**The Nigerian Biafra War, 1967-1970: A Historic Burden**

**Not lifted in Contemporary Nigeria**

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Abstract

*This study examined the three years of internecine armed conflict in Nigeria between the Nigerian State and the self-declared ‘Republic of Biafra’. Not many have scholars have considered the aftermath of the war as a national burden worth lifting. Historical and conflict suppression approaches, primary and secondary data sources, this paper suggested that changing the mindset of disputing parties on the negative effects of this conflict, will in turn influence decisions and actions positively, to mitigate and lift the post-war burdens on the south- east and Nigeria. This paper realized that, fifty-seven years after, the war rages on and remains sensitively controversial in national discourse as it’s ghost is alive and hunting every facets of the polity. Failure of the ‘no victor, no vanquish’ policy, the lack of a true national reconciliation, rehabilitation, reconstruction policy, inability to integrate the ‘defeated’, the continuous marginalization of prominent antagonists of the war, the mindset of ‘US vs THEM’ dichotomy, entrenched ethnicity, insurgency, nationalist agitations (IPOB), clamour for state police, and resource wars, have become a national burden, inimical to peace, national unity, patriotism and sustainable development. This paper found that, the war was an unmitigated tragedy fought, won and lost leaving Nigeria more divided today than ever. Genuine reconciliation, forgive and forget national policy, remain an albatross on the jugular of the nation. The war remains an elephant in the room, and a factual burden to be lifted through genuine dialogue, strategic leadership, sincere reconciliation, rehabilitation, reintegration and restitution as panaceas going forward.*

**Key Words:** Nigeria, lifting burden, National reconciliation, civil war, Patriotism, national reorientation.

**Introduction**

On the 1st October, 1960, the most populous black nation on the planet, Nigeria with pump and pageantry got its political independence from colonial Britain, ending decades of political and economic servitude. The Union Jack was lowered and the national green-white-green flag was pompously hoisted with great pride and prospects geared towards liberty, national unity and progress as the national anthem rented the air thus “Nigeria we hail thee…though tongue and tribe may differ… in brotherhood we stand”. Fifty million Nigerians liberated from colonial grip and are now home to build their own country. Before the 1966 crisis, Nigerian ethnic groups had started experiencing cracks in the union. In July 1960, the Tiv Riots broke out, in the 1963 census all the regions accused each other of falsifications of census figures, and between 1964 and 1965, and the national election which was to determine national leadership was marred by controversies coupled with post-election crisis in the Western Nigerian Assembly. These further polarized the country along ethnic lines.

On 15 January, 1966 a Coup d’états and a counter coup in July made things to fall apart signalling the start of war and upheavals that will never leave Nigeria the same again. The war ended on the 15th January, 1970, when Colonel Effiong read the Biafra instrument of surrender thus…we affirm we are loyal Nigeria citizens and accept the authority of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria…that the Republic of Biafra ceases to exist’.[[1]](#footnote-2) With the surrender, nationalists Biafra and Nigerian army became advocates for ‘One Nigeria’. This call for unity, undermined the true intentions of the British Amalgamation of independent nations (territories) in 1914, not the people but basically for British economic interest. The military and nationalist leaders based on mutual fear knew that Nigeria was an artificial creation with deep diversities, and a test to the nascent state, a clear consequence being the civil war. The hot war has come and gone but fifty-seven years later, it is still being fought in the hearts and minds of the major antagonists and their sympathizers in the nation. This is owing to structural weaknesses and failure of national reconciliation which would have brought healing and closure like the Rwandan and South African episodes. The war remains a scar and dark chapter in the political history of Nigeria and has been widely judged as the main reason why Nigeria continues to be polarized along ethnic, religious, academics, politics, economic and resource divides, threatening her existence as a united and indivisible entity.[[2]](#footnote-3) Thus a burden that must be lifted genuinely for Nigeria to rise above mediocrity in the world stage irrespective of the fact that Nigeria has all the prerequisites to become a major world power.[[3]](#footnote-4)

To efficiently explain how, the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 is a national burden that must be lifted for Nigeria to develop faster in peace and unity, this study adopted a logical frame work by looking at the, pre-colonial Nigerian states relations and the birth of Nigeria, conceptual issues of conflict management, the civil war as a burden and if the war is truly over and how to lift this burden for a better and prosperous Nigeria. This will also give a better understanding of the concept of war, peace, government, politics, unity and diplomacy on the African continent.

