

**“There Was A Country”: The Reminiscence Of Nigeria-Biafra Civil War And Elites’ Perception Of Nation And Nationalism In Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*Much debate and controversy dominate almost every discussion on the Nigerian civil war. The most recent could be described as an intellectual war and ethnocentrism. These were characteristics of the responses and reactions to the book, “THERE WAS A COUNTRY...” by Chinua Achebe. Over the years, scholars and political analysts have written books narrating different versions of the civil war, from the remote to immediate causes of the bloody thirty months war. To some, these efforts are exaggerated accounts of the war; hence, they promote ethnic bigotry. The question is how national integration can be achieved amidst continued ethnic dichotomy in Nigeria. Chinua Achebe has used his literary prowess to express in varying degree; the quantum of disappointment experienced by Nigerians due to ethnic cleavages. It is conspicuous that ethnic diversity has spurred criticisms to and underplayed the clarion call for nationalism by Achebe’s memoir. This paper uses historical analysis with a synopsis of the book, “THERE WAS A COUNTRY”, in the discussion of Chinua Achebe’s conception of nationalism on account of the civil war. In this paper, I argue that the memories of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war disenchant the spirit of nationalism in Nigerians. They (the Nigerian masses), therefore, relying on the perception of their ethnic political elite are led to pursue ethnic nationalism. In otherwise, the masses’ understanding of nationalism is dictated and based on the definition given to it by the political leaders.*

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### Introduction: 'There was A Country'

The major themes in '*There was a Country*' are politics of nationhood, ethnic nationalism and national integration. These can be described as the totality of the causes of Nigeria-Biafra civil war. There is also the psychological trauma caused by the struggles and sufferings during and after the war. Furthermore, tradition versus modernity and the influence of colonialism were not left out by Achebe. The conflict between tradition and modernity as seen in '*There was a Country*' sets the pace for future conflicts that culminated in the civil war, as this struggle still exist in the conception and understanding of ethnic nations and Nigeria's nationhood within Nigeria as a multi-nation State. There had been hardly any discourse on the civil war that does not expose the psychological malaise suffered during the civil war as an enduring remnant of war. The bitterness in an ethnic group has deterred their conviction of true nationalism in Nigeria since the war. Therefore, these factors could be considered as some of the banes to national integration that emerged since the civil war. They constantly reaffirm our lack of confidence in the Nigerian nation and our sympathy to ethno-nationality.<sup>1</sup> All these have served as veritable encumbrances to Nigerianism and national integration, brewed from the civil war.

Consequently, when Achebe laments the political killings of Nigerians (mainly the massacre and pogrom unleashed on the Igbo people resident in the Northern Nigeria on 29 May and 29 June, 1966<sup>2</sup>): the bloody massacre at Asaba, Calabar, and Nsuka during the war, the starvation of Easterners during the war and the dispossession of Igbo people of their properties in Port Harcourt, Lagos, and other major cities; he re-echoes the cries of a psychologically wounded people. Through the description of such scenes, Achebe creates an imaginary scene of the traumatic horrors of the war, which lingers and disenchants nationalism. This approach enables the reader to appreciate the themes of the book, as it appeals to the reader's senses for caution so that such grievous terrorism will be avoided irrespective of the locale. To this end, Achebe lends his voice to "a dialogue which, despite all efforts often ends in a misunderstanding- a most frustrating dialogue" called the national question (Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1989). From what critics have done, Achebe's memoir has been interpreted out of this context due to deep rooted ethnic bias.

In appraising the views advanced by some reviewers of the book '*There was a Country*', there are indications that the controversy stirred up by Achebe is an endless debate not intended. But there is a course of direction. Achebe's poignant expressions have attracted different reactions, for instance in 'We Remember Differently', Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie wrote,

History and civics, as school subjects, function not merely to teach facts but to transmit more subtle things, like pride and dignity. My Nigerian education taught me much, but left gaping holes. I had not been taught to imagine my pre-colonial past with any accuracy, or pride, or complexity. And so Achebe's work, for me, transcended literature. ...his long-awaited memoir of the Nigerian-Biafra war, is

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<sup>1</sup> I have previously argued that it is the failure of the state to provide even development; power scramble among the political elite and gullibility of the masses, which make ethnicity prevalent in Nigeria. Ekhaton, O. G., (2012), 'Ethnicity and the Challenges of National Integration in Nigeria: 1960-1999' in *Issues and Trends in Nigeria's Development* edited by Edo, V. O. and Salami, E.F.K. Ibadan, John Archers Publishers, pp. 41-68.

