of Oil; The no Victor nor Vanquish: Truth or Illusion Why Biafra lost the war and the Significance of the War.

### **The Niger Committee**

The Niger committee also commonly referred to as Lord Selborne Committee was set up by Joseph Chamberlain the then British Colonial Secretary Head of the Colony in 1898, the following questions were referred to the committee for consideration, they are; should the future administration of the three territories of Lagos, Niger Coast Protectorate and Niger Company's Territories be united under one head if not, into how many administration and with what limits and with what seats of Government? (Uzoigwe, 1968). The committee recommended that the administrative goal to be aimed at for the three territories was amalgamation, but that for the being, such a course of action was premature and unadvisable because they experienced colonial administration to preside over the affairs of the large territory that would arise from the union did not exist. It also recommended that the infrastructure such as communication, which could conduce to efficient administration, did not exist. This committee further recommended for the time being a merger of Lagos colony. The Niger Coast Protectorate and the Niger Company's territories to be amalgamated, under one head which shall be called a Governor general who should be resident in Nigeria (Innocent, 2011).

Considering the analysis of the terms of references given to the Niger committee, it could be clearly seen that the British Government has no any interest whatsoever of uniting the would be Nigerian areas together and it also entails that the sole aim of the British government is what they stand to gain in their adventure to this area. The Amalgamation police that was recommended was only intended into amalgamates territories not people, and also the history of the people was of no issue to these people.

### **The Colonial Structure**

In obedience to the report of the Niger Committee earlier stated, Lord Frederick Lugard in 1914 amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorate and he assumed the position of Governor-General of Nigeria. This amalgamation as expected was primarily designed to

maintain law and to facilitate economic exploitation of Nigeria by the colonial masters. It was meant to integrate territories not to unite the people. For instance, even after the amalgamation the administration of the Northern and Southern Nigeria continued to operate as they had under the formal protectorate era. They continued to operate as two different countries. The areas which came under centralized administration were areas that were geared towards achieving British interests. These areas are custom, judiciary, police, treasury, military, railways, posts and telegraphs, survey and audit which came under the direct control of the Governor-General (Eluwa, 1988), Lord Lugard and other colonial officials discouraged real union of the North and South. They emphasized the differences between the two Nigerian areas and encouraged the divisions that were to plague Nigeria in later years.

For instance, the British officials did not create the atmosphere to bring the country together. Lugard left Nigeria in 1919 and his successor Sir Hugh Clifford which gave Nigeria another constitution that excluded the North from the legislative council, whereby strengthening the division. Governor Bourdillon who succeeded Cameron also took a step which further strengthened the lack of emphasis on unity which the Richard Constitution of 1946 that created three regions officially entrenched regionalism and kept the people more world apart. The central administration in Nigeria was organized in such a way that local differences were strengthened by the constitution and administrative arrangement of the colonial period. Nigerians in the north and the south had little opportunity to interact in fashioning the affairs of the country. In fact, until the 1940s, the central legislature was mainly an affair of southerners (Falola, 1991).

The colonial structure did not encourage nationalism and unity; some people argued that such measure would have been counter-productive for the colonial interest. This is because it would have united them to fight a common enemy, the colonial masters and assert their right to self-determinism much earlier. Of course, to a reasonable extent people that held this opinion were right because from middle 40s that Nigerians were given some political space to mingle the agitations and pressures for independence by Nigerians was very high, which culminated in the motion moved by Anthony Enahoro in the floor of the House of Representative on 1 April 1953 demanding self-government in 1956. The first manifestation of tribalism in Nigeria was the formation of political parties along regional enclave. For example, NCNC whose leader is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe an Igbo from the east dominated the Eastern Region, while AG whose leader is Chief Obafemi Awolowo from Yoruba dominated the West Region and NPC whose leader is Alhaji Abubaka Tafawa Belewa an Hausa dominated the northern region which they not objected, existing unpreparedness and domination.

The structure of the colonial state that operated with the police of Divide and Rule of the indirect rule sowed that the culture of "Parochialism" and "Ethnocentrism" in national affairs which has grown and become a major problem in the Nigerian state<sup>9</sup>. And all the post-independent crisis that plagued Nigeria stemmed from the colonial state structures and aggravated by tribal bigots called "nationalities" that assumed the rein of power bequeath by the colonial masters.

## THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY FACTOR

### Political factor

As aforementioned, the Nigerian political actors before independent had already been baked in the ovens of ethnicity and parochialism which have drained them any iota of nationalistic flavor. Hence, are now ethnic bigots with selfish appetite for power and who are willing to do anything to cling unto power, were foot loosed to grace the political environment of Nigeria? Under this atmosphere, the 1959 federal election was held to usher in the political independence of Nigeria. And the result of this election showed that a coalition is needed to form a government and Chief Awolowo of AG had agreed to enter on alliance with NCNC, then the North threatened that if the Southern parties allied to capture power at the federal level, that the North will secede.

In this political imbroglio, the constant British character to support the North coupled with the latent antipathy of some NCNC leaders against the AG led the NCNC to team up with the NPC to form the government in December 1959 (Adewale, 1981). The structure of this government at independent was like thus, Alhaji Abubakar of NPC who had led the party since 1954, because the Prime Minister and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who was the pioneer leader and premier of Eastern Region gave up his positions as Premier and became the Governor-general while Awolowo the leader of AG and Premier of the Western Region gave up his premiership and became the leader of the opposition in the federal parliament.

Amidst all the political hiccups such as the minority agitations for more status on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1960, Nigeria was granted independence. From the earlier political compromise reached, it appeared it seemed as if the political equation of Nigeria had been balanced, but consciously or unconsciously a tribal and political time bomb was planted in the heart of Nigerian polity. This time bomb started ticking in 1962 with the cancellation of the census of 1962 (Larry, 1988), by the Prime Minister when the NPC led government discovered that the figures were trickery in favor of the South. This cancellation was made to avoid a political scenario where the south will have more seats in the federal

constituencies and stand on a better ground to challenge the domination of Northern NPC led government or even overtake it. Furthermore, the imprisonment of Awolowo and Enahoro on the charges of treason and the subsequent arbitral creation of Mid-West Region out of Western region heated up the political environment

These politicians instead of embarking on policies that will trigger national unity and development, embarked on ventures to stop their fellow politicians or the opposition party. They reinforced the divisions created by the British among Nigerian. The political parties they formed were nothing more than tribal association that breed rancor among Nigerians.

This anomaly was not just between the North and the South but also between the West and the East and also intra-regional political tussle was having its way. These politicians through unguided utterances and acts drummed up the concept of domination into the ears of ethnic or sectional groups. Karin on the political situation rightly asserted that, "By 1964 the federal structure was failing, ethnic minorities were revolting, rival political factions were fighting in the western region regional governors were attempting to inflate population numbers in national census, and elections were both boycotted and rigged" (Kairo, 2012).

This scenario culminated into a wanton destruction of lives and property. In fact, there was gross breakdown of law and order. But the federal government was at a loss of what to do. Hence, this political rascality reached an intolerable crescendo which both the masses and the politicians became so weary of the events and longed for an alternative; which the military that appeared uninterested though highly interested as a result of participating in the government through the state of emergency declared on the Western Region, readily provided through a coup on 14-15 January 1966.

### The Military Factor

After the 1964 election that was marred with all manner of irregularities and violence, the President Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe refused to appoint a prime minister (although he later did after many days of feet-dragging) based on these allegations. The President and the incumbent Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and politicians were all seeking the support of the Armed Forces. However, if the election in the North and South was described as a misfit of what a democratic election should be, then the 1965 western election was nothing short of hell let loosed on the region because of the level of anarchy and lawlessness that trailed the election.

The direct involvement of the military in politics took a turn for the worse during the Western Region elections in October 1965. The politicians openly courted the friendship of top military officers. Considering the involvement of the military into the politics of Nigeria,

could like to this fact that says, if you want to domesticate a lion, never serve her blood or flesh because if she test it, she will grave for more. Thus was the case between the military in the political landscape of Nigeria. In the sense that the military (the lions) tested political power (flesh or blood) through the emergency rule in the West, politicians courting their friendship and craved for more. This is true because when the coup failed the military officers would have supported the civilians for the government to continue rather they clung unto political power through coup and counter-coups, and where not in a hurry to let go of this political power. This trend led Azikiwe to suggest diarchy so that both politician and the military can be sharing political power at the same time.