Pre-Colonial Nigerian States relations and the birth of Nigeria

The pre-colonial states which later became Nigeria were sophisticatedly heterogeneous. The peoples lived in separate territories, with different religions, cultures, institutions, traditions and nationalities in centralized and decentralized states. Crowder, opined that the territory which became Nigeria in 1914, “contained not just a multiplicity of pagan tribes, but also a number of great kingdoms that had evolved complex system of governments independent of contacts with Europe”[[4]](#footnote-5). Crowder further ascertained that “the great kingdoms of Kanem Bornu, the Fulani Empire, the kingdoms of Ife, and Benin, the Oyo empire, the city states of the Guinea coast and the Niger Delta and the politically decentralized and culturally homogeneous Igbo people of the Eastern region and the small tribes of the Plateau”[[5]](#footnote-6) were sojourn in the Niger area. These states, empires and groups in West Africa were not insular from each other as they interacted through trade, politics, intermarriage, and diplomacy before the advent of the Whiteman[[6]](#footnote-7) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In the north, the Kanem Bornu Empire was great and prosperous and played the middle-man role in trade diplomacy in gold, ivory, horses, beads, cloths and later slaves between the forest states and North Africa. With competent Muslim leaders (Mai), Islam became the state religion, with its authority, laws and customs spreading to Hausa states and southwards into the forest states. The Benin Empire[[7]](#footnote-8) was the largest and most complex centralized political system in the Guinea region in the 16th century led by the king (Oba), with the village chiefs and king makers (Uzama) who maintain law and order in the kingdom. Its city had paved streets, a large army, and Guilds systems independent of European origin not until 1897 when it was sacked by British Imperial power following the ‘Benin Massacre’.[[8]](#footnote-9)

The Oyo Empire of the Yoruba, grew strong politically, militarily and economically, led by the King (Alafin) and the King makers (Oyo Mesi) who acted as checks to the excesses of the Alafin.[[9]](#footnote-10) The Alafin was the lord of life and could make or end wars and ruled over Yoruba land ensuring peace and stability while the Aremo-Crown Prince is in charge of the king’s numerous children and vassal states.

The Igbo live in decentralized or ‘stateless societies’. This does not mean they were in chaos or stateless but that they are republican in nature as power was not reposed in an individual but in village groups and societies like the age, grades, Umuuna, Umuada, Ekpo societies and others. The Igbo society remains very individualistic, patrilineal and communal at societal level with no unified or singular political authority, and it is often said ‘Igbo don’t have a king’. The Igbo interacted with their neighbours through oracular diplomacy of the Aro Long Juju (Ibinu Upkabi), trade and intermarriages.

The Niger Delta city states of Bonny, Okrika, Old Calabar, Kalabari and Opobo lived in the banks of rivers and mangrove swamps with canoes as major sources of transporting fish, salt and other sea foods to the hinterland Igbo in exchange for yams, metal wares and later slaves. Their interrelations through the process of acculturation[[10]](#footnote-11), led to slaves from Igbo land becoming free citizens in the War Canoe House System of the city-states, which enabled them to become Heads of Houses and even kings like the case of Jaja in Bonny and later King Jaja of Opobo.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Deductively, pre-colonial Nigeria was a melting pot of cultures, states, kingdom, and institutions different from each other in every ramification except by race. They already had stable polities and conducted international diplomacy as states in their own rights before contact with Europe which was to change them forever. In the 15th century Africa and consequently states, empires and kingdoms in Nigeria encountered European explorers, missionaries, and administrators and traded in slaves (slave trade) and forest produce (legitimate trade). In 1884-1885 Berlin Conference, European power who had been in stiff competition for trade monopoly and spheres of influence in Africa decided that to avoid conflict between them, agreed that, any power claiming possession of any area of interest in any part of Africa most have ‘Effective Occupation’. The Niger Area became the lot of Britain, who administered the area through Lord Goldie of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) by a Royal Charter from 1866 to 1899. One can say that Nigeria to an extent Africa was born in Berlin. Britain abrogated the Charter of the Royal Niger Company and took complete control of Nigeria in 1900. In 1914, the Colony of Lagos and Southern Protectorate and the Northern Protectorate were amalgamated by Imperial Britain for administrative and economic convenience with Lord Fredrick Lugard in charge and thus Nigeria came into existence officially to the world. These heterogeneous kingdoms, states, empires, with different religions, cultures, and institutions were to become one with no unified political system, institution and no common ruler.[[12]](#footnote-13) From 1900 to 1960 Britain through the indirect rule system, introduction of western education, and technology succeeded to weld these diverse entities not as a people but as a geographical area for her economic benefit[[13]](#footnote-14) without the consent of the different ethnic groups. Thus the problem with Nigeria has started. The Northern part of the country resisted western influence and was left out of the main stream of western education, technology and industrial advancement while the south and west of the country were enriched by Christian educational training, resourcefulness, industry and dynamism.

As Nigeria became a nation, government agencies and institution needed man power trained in western education. Thus the Eastern part of the country (the Igbo) provided the requisite labor and Nigeria became the Eastern Nigeria Diaspora for Igbo, as they were all over the country. Ottenberg, opined they (referring to the Igbo), transformed native structures into ideas of Nigeria as a modern polity[[14]](#footnote-15). Igbo were upwardly mobile, egalitarian in ethics, behaviors, organization and industry unlike the north that was not and produced polar opposites to the Southern part of Nigeria. Britain’s inability of unite the people was not an innocent mistake but rather a deliberate designed to ensure their continued ruler ship and exploitation of these disparate peoples by ensuring they did not unite or team up against colonial rule. The amalgamation brought *divide et impera* for economic and administrative convenience for exploitation to keep the people perpetually apart, thus poisoning and politicizing the existing inter-group relations amongst the ethnic groups. Governor Hugh Clifford even admitted in Coleman (1958) that, it was actually not the intension of Britain to build a Nigerian nation, rather “ to secure to each separate (ethnic group) people, the right to maintain its identity, its individuality, and its nationality, its own chosen form of government and peculiar political and social institutions…evolved for by wisdom and…accumulated experience of generation of its forbearers.[[15]](#footnote-16)