<sup>2</sup> These killings were part of the reactions to the unification of the federal civil service with Decree 34, which the Northerners gave ethnic interpreted as 'Igboisation' of the Nigeria.

both sad and angry, a book by a writer looking back and mourning Nigeria's failures. I wish *THERE WAS A COUNTRY* had been better edited and more rigorously detailed in its account of the war. But these flaws do not make it any less seminal: an account of the most important event in Nigeria's history by Nigeria's most important storyteller (Adichie, 2013).

This implies that if Achebe were ethnocentric in 'There was a Country', it does not debar the credence of this memoir as one vital contribution to Nigeria's nationhood. Achebe reflects and mourns for a promising nation crippled by the failure of its leadership to integrate the people before and after the civil war, till date. He implores all Nigerians never to let it happen again by identifying and proffering solutions to the very complex and ambiguous nature of the phenomena epidemics in Nigeria's polity. However, other reviewers like, Kadiri S. called it '*...Igbo before others fairy tale*' and not a Nigeria tale for Nigerians (Kadiri, 2013). Also, Ishola Omodunni stated that, '*if there was a country, let them have it*'. He presents a mock challenge to the Igbo people to exist in isolation from other Nigerians (Ishola, 2012). But Chidi Nwaonu played the unbiased umpire; his criticism was more constructive not condemning or eulogising; he wrote,

Pedantic points of interest to a history buff but they are also telling omissions by a sensitive man of letters (sic) who not only abhorred war in its abstract but in its object and its reality and this war in particular which destroyed the culture and country he so revered. However despite the book's title I believe the country he most mourns for is not Biafra, but Nigeria. Not just the Nigeria of 2012 or the Nigeria of 1960 but also the Nigeria before Nigeria was Nigeria. For the customs, cultures and practices of the tribes and nations that inhabit the landmass known as Nigeria (Chidi, 2012).

In two occasions Achebe described the Nigeria this present generation did not have the opportunity to see. The description of that Nigeria by Chidi Nwaonu demonstrates a tranquillity of judgement which no other reviewer was able to show due to their ethnic bias. The Nigeria Achebe laments on could not be any other Nigeria than NIGERIA BEFORE NIGERIA WAS NIGERIA, that was the Nigeria he must certainly mourn for and not Biafra. First, he 'mourned for that Nigeria where the pace of social, economic and political transformations were incredible', ushering in the dawn of a new era. Second, he mourned for the Nigeria elevated from a colonized country to an independent nation with the most optimism for transformations as the jewel of the British Empire and symbol of hope for Africa. These were because his generation 'had great expectations for the nation, but with the civil war; failed leadership; corruption and ethnicity all the hopes, everything about Nigeria had to be rethought. Nigeria had never remained the same again! (Achebe, 2012: 39; 92 and 226).

It is explicit in my opinion that Achebe's message, in 'There Was a Country', is not a call to an ethnic nationality or the pro-ethnic nationalist, but for the unborn future generation of Nigerians and to the true nationalist. It is a message that a non-ethnically biased mind has to advocate. Using his personal story as a conveyor, Achebe sends a warning and a call for peace, to all ethnic supremacists; Biafra nostalgists and Igbo everyone-hates-us-ists; Yoruba justification-ists, and tribal chauvinists; Northern oligarchists etc, in Nigeria (Chidi, 2012), who are making national integration a delusion for true Nigerians that believe in the nation.

These ethnically biased Nigerians spread the primordial ideas of ethnic nationalism among the tenets of nationalism and nationhood. They agitate for state creation so that only they have access to political power; and ask for resource control only to enrich their caste and kin. While those against state creation and resource control have continued to corruptly siphon the wealth of the nation. So Achebe tells the future Nigerians how, after amalgamation and before independence, Nigeria was a land of great hope and progress and the jewel of the British Empire, where everyone could live anywhere. He writes on how Nigeria can be great with patriotic leaders that are accountable to the people and how to purge corruption in public offices, so that nation building will be paramount to all and national integration realised (Achebe, 2012: 243-253).