Prior to the coup of 15 January 1966, it was obvious that the safety values of any nation which is reposed in such institutions as the courts, the census commission, the electoral commission, the police and the armed forces. However, the sanctity of these institutions in Nigeria was being politically tainted, assaulted to an extent that their credibility was at the lowest ebb.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the character of the personae in the Nigerian system could best be described as the nature of the depraved man of the last days that Paul the Apostle wrote thus:

*There will be terrible times in the last days (Nigerian history). People (politicians) will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive...slanders, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of good, treacherous, rash, conceited...(whose conscience have been seared as with hot iron).*

Hence, some young Nigerian military officers who felt that a clean-up is needed in the political arena to save the country from imminent doom it was heading to through a military coup. This Putsch of 15<sup>th</sup> January 1966 claimed the life of eminent politicians mostly from the North, such as the Premier of the North, the Prime Minister and the Premier of the West. However, even though the coup failed because they could not take over the government as a result of betrayal and maneuvering by the supposed friends of the coup plotter but it was welcomed by all Nigerians from the East, West and the Northern Nigeria who have had enough and are craving for change, although some Northerners viewed the coups as ethnic cleansing.

Meanwhile, as earlier indicated the coup plotters, led by Major Nzeogwu, did not succeed in taking over the government since the failed to kill the head of the Army, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi. He and other surviving officers tactically put down the coup and restored their control of the Army. The coup plotters were rounded up and detained. The discredited and terrified politicians handed over power to the military that was how the first

civilian regime or republic was brought to an end<sup>21</sup>. The military that for long have been looking for such opportunity saw it on a platter of gold and seized it.

When the giddiness must have subsided then pressures were mounted on the military regime led by Ironsi to try the Coup plotters or to set them free<sup>22</sup>. And the failure of the regime not to try the coup plotters, coupled with the Decree Promulgated by the Regime, that changed Nigeria from a federal system to unitary system of government, which entails that merit and not quota would be the sole criterion for appointments and promotion was seen by the North as an attempt by Southerners and move specifically the Igbo's to impose their domination through reforms tailored to suit their higher education. And to curb this alleged domination, officers from the North staged a counter-coup that killed Aguiyi Ironsi and other Igbo military officers.

This counter-coup of 29<sup>th</sup> July 1966 had two aims: to revenge on the East, and a breakup of the country. From that 29<sup>th</sup> of July the killing of Igbo civilians by the northerners became an everyday routine that led to Head of States Yakubu Gowon in a broadcast to the North in September, said, "I receive complaints daily that until now Easterners living in the north are being killed and molested and their property looted. It appears that it is going beyond reason and is now at a point of recklessness and irresponsibility." This counter-coup accelerated the timing to the civil war in that it did not only destroy the unity of the Army; it also short circuited the hierarchical structure of the Army. In the sense that General Gowon was not qualified to be the Head of States, since the highest office in the army, the second in command to Ironsi, Brigadier Ogundibe was still alive.

It could be recalled that the second aim of the counter coup which is session (the north has always used the threat of session from 1947, 1953, 1959 and 1966 when they felt sidelined) of the north was discouraged by the British who explained to them that they will suffer if they go ahead with the plan as the economy from the South that sustain them will be cut off and moreover that the North is land locked, moreover, that political power is all that they need to be relevant in Nigeria that the north should hang unto it. This manner in which Gowon usurped authority brought crises of loyalty between Ojukwu and Gowon that led to a personality crises between them. All efforts to bring them together and resolve the differences failed partly because as the reconciliation moves is made, the Igbo's are killed in the North and fear of his life could also be believed his recalcitrant behavior considering the fact that Gowon is one of the inconsistent personality as demonstrated on the manner he came into power and how he renewed on the Aburi Accord.

Adewale, rightly asked how did it come that the North which aimed at secession, turned and fought for the integrity of Nigeria, while the East which did all the time

work for and aimed at the integrity of this nation swung round to wear the garb of and fought for secession?. I will advance some answers, they are: the British drumming into the heart of the northerners how secession will be tantamount to economic suicide; the protracted wanton killing of the Easterners in the North: Gowon plus Ojukwu's idiosyncrasies, and the extraneous influence on Gowon.