From the above investigation, it is clear the seed of disunity, inter-ethnic conflict, hatred and hostility had already been sowed owing to the vast diversity, developmental imbalance, world view of the different ethnic groups in the country and it was just a matter of time for things to escalate. Mutual suspicion and distrust amongst ethnic groups continued as the Colonial authorities continued to logged-heads of leaders together with each seeing the other as the enemy rather the British as they court British favours to undermine each other. Hence by 1958 there was no clear cut Nigerian national political leadership and by 1959 the Hausa-Fulani ethnic political leaders won in wooing the British to their side in the ethnic power play and the British adopted them knowing her long term neo-colonial project.

**Conceptual Issues of Conflict Management and Resolution**

Conflicts are inevitable in human relations once goals begin to conflict. Management of conflict is very essential not the elimination of it as it is practically impossible to eliminate conflicts[[16]](#footnote-17) completely. Conflicts do not just occur for there are most times early warning signals which must be resolved to avoid crisis situation. In the case of the Nigeria-Biafra war the early signs were all over. National diversity, discrepancy in educational level in the regions, faulty amalgamation without the peoples consent, ethnicity, national population census crisis, the Tiv Riots and others were signs of crisis to come with no early warning systems to anticipate, mitigate and tackle the pending crisis.

The concept of conflict management as an offshoot of the limitation of the realist concept of conflict analysis in any society has to do with the operation and response to enforcement of strategic provisions, goals, and ideals of conflict resolution schema. The theoretical initiative and design of the peace process of conflict resolution is concretely expressed in conflict management. The agenda for peace in conflict management and resolution specifies the critical roles of actors in conflict to abate violent conflict by creating platforms for antagonists to come together, establish legal frameworks for restraints, ceasefire, and verification of compliance, enforcement of disarmament, arms control and peace monitoring. In the case of the Nigerian-Biafra War, the Aburi meeting in Ghana was a way of resolving the disputes from escalation but it failed as Gowon and Ojukwu blamed each other for violating the terms of the Aburi Accord and war happened in 1967. For conflict management and resolution to be successful certain factors are paramount for peace to be achieved *interalia* early warning systems, nature of negotiation and mediation process, the personality traits of the antagonists, cultural differences and conflict prevention institutions. Early warning systems provides an accurately conscious social capability (science, technology, human capacity) for proactive preparedness, response and mitigation mechanism needed to deal with crisis. The help to forestall conflict or even when they occur they are mitigated. When conflict occur systematic and orderly dialogue, diplomacy, negotiations (positional or collaborative) and mediation (mediators, emissaries, private investigators, psychologists and social workers) take place in the background to restore peace.

The personality traits of the key antagonists also play vital roles in negotiation. Personality traits can be assertive, aggressive, fearful, antisocial, psychopathic, and other (Aiken, 1979). It has to do with the composition of the mental, biological innate deposition, impulses, tendencies, appetites, instincts interest, attitude, and pattern of behaviour that makes that person different or unique to others.[[17]](#footnote-18) The two war personalities Gowon and Ojukwu both have these personality traits which did not make peace possible at Aburi. Personality cult (ego) between these two leaders was instrumental in drawing the war closer. While Ojukwu said Gowon was a junior officer and cannot give orders, Gowon says, it is his obligation to keep Nigeria one and indivisible. While Zik was against the war, Ojukwu felt Zik was old and a betrayal and hence could not listen to the counsel of his kins-man and elder states man. So personality traits of key protagonists to conflict matter a lot to peace building and conflict resolution. If Zik were to be in the shoes of Ojukwu, maybe the war would not have happened. Ethno-cultural differences of war actors are often politicized and affect peace in crisis situation. The cultural and ethnic backgrounds of the Gowon (North) and Ojukwu (South-East), also jeopardized the peace since the former was from a centralized state system and the latter from a decentralized state system. Hence, while Ojukwu is from a republican background and believe in democratic principles, the Gowon was from a command system which emphases respect for a centralized authority. Both men might to an extent deeply felt that the 1914 amalgamation was not necessary for a nascent state that has no national, cultural or linguistic intelligibility couple to entrenched divergent political, cultural and religious systems.

In conflict resolution, the cultural background of the antagonists is an important consideration in the negotiations as they must reason beyond culture-imposed limitations to realize peace. To prevent conflicts, institutions for conflict prevention has to be established as conflicts are integral in human relations. To end the horrors of conflicts and the memories of the bitter past of war, cultural, religious, ethnic harmony, team work and organizational developments are important in mitigating the externalities of protracted conflicts. Strong institutions, violence prevention, education, good governance, economic development and genuine strategic leadership are vital for conflict, detection, prevention, resolution and management.[[18]](#footnote-19) The nascent country, Nigeria had no viable internal mechanism to end or stop the war when it started. In 1970, the guns became silent three years after the killings, when Biafra surrendered with “sergeant hunger” and “colonel starvation” stepping in to determine the end of the conflict, external intervention notwithstanding. Hunger was a defining feature that ended the war.