Almidst the political impasse between Ojukwu and Gowon a neutral ground was agreed and also the safety of Ojukwu was guaranteed for a meeting to resolve the simmering issues in Nigeria at Aburi in Ghana, it was held between 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1967. The meeting was attended by both the eastern delegates and federal government delegate and an agreement was reached by both parties known as Aburi Accord, this is the summary of the Accord: The members agreed that the legislative and executive authority of the federal military government should remain in the supreme military council that will also make decision on what effect the whole country and that the military governor will have their impact in such matters; that all high profile appointment in the military, federal civil service, diplomatic services etc must be approved by the supreme military council; all decree passed since January 15, 1966 which detracted from regional government should be repealed; system of confederation shall be adopted in the country and resource control set in motion; and that easterners shall be compensated and salary arrears paid to civil servants from eastern region that left the north as a result of the wanton killing, confederation as a new system of government was also agreed upon.

The proceedings of the meetings in Aburi were reported verbatim for each personal government and the federal by their respective official reporters and tape-recorded versions were distributed to each government. It had been said in many quarters that the reason why the Accord failed was because the parties involved reinterpreted it to suit their interest; but the clear picture behind the failure of the Accord was presented in Gowon Press Conference of 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1967 he said "The permanent secretaries had advised me to stick to their recommendation and advise on most of the issues contained in the Accord".

In the light of the above, the failure of the Aburi Accord would be traced to the extraneous influence on Gowon, considering his acknowledgment to stick on advice and recommendation by the permanent secretaries on the accord. In other words, Gowon ignored the tenets of the accord. Howbeit, the war would have been avoided if Ojukwu had exercised restraint on the adulterated implementation of the Accord by exercising the spirit of compromise and diplomatically pursue for the full implementation of the Accord in the course of time. On the other hand, Gowon nonchalant attitude to the wanton killing of the Easterners in the North proved to be a

decisive factor that triggered the war. Falola *et al.*, said that "in spite of these, the federal government tried to appease Lt. Colonel Ojukwu, it was all in vain". In other words, that Ojukwu proceeded to the war. The question that boggles the mind on this issue is how would you be appeasing a person and at the same time killing his people and expects him to trust you? That was the quagmire which Ojukwu found himself, that opting for secession became an easy decision to arrive at and thus view was supported by Eluwa *et al.*, when he observed that, "to the Igbo, their action was warranted, they were living a state in which they had not been permitted to live. To their sympathizers in the outside world they were fighting for self-determination."

However, when Gowon saw that Ojukwu is bend on going to war, he implemented a strategic move by creating 12 states out of the four regions on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1967 and in the process cut of the enclave of Biafra from the sea and winning the support of the minorities that have been clamoring for the state of their own as a panacea to their perceived Igbo domination. Then on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May, 1967 and with the backing of the People's Assembly, Ojukwu announced the Independent Republic of Biafra. From every ramification it would be seen that economic factor especially the oil boom emboldened Ojukwu who wanted resource control and Gowon who saw it as a course worth protecting for the survival of the North. Although, its role have been downplayed by all the parties.

## THE ROLE OF OIL IN THE CIVIL WAR

As earlier observed, the role of oil in the build up to the war has been downplayed by the protagonists. And even most historical narratives and books have either mentioned it in passing the economic make-up of these days or out rightly ignore the role played by these natural resources. The reason behind this oversight could either be attributed to the resolve (consciously or unconsciously) by the actors to keep the oil success story out of the picture as not to betray their vested interest in the oil. For instance, the Pearson Report, a 1966 US Agency for International Development study commissioned to assess the impact of increased oil revenues in Nigeria "discover that the official Nigerian government statements concerning the anticipated Nigerian oil revenues were substantially lower than what the oil company official know could be forecasted.