**The Civil War as a Burden not Lifted. Is the Biafra war over?**

Literatures abound on the causes, course, and aftermath of the war and even the ensuing blame game. These need not border us here as the work discusses how the war has been and is still a burden to the nation which must be lifted for Nigeria to move forward and take its pride of place in the comity of nations. In the south-east region the memory of the war is still potent and remains a symbol of resistance and identity as families and communities informally teach the war narratives ensuring the memory stay alive. The hot war may be gone but the “cold war” rages-on and at other times echoes as a hot war via insurgency, secession clashes of the MASSOB, IPOB, ARENWA, MIYETTI ALLAH, AFANIFERE, militancy in the Niger Delta and others influencing the socio-political landscape of the country. The total absence of dialogue and accountability have left unhealed wounds in regions heavily impacted by the war and the country at large.

For Nigeria to attain its pride of place in Africa and the world, Obasanjo opined “without peace, and security, stability, development and corporation would be an unattainable goal”.[[19]](#footnote-20)All these have deluded Nigeria largely because of the Biafra war and the Igbo scare. General Ibrahim Babangida, a former military president said “Reconciliatory efforts were not pushed harder after the Civil War…national unity is still a dream because of failures of successive administrations after the Civil War… that 50 years reconciliatory efforts were not pushed hard enough by these regimes to make lasting impacts.[[20]](#footnote-21) Since 1970, no Igbo man has been Inspector General of Police, Chief of Naval Staff, Chief of Air Staff Director, or Director, for State Security Service, (DSS),[[21]](#footnote-22) Director General Customs, and no Igbo man has been president since the end of the war because they believe an Igbo man cannot be trusted with power. Igbo are discriminated against in all major Government Establishments and appointments for fear of sympathizing with Biafra. Prominent Igbo businesses are not spared like Innoson Motors, Ibeto cement and others. No federal government presence in the South-East has made the Igbo to feel not wanted and left out in the Nigerian Federation. This has made the Igbo to be less engaged and cooperative to make the national development work. If there is any Nigerian and participant in the Civil War that regretted it ever happened, it is the General Officer Commanding Third Marine Commando Division of the Nigeria Army in May 1960, General Olusegun Obasanjo. He asserts that;

The war has come and gone. The story of the war and what led to it has been told…and what came after it… hopes and believe the past can be ignored…the present is what matters…mistakes of the present can be as grievous as the mistakes of that past…learn from history to avoid collective and individual disasters…if the civil war was a mistake and God has saved us from ourselves we must not tempt the almighty by provoking any semblance of a second attempt to break Nigeria up.[[22]](#footnote-23)

Obasanjo regretted the war ever happened and suggested that: peace, security, and stability will move the country forward in cohesion and unity, with equity justice and fairness as the watchword. That Nigerians must refrain from impunity, ethnicity, corruption and that every Nigerian must enhance belonging to Nigeria and let the benefits of the nation’s resources be for the benefit of all. Then will Nigeria be the epicenter of African solidarity. The general acknowledges that the civil war is really a burden on the neck of the country to be lifted.

Alagoa, E.J in his National Merit Award Winners Lecture entitled ‘Nigerian History Lifting Burdens, Learning Lessons’ further lamented the consequences of the war and military incursion into Nigeria political space says, Nigeria was in a delicate balance at independence as the Nigerian Army tragically overthrew the civilian government in 1966 and the resulting Civil War in 1967-1970.These events have held the nation captive even as the military imposed a constitution on the nation and continue to influencing political direction of the nation in the 21st century. This to Alagoa, has made Nigeria to face a level of disharmony and danger greater than the days of the Biafran threat. He concludes by saying that, the lessons of history must bring hindsight of memory to enrich our performance in the present and improve our foresight and that:

 We must accept our responsibility to confront our errors in putting to rest the consequences of the Civil War…long period of departure from democratic government, to build new structures from our own cultural roots combined with any lessons from the practice of governance from other lands.[[23]](#footnote-24)

 Alagoa was apt in proffering a panacea to Nigeria problems, not leaving out equity, fairness and justice in political governance. This lack of justice has made the search for equal opportunity, identity, self-recognition and destiny a must for the Igbo man and Biafra. The continued drive to relegate and alienate the Igbo in the scheme of things in Nigeria, is really a burden to the entire nation impeding its development and creating insecurity.

Professor J. P. Clark, also observed the consequences of the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 in his Award Winners Lecture in 2001 entitled ‘The Burden not Lifted’. Focusing on the universal cultural tradition, he opined that when an injustice is done, it places a burden on our spirits, soul and destiny of which societies and cultures must find some means of lifting such burdens of the consequences of the group and its members. According to Alagoa, J.P Clark’s “case against the Nigerian Nation is that it has not done whatever it takes to lift the burden of guilt created on all sides of the course of the disastrous ‘Civil War’ and that “we are all causalities of war”[[24]](#footnote-25) both in Nigeria and Biafra. This work agrees with Alagoa and Clark in saying that these observations are still in Nigeria today with no signs of abatement. Clark, laments at the situation of environmental and ecological decay of the Niger Delta, the stark poverty, youth restiveness, illegal bunkering, sooth diseases and militancy said the ‘we are all victims of war’ meaning the decadence in the region can be traced from the consequences of the civil war which has led to the ‘sub imperialism’ and total neglect of the region by the Nigerian state. The socio-economic, political and military instability of the Niger Delta is impinging on national development as the government spends heavily to maintain armed security in the region to ensure security of oil facilities, workers and exploration. This is burden that must be lifted because the Niger Delta war a theatre of war and destruction as the Federal and Biafra forces battled for the soul of oil. This is a burden that must be lifted for Nigeria to move forward.

Furthermore, Chinua Achebe said;

The post Nigeria-Biafra civil war Era saw a ‘unified’ Nigeria saddled with a greater and more insidious reality…plaque by home-grown enemy: political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic-bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class. Compounding the situation was the fact that Nigeria was a washed in oil-boom petrodollars, with more money without knowing what to do with it. A new era of great decadence and decline was born. It continues to this day.[[25]](#footnote-26)

To Achebe, failure to get the right leaders with the right education and background at all levels to be in charge of the country in the immediate post war years made Nigeria’s liberation difficult from our own corrupt brothers and sisters. War ended in with a lot of hatred and prejudice by Nigerians against Nigerians. Political violence, unconstitutional electoral processes, ethnic stigmatism, indiscipline, armed robbery, fatal corruption in government, religious crisis to the rise of Boko Haram, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), MOSOP, militancy in the Niger Delta and others are all fallouts of the civil war. Achebe, is of the view that leadership is the problem with Nigeria that must be corrected; that the Mandela spirit of reconciliation, forgive and forget is needed in Nigeria, politicians must be accountable and that criminals must be brought to book to fight corruption in the country. Mediocrity must be displaced with a competent system of democratic transition established based on the rule of law, then can Nigerians breathe a sigh of relieve for better things to come in the nation. Achebe concluded by saying that the issue with Nigeria is ‘the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership’.[[26]](#footnote-27) This too, Nigeria lost in the civil war because after the war, Nigeria became the melting pot for ruthless military dictators without conscience and patriotism and failed to put away the ugly past of a painful war but were hell-bent on revenge. These middling post-civil war leaders further entrenched tribalism, disunity, materialistic woolliness, self-centeredness, vindictiveness, theft of public funds, dishonesty and destroyed the fabric of the educational institutions making Nigeria a shame amongst the committee of nations. Fifty years after the war Nigeria has not had leaders in the likes of the founding fathers of the nation’s independence who fought for the freedom Nigerians now benefit from. The numerous agitations in the country is because the people feel Nigeria has been grounded to a halt and each group has to seek its own destiny in a country nothing works properly not even the most basic of things like power, good roads, good health services, factories to create jobs, with some state not having a single federal government project. Social justice lost after the war may be one of the ways out in lifting this national burden.

Indiscriminate slaughtering of the Igbo in the North of Nigeria, the civil war, its aftermath and the systemic marginalization of Ndi Igbo following the war, according to Madubuike has given rise to a renter political class, growth of miracle and prosperous churches misrepresenting the true Christianity, poverty and wide spread dissatisfaction amongst Nigerians, depriving the nation of authentic leadership, which has constituted the Igbo Challenge in Nigeria.[[27]](#footnote-28) These challenges points to its resolution stressed, Madubuike. Nigerians out of poverty and hardship have taken solace in religion as an opium to pacify them from their misery of the post-civil war challenges. The churches have multiplied over the years with no corresponding improvement in their economic, moral and social wellbeing irrespective of plenty in the land. This too keep the citizen confused and unable begging their God to have mercy on the nation. However, God will help those who help themselves. Therefore, Nigerian must start holding their leaders to account and the agitations by Biafra and others are ways of doing so. This threatens Nigeria’s unity.

Emefiena Ezeani in his work; In Biafra Africa Died: The Diplomatic Plot[[28]](#footnote-29) said the loss of Biafra robbed Africa of her technological, economic and political power. Nigeria and Africa never learnt anything from the Biafra scientific and technological innovations (Molotov cocktail, ‘Red Devils’, Rockets (*Ogbunigwe* and others). Hence, 50 years after the war Nigerian count generate its own electricity or refines its own crude oil due to faulty foundations. Thus the country remain confused and poor in all indexes of development and the poverty capital of the world. Ezeani, was right in a way because, as part of genuine national, reconciliation, rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration of Biafra after the war, the national leaders at the time it was expected to put the intellect and technological prowess of the Biafran technological and scientific innovation during the war together, to know how they were able to hold on for three years, and harness those discoveries and inventions for national good. But all the lessons of the war were lost on the altar of revenge, hatred and greed. This too is a burden that must be lifted for Nigeria to grow in practical science and technology like the Asian Tigers of this world. Nigeria is capable.