And also considering the fact that oil information in Nigeria till date is hardly given a detailed news by successive governments rather it is shrouded in secrecy goes on to prove that the downplay of oil in the war is an action by the oil in the war is a deliberate actions by the oil companies, and government of Nigerian officials, to protect their image. Thus assertion was clearly supported

by Kairn when he opined;

*Furthermore, key actors in the drama – the federal military government under Yakubu Gowon, the international oil companies and their home governments, and the secessionist leader Emeka Ojukwu – all concluded for different reasons that oil matters were best kept out of the public sphere. As a result, the particular political economy of oil in Nigeria introduced opacity – the deliberate obscuration of information related to oil production, revenues, accounting, and operations-as a governing principle.*

On the contrary, these actors and their supporters are always which to exonerate the role of oil in the Nigerian cold war, citing the fact that oil exploration then was still at its infancy and would not have contributed in triggering the war since the “oil boom” in Nigeria started in the 70s. However, this evidence is suggests the contrary. For instance, the American Embassy in Nigeria reported on the “Boom Atmosphere” of Port Harcourt, citing 1964 as “the bench mark for when Nigeria moved from a marginal producer to a major world oil producer of great promise for the future.

The crude output per day in January 1964 was 84,000 barrel and increased to 301,352 barrels per day in August 1965, causing the export revenues to increase from £20 million to £60 million, placing Nigeria at the 13<sup>th</sup> position of the largest oil producers in the world.

Britain in their mannerism supported the Nigerian forces because they are aware that their interests and investments would be best protected in a united Nigeria led by the North.

Ojukwu’s adventure to get ammunition from Russia in June, 1967 through his special Envoy, Ajuluchukwu met a brick wall when Russia spokesperson Romanou Alexandra told them that Russia would only recognize Biafra and supply its arms if it will nationalize the oil industry and Ojukwu gave a lot of reasons why he will not do it.

But a month later, the federal commissioner for information and labor, Anthony Enahoro went to Moscow and signed a cultural agreement with Moscow, and promised to nationalize the oil industry, including its allied industries once they got arms to recapture the facilitating and oil creation Biafra.

When Russia supplied the ammunitions they did not nationalize as promised. Although the oil sector and other industries were nationalized in 1972 through the Nigerian Enterprise Promotion Decree of 1972, popularly called indigenization of the economy. These conflicts of interest contributed in great measure to the motivations to the war and the intensity in which all the actors fought either to upstage Nigerian or carve out their state or to maintain the status quo (one Nigeria).

## Why Biafra Lost the War

The following reasons could be said to have led to the defeat of Biafra, they are:

- 1). The viability of colonial Boundaries. What Ojukwu challenged was the viability of the African boundaries as constructed by the colonial masters. It is believed that if this Nigerian boundary was successfully adjusted, it would open a floodgate for more adjustment of colonial boundaries in Africa. Hence, the OAU whose charter recognizes the viability of African boundaries and colonial masters stood to defend the boundary by supporting Nigeria.
- 2). Biafra did not get territorial support from its closest neighbors. For instance, Cameroon closed her borders against Biafra and supported Nigerian groups.
- 3). Ojukwu did not adequately prepare for the war and also he took the loyalty of the minorities in the eastern region that have always clamored for freedom for granted.
- 4). The timing of the creation of those two states out of Biafra enclave weakened the support that Ojukwu would have gotten as it is natural with man to abandon a course once his need is met. These states now saw the Biafra course as a tribal course, that is why the lost the coastal advantage that would be a great advantage to Biafra.
- 5). No major power supported Biafra. They all saw the war as British domestic affairs.
- 6). The Great Britain, USSR and the Arab nations combined forces against Biafra. Ojukwu in his Ahiara’s declaration concurred with the above when he said “we are the latest victims of a wicked collusion between the three traditional scourges of black man – racism, Arab-Muslim expansion and white economic imperialism...playing a subsidiary role is Bolshevil Russia seeking a place in the African sun”.
- 7). Biafra was very weak on its inner front; loyalty was rare and was dominated by Igbo officials and men.
- 8). It was blockaded from the beginning of the war, thus frustrated the flow of arms and other goods.
- 9). Leading to food scarcity and inadequate arms which forced Biafra to surrender unconditionally.

## The “no victor no vanquish” policy: Truth or Illusion

When Biafrians unconditionally surrendered on the January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1970 with the formal acceptance by General Gowon’s regime of the document of surrender from Lt. Col. Philip Effiong (the second in command to Ojukwu and at this time Ojukwu had gone to self-imposed exile), Gowon now said that there were no victors nor vanquished and subsequently announced the policy of reconciliation rehabilitation and reconstruction. Gowon in national news titled “Let us reconcile” reiterated his

commitment for reconciliation when he said:

*“...we guarantee the security of life and property of all citizens in every part of Nigeria and equality in political rights. We also guarantee the right of every Nigerian to reside and work wherever he chooses in the federation, as equal citizen in one united country...there is no question of second class citizenship in Nigeria.*

In consideration of Gowon's stance based on what he said, one is left with this question: where his famous no-victor no-vanquish statement and his policy of 3R a reality in practice or was he playing to the gallery? The answer to this question will be found below. The war causes a mind boggling devastation in the economy of the Eastern region, infrastructures were destroyed and humanitarian crises was so high that massive aids effort was needed and Gowon's Regime who would not handle it alone barred foreign assistance. This was well documented by John:

*All the countries like France, South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia which had supported Biafra were told to keep their aid and stay out. Relief organizations in a similar position, notably Caritas and World Council of Churches, were also barred, “let them keep their blood money”, Gowon cried. Nigeria will do this itself”. The Catholic priests and nuns...were rounded up and expelled...their removal left a crucial gap in a rapid deterioration relief situation.*

Gowon hinged his reasons of not accepting aids to the fact that these countries and international organizations contributed immensely in prolonging the war. But any genuine statesman that is eager to heal the wounds of his nation would reach out to all and sundry for assistance, knowing fully well that it lacks the resources to deal with the humanitarian cases. As a result of these bluff to foreign assistance many Igbo's died of diseases and starvation that otherwise would had been saved if aids were available. More so, the seriousness of the reconstruction of Igbo land was too herculean for the region to pretend it would tackle alone, indeed, there was vanquish.

Consequently, the regime promulgated the Public Officers Decree No. 46 of 1970. This decree gradually screened out senior Nigeria civil servants of Igbo extraction on the account that they participated in the war. Paul said that he decree was an instrument of vendetta by Gowon's regime which needed out civil servants without pensions. The decree also served as a medium for compensation, because the government posits that it will be unwise to edge out those that stood by it in its period of need simply to create room for the

Igbo returnees, on how Gowon related with the Igbos through his appointment in his eight years administration. See Table 1.

Subsequently, the infamous Abandon Project policy was used to confiscate the property of the Igbos that fled to their country home during the civil war, as they return to their formal place of abode they were told that their property has been declared abandoned by the government that was at the same time executing the program of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, may be the Abandon Project Policy falls under Reconstruction.

Both Rivers and Southern State that was carved out of formal Eastern were empowered to implement this policy. This policy betrayed Gowon's speech that guarantee the security of lives and property of Nigerians anywhere in Nigeria. Through this policy most Igbos lost their property and some as a result of it died. Ambrose decried the fate of this Igbos when he said, “I know many of them (Igbos) who helped me as a mayor to build Port Harcourt but died of broken hearts because their property was considered abandoned”. Another issue noteworthy is the Banking Obligation Decree of 1970.

This banking policy of the Federal Government directed the Igbo people to submit their Biafra currency for conversion into Nigerian currency and the government regardless of the amount deposited paid twenty pounds per depositor. This policy stilled the economic reconstruction of the Igbos in the same vein, this policy stipulated that all bank deposits made in the old eastern region, excluding Calabar, between May 31, 1966, and January, 12 1970 remained void and cannot be withdrawn by the owner again and this economic emasculation on the Igbos enriched the federal government treasury to the tune of four million pounds.

Furthermore, all the military officers that took part in the 15<sup>th</sup> January coup and those that took part in the invasion of mid-west during the war were rounded up and tried. But it is unfortunate that all the northern soldiers that led the counter coup in July 29 were never called to question on the death of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi and other military officers of Igbo extraction. On October 1, 1971 General Gowon gave a score-card of his policy of 3Rs, in a national broadcast he asserts “...we have been able to achieve complete reconciliation amongst our people within a relatively short period of time; we have succeeded in rehabilitating and resettling our displaced people and we have spared no effort in reconstructing our economy....