Chudi Offodile in the ‘The Politics of Biafra and the Future of Nigeria’, is of the view that “nearly fifty years after the end of the Biafra-Nigerian war in 1970, Nigeria is still grappling with the Biafra dilemma. No matter its pretensions…the country will continue to face epileptic developmental thrusts, militancy from the Niger Delta and ruinous intensifying glamour for self-determination by disadvantageous ethnic groups, especially the Igbo”.[[29]](#footnote-30)

From the above, Nigeria’s development is being stifled by its inability to resolve the fallouts of the civil war and the effective reintegration of the Igbo and other ethnic groups into the main of national political economy as the federal structure is skewed against other ethnic groups and in a sense against Nigeria itself. The Igbo, conspiracy by successive political leadership in the country since the civil war has not solved the woes of the nation and discordant voices are calling for restructuring of the federation especially the Igbo, who believe have no future in the current pseudo-federalism. The civil war can be seen here again is a burden that must be lifted as the lopsidedness in political, federal appointments and developments has never favored the people South-South and South–East of the Niger. .

Ojukwu, a former Biafra war lord says that the problems of Nigeria has always been the search for unity. That the fear of unity led to the postponement of self-government to 1960 and that “it was the fear of unity that triggered the civil war which millions of innocent Nigerians suffered and perished and from which Nigeria has never recovered… the civil war was fought to unite the very people whose advocacy of unity was considered so intolerable as to provoke the same civil war”.[[30]](#footnote-31) Ojukwu, further said, Gowon’s victory in the Civil War completed the coup, that brought him to power and this success legitimized indiscipline and changed Nigeria most profoundly to the extent that respect for the rule of law became a mere propaganda as with the military Nigeria lost direction. Our deliverance lies in our own hands Ojukwu reiterated. Ojukwu also regretted the Civil War and how unity as eluded Nigerian since then. To Ojukwu, the war left a burden or unity crisis in the country which has not be resolved. Ojukwu, is right and called for the building of national consciousness and abandon our fear of unity, redistribute wealth and control of property and its acquisition, nurture a sense of measure and a sense of humour, learn that unity does not mean uniformity, mobilize the people to have a sense of belonging to the body politic, must learn to accommodate eccentricism, and reforms must start from the top or the inevitable revolution from below. These were his panaceas for Nigeria moving forward[[31]](#footnote-32).

This paper is of the view that the civil ended with an ‘Igbo Problem’ that is irritating and a thorn in the flesh of the body polity of Modern Nigeria. The Igbo are seen as arrogant, clannish, aggressive, domineering, and resulting in sporadic anti-Igbo sentiments. After the war, the Federal Commissioner for Finance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s[[32]](#footnote-33) banking policy nullified all banks account held before the war which improvised the Igbo and in 1976, the newly created Rivers States, ‘abandon property saga’, the Igbo lost their properties and buildings to Rivers State indigenes. The Indigenization Decree threw the Igbo from the commanding heights of national economy and pauperised the average Igbo man. Fifty years later, the Igbo man by his highly competitive, opportunistic, individualistic, self-confident, and susceptibility to change mindset, has unquestionably secured the economic credentials to advance to the amazement of other ethnic groups spreading in every nook and cranny in the world. The successful rise of the Biafra, carries with it jealousy, stereotype, anger and anti-Igbo sentiments from other ethnic groups in the country. This is the ‘Igbo Problem’ an off shoot from the war which now constitute a national burden to be lifted for Nigeria to develop and stay united unhindered by bigotry. Chinua Achebe says’ the competitive individualism and the adventurous spirit of the Igbo are necessary ingredients in the modernization and development of Nigerian society’.[[33]](#footnote-34)

According to Titus Okereke, the Nigerian- Biafra war which ended in January, 1970 is incontrovertible but failed to win the peace. To him the reasons for not winning the peace included, Nigerian and British attempt to brush under the carpet the atrocities perpetrated against the Easterners and Igbo, non-implementation of the Aburi Accord, failure to consider the plight of minority groups, the seed of discord, suspicion, and unhealthy competition sown by the British colonial government. Fifty – seven years-on very little if anything at all has been done to redress inter-regional disparities.[[34]](#footnote-35)Titus further took a look at the burden of abandon property in Port Harcourt in the newly created River State, in which Igbo who fled to the hinterlands from the war, returned only to realize they have been dispossessed of their property. Even soldiers who fought on the side of Biafra who were re-absorbed into the Nigerian Military were never given a lateral platform to operate while all bank accounts owned by Biafrans were declared ‘contaminated’ as illegal and were offer only 20 pounds irrespective of the amount of money in the account. The Igbo started rebuilding their lives from scratch with vigour and fifty years later, there is ‘Ndi-Igbo phobia’ in the country irrespective of the years of marginalization, The Igbo remain the most misunderstood and misrepresented ethnic group when it comes to hard work, inventiveness, education and dedication in the country. This create anxiety whenever an Igbo man is in a group with other groups. These burden especially of genuine tolerance and acceptance must be lifted for development of thrive in the country.

Ken Saro Wiwa, an environmental rights activist, in his work: Sozaboy and On a Darkling Plane” equate the Biafra fracas to the scramble for oil. That greed for oil and power was a major reason for the war on both sides. The Ogoni genocide[[35]](#footnote-36) led to and the war which murdered 30.000 Ogoni with oil spills destroying the ecology[[36]](#footnote-37), aquatic, terrestrial reserves leading to bio-terrorism. To Ken, the bouts of dire and ravaging violence on oil facilities, and riverine communities by federal forces remain fresh in the minds of the people and the impact on the environment still endures and will for a long time as “ the material and psychological despoliation of most of the ethnicities in the area’[[37]](#footnote-38) remain offensive. This is a burden to the people of the Niger Delta region and which must be lifted because the promises of a better life after the war and the creation of a River State have not been met. Ken Saro-Wiwa, “On a Darkling Plain”, opined that “When news came that general agreement had been reached at a cordial meeting in Aburi, there was general elation. Ojukwu returned and spoke in glowing terms of Aburi. He had virtually achieved his confederate aims; if the decisions of Aburi were implemented, there was little doubt that peace would return to Nigeria. The generality of Igbo were cock-a-hoop about Aburi it was inconceivable that an Igbo would go to bargain with Hausa and fail to win. The non-Igbo, on the other hand, were dismayed: it looked as though the nation had sold them to the Igbo. In Rivers circles particularly, there was great agitation. Some showed their dismay openly”.

The Aburi Accord was signed on 5th January 1967. According to Mr Ken Saro-Wiwa, the non-Ibos were not happy with the Aburi Accord which created a confederation of regional governments. In the book, he told the story of how he took some of the chiefs in the riverine area and went to Lagos and defected to the Nigerian side and told General Gowon that the non-Ibos in Eastern Nigeria did not want to be joined with the Ibos in the same region and did not want Biafra Literary icons in Nigeria like Ken Saro wiwa, Chinua Achebe, J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, Chimamanda Adiche and others in theirs works have recreated the devastation and horrors of the war in civil war poetry and exposing the greed, deceit, selfishness of the war and that it was a needless carnage which was unattractive and condemnable leading to a nation of “disconnected nationalities, bullying paranoid majorities and fractious minorities, barricaded in board rooms and treasure houses”.[[38]](#footnote-39) By writing about this burden of wars, these poets ease the burden of war through shared experiences, thus discharging a burden of history by reconnecting reality with the social, economic and political process of building a united country lost during the war. Soyinka, opined the correctly[[39]](#footnote-40) ‘ Nigerians fought a war of solidarity’ rather than ‘unity’ Soyinka therefore saw the Nigerian Civil War as a killing spree which only consolidated the very clannish values that gave rise to the war in the first place and at no time has those values been examined.[[40]](#footnote-41) To these patriots, the militant weapon to defeat the Biafra genie and end the burdens of the years of strife is transparency, fairness, equity and the practice of true federalism and proper devolution of power that will engender true national engagement.

From the above, it is evinced that the reason of injustice, oppression, suppression, ethnicity, nepotism, lack of transparency, inequality and planned extermination for which the war was fought to eliminate in the Nigerian polity still persists. Nigeria has since the war has witness unprecedented levels of militancy, deaths by violent herds’ men and Boko Haram, agitations for secessionist groups, corruption and other ills pervade the society unabated. These have stifled the pace of national growth, engendered unrealistic national engagement, and vehement refusal to restructure the country for giant leaps in development. The reverse is the true solution to defeating the Civil War nightmares in national life.

Prospects of Lifting the Burden

The Igbo are of the view that that Federal Government in Nigeria has failed and do not rely or depend on the Government but on their individual and community efforts. However, some of us have observed that the individualistic tendency is getting to an unacceptable extremism contrary to the Igbo Philosophy of “*Igwe Bu Ike*”, “Ike *Otu Onye Adighi Ire*”; “*Anyukoo Mamiri Onu*, Ogbaa *Ufufu”* that expound the power of unity and synergy of teamwork. This is the asset lacking now and which we must regain in order to succeed as a nation not as individuals. The Igbo must learn the salient lessons of putting our house in order by effective strategic leadership and followership. The war destroyed the psyche of the Igbo who before the war was an epitome of orderliness and effective democratic governance. The leaders must cultivate the right leadership that is acceptable to youths who now misbehaved and no longer respect their elders because of leadership failure in godliness, morality, honesty, integrity, and respect. The consequence is that the Igbo youth is now defiant to their leaders and the state leading to the factionalization of Igbo organizations and agitations for independence by Biafran group the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in 2013. This is a burden that must be lifted and as an off shoot of the civil war.