A careful observer would mistake the implementation of the 3Rs to that of the seven fury of God that John described in the book of Revelation. It beats logic to reconcile the fact that the war lasted for two and half years and it took Gowon's administration one year and six month to fix back everything that the war destroyed, as it is a known fact that it takes time to build than to

**Table 1.** Distribution of Political Appointments among the Igbo, the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani

	Igbo	Hausa/Fulani	Yoruba
Gowon's Regime (July 1966)	1	9	8
Muhammad/Obasanjo (SMC of 1975)	1	10	7
Governors (30/07/75)	6	6	4
Governors (30/02/76)	1	9	4
Ministers (03/02/76)	2	6	7
Buhari Regime (SMC of 01/10/84)	1	9	2
Babaginda's AFRC (1989)	1	11	8
National Defence and Security Council (04/01/94)	6	5	5

**Source:** Nsukka Analyst

destroy. This feat of Gowon was in did a modern miracle as Ukpabi Asika rightly said.

### The Significance of the War

The war is significant in many ways, as listed below:

- 1). It severed the Igbo nation from the main stream of Nigerian politics. Considering the fact that during and after the war the Igbo's hardly occupy any high political position. Table 1 shades more light on this.
- 2). The war demonstrated that the Nigerian military officials were inept in issues of compromise, diplomacy and statecraft.
- 3). The war diluted professionalism in the Army, increased the size of the army numerical and decreased its quality. For instance, soldiers that never fired a rifle were promoted to high ranks, the recruitments without requisite qualification in bid to respond to the exigency of the moment compromised quality in the alter of quantity. It introduced materialism and weeded the Nigerian military with tribal politics which has remained with it ever since.
- 4). The Igbo's that were economically affected have to begin a fresh economic pursuit in a harsh environment.
- 5). The unity or territorial integrity of Nigeria was established. Considering the horror of the war, the political and socio-economic aftermath suffered by the vanquish, no part of Nigeria would venture into secession project in the nearest future.
- 6). It destroyed regionalism and replaced it with state system having weaker states and strong center. It also moved Nigeria from federalism to a unitary system of government.

### CONCLUSION

The war whose genesis stemmed from the British amalgamation of territories not the unity people because of their economic interests tried very hard with policies and utterances to keep the people divided, such as this

one made by Hugh Clifford the Governor-General of Nigeria(1920-1931) to the Nigerian Council, he said "Nigeria is a collection of independent native state, separated by one another by great distances, by differences of history and tradition and ethnological, racial ,tribal political, social and religious divide." The British perfected their divisiveness in Nigeria between 1914 to 1946 .This divisive scenario whose seeds germinated and strangled the tender spirit of nationalism, grew unperturbed bearing its seeds seed of ethnicity, tribalism, greed and parochialism that permeated into every fabric of Nigerian polity and psych

Between 1946 and 1959 this seed was well enshrined as an written code in the hearts of Nigerians as well as the would be statesmen, such as Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Belewa etc ,that were saddled with the task of starring the political affairs of Nigeria. It is not surprising that these "statesmen" already overdosed with tribalism left the task of statecraft indulged their selves with the task of building a time bomb through every form of political rascality between 1960 to 1965 which exploded in the civil war of 1967. But the war could have been avoided but the actors involved were overwhelmed with different interests. This war that lasted for thirty months claimed the lives of millions of lives mostly in the eastern region and its attendant destructions of social amenities and infrastructural facilities .Besides these destructions; this war took its toll on the Nigerians of Igbo extraction economically and politically. Although the Military Government then proposed a reconstruction program but an analysis of the program proved that it was a smokescreen

It is sad that Nigerian government did not learn anything from the war and more so from these people with little or nothing except ingenuity resisted the federal forces for two and half years. This observation led Benjamin to voice his pleasure when he said:

*We as Nigerian soldiers destroyed the mines, shoe batteries: Ogbunigwes and armored cars of the Biafrans; we thought we have conquered them.*



*But rather than tapping their technology ingenuity we treated them as villains. Today, we are paying for its carelessness. We must go back and begin to rectify the errors of the past. It is only by doing this that a true nation will emerge.*

How I wish this advice is heeded to. The war has ended but the colonial divisiveness war rages on in all aspect of Nigerian lives, and the question is, when will the people of Nigeria be free from these colonial cleavages that have brought untold sorrow to the masses of Nigeria?

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