Nigeria must restructure and diversify the economy. The Nigeria is a “failing state”, in that it has lost partially its sovereignty and control of it borders following the Boko Haram insurgency, trans-border movement of herdsmen who kill Nigerians couple with militants who hold up arms against the state with no reprieve, MASSOB notwithstanding. Some of these Organizations like the Boko Haram and MASSOB, lay claims to certain regions of Nigeria with their own flags, security, population, laws, leadership, currency and passports real or imagine. These diminishes the political integrity of a state already hard hit by ethnicity, corruption, weak domestic institutions, greedy political and economic elites do not have the will to lift the burden of history in this country, are a consequence of the civil war.

Nigeria depends on “extractive” industries (oil, natural resources), with little or no room for diversification. This destroys incentives, discourages innovation, saps the talents of Nigerians and robs them of opportunities, hence the unemployment and poverty in the country. This means that since Nigeria depends heavily on oil, if oil price fall below unreasonable levels or estimated bench marks, the country will not have money to import food let alone pay salaries and build infrastructure. This will deepen cracks within the Nigeria State which is not good for an already fractured society consequent on the civil war.

After the civil war, Nigerians especially the Igbo lost landed properties in the Abandon Property Policy in most states nation-wide not forgetting the ‘20 Pounds’ flat fee bank reserves[[41]](#footnote-42). There is a seemingly lack of property rights in Nigeria which makes it almost impossible to own property without fear of being dispossessed in the event of a crisis as seen after the Civil War and threat by some ethnic groups against others to ‘leave their state’. The 1969 Land Use ACT vested the ownership of everything land and natural resources to the federal government. This means the Federal Government own all the oil, which was one of the reasons for the war. Nigeria should practice true federalism with the states in control of their resource and remit a percentage to the central government.

Nigeria lacks adequate skilled labor, compounded by brain drain. Lack of innovation and technological progress in most areas of the economy is a problem as the lives of Nigerians have not improved. Failure of Government policies like the federal character policy has only exacerbated mediocrity, ethnicity and ‘god-fatherism’ in the country. Government policies are not working and politicians and their conies have hijacked Government institutions. Citizens lack equal playing field for competition and appointments, with ethnicity, political interests and affiliation playing dominant roles. There is an ‘ethnic bar’ in the country, where by only people from particular ethnic group can assume certain positions and appointment in government agencies and Parastatal. This is also a consequence of the civil war which must be stopped for Nigeria to move forward or Karl Maier’s book ‘This House has Fallen’[[42]](#footnote-43) may as well be true.

Dr. Alex Ekwueme, Dee Sam Mbakwe and Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu represented the Igbo in Abacha Constitutional Conference in 1995 and present the Igbo Master Plan. Dr. Ekwueme made a wonderful presentation that got everybody captivated and convinced that the Igbo Master Plan was the best for all Nigerians. In the end, General Abacha was very impressed and approved the Igbo Master Plan. The structure of six geopolitical regions was accepted. The rotational presidency was accepted but the North said it would rotate between North and South instead of rotating among the six geopolitical regions. Their game plan is that when it comes to the turn of the south, the North would support a candidate from South-South or South West but never the South East. The power game of strategically sideline the Igbo from being the president in Nigeria was is a burden that must be lifted without which the peace and development may continue to delude the country. Nigeria suffers from insecurity in almost every geopolitical zone of the country. Groups take up arms against the government demanding secession, clamour for resource control, citizens challenges the sincerity of supreme court judgements and general incapacity by the security agencies to maintain law and order, makes it impossible for the economy to thrive, as investors will not invest and rich individuals will not risk their cash in the economy. The nations will not progress.

**Conclusion**

The Biafra War of 1976-1970 remains a significantly unresolved burden in Nigeria as the underlying issues that led to the conflict persist in the Nigerian polity today. A greater Nigeria cannot be borne in isolation because the future of Nigeria and lifting the burdens of the civil war are inextricably linked. Fifty- seven years after the war, seem to enact the fact that, there was a real ‘victor and a real vanquish’ contrary to popular opinion. The failure of a genuine path to reconstruct, rehabilitate and reintegrate the defeated in the Civil War is a burden for Nigeria. The twenty pound flat fee refund, the indigenization Decree, Public Officers Decree, No.46 of 1970, manipulation of the 1973 census, Federal Character Principle, splitting the South-East into tiny states, deliberate under use of seaports in the East and the absolute absence of a truly international airport in the South East, are all aimed at reducing their economic and political power, setting them at loggerheads and hatred with other groups within the region and the nation. These have left the region polarized and left indelible marks on national political dynamics, social fabrics, legal frame works and has become a national burden too difficult but not impossible to lift and reconcile. Gowon acknowledges this when he said ‘the Igbo still marginalized in Nigeria’[[43]](#footnote-44) and advocated the need to ameliorate the pains of the Igbo. Nigeria has learnt and implemented nothing from the history of the war, leaving many to ask why the war was fought *ab initio.* The Federal Government must have the political will to lift these burdens through the provision of sound strategic leadership, practice of true federalism and restructuring, with proper devolution of power as integral parts of socio-economic and political development of the country in line with what the former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) Olisa Agbakoba, who said that, a new federal system will kill Biafra for a genuine nation to emerge.[[44]](#footnote-45)

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