Since 1914, when Nigeria was created, the nation have been recreated and consolidated in all ramification of national life. In the process, it was the first African nation to experience a modern or post-independence civil war. This was as a result of the aspiration for self-determination by an ethnic nationality and the government's desire to protect and maintain Nigeria's territorial integrity and sovereignty as a state irrespective of the diversity inherited from the British colonial masters (Alapiki, 2005: 45-65; Campbell, 2011: 1). Over the years, the haunting memories from scars of those bloody experiences pose a great challenge to fostering national integration, patriotic nationalism and modern nationhood in Nigeria. Also, the civil war has been argued to be a catalyst and not a bane to Nigeria's nationhood. To some Nigerians, the war should have been the furnace that forged the iron pillars of our unity- that is, our nationhood. What then can be done to change the perception of ethnic extremists and apologists from appealing to the sordid past? Or what should be done to raise true patriotic Nigerians? The solutions to these questions are the very essence for an acceptable definition of the term 'nation'.

To this end, this paper shall take a cursory look at the evolution of nationalism and Nigeria nationalists; it will examine the concepts of nation and nationalism with a focus on the national question of Nigeria. It shall attempt to examine some cardinal relics of the Nigerian civil wars, which were the causes of ethnic aspersion that inhibit the perceptions of nationhood, nationalism and integration in Nigeria. The paper identifies some of the psychological effects of the war and emphasizes that ethnicity has led to several altercations invariably altering national development, finally, it concludes that these events are and should be regarded as lessons for national integration.

### **Nationalism and the Evolution of Nigeria Nationalists**

Before 1900, traditional nation-states in Nigeria interrelate and interact through shared socio-economic, political and religious associations, called 'inter-group relations' or inter-national relations in Diplomatic Studies. Within a period of hundred years, 1860-1960, there were three episodes that shaped our history as a people (Osadolor, 2007: 89-110; Isichie, 1976: 119-240). The first was the collapse of the structures of inter-ethnic social intercourse due to the infiltration of western influence. Secondly, there was the rise of and struggle by traditional nationalist to protect and preserve their political suzerainty. This was followed by modern nationalism, which resisted colonial rule and continued to slate neo-colonialism after independence. The third was the introduction of Western education, spread of religious institutions and the enlistment of Africans- Nigerians in the British army during the World Wars. These events left undying legacies for the emergence of Nigeria nationhood and nationalism. The bequests of each era were critical nationalist ideas that form the sort of

character of the nation Nigeria became; they motivated the several anti-colonial nationalist struggles leading to our political sovereignty in Nigeria, on October 1, 1960.

The main legacies of Western education and religion in Nigeria could be identified as the increase in the educated, which were the driving force of anti-colonial nationalism. Secondly, there was the promotion of inter-tribal co-existence or national integration through schools and churches, indifferent of the colonial ideology to 'subvert indigenous cultures'. The missionary schools provided a platform for cross cultural interaction. This does not in any way imply that the colonisers intended to foster unity. The purpose of establishing educational institutions by the missionaries and colonial government have been well explained by Elisabeth Isichie, when she contended that,

To the mission, the schools were an invaluable way to influence the young in their impressionable years, and government subsidies a precious supplement to their meagre budgets. The government needed a large cadre of Africans who were literate and numerate to staff the railways, postal services, police force, and fill a large number of clerical posts, the expatriate commercial firms, likewise, needed the same type of personnel. It was cheaper to subsidise mission schools than to start their own.... (Isichie, 1976: 185)

As a result, the missionaries backed by government subvention established a number of schools across the nation (Bola, 1995: 8 and Isichie, 1976:185-186), for the provision of skilled manpower. Contrary to the malign intent of the founders and funders of these schools, Nigerians made two landmark benefits from it. First was the integration of the different ethnic groups and the other was the evolution of nationalism, started by the graduates of these schools. For instance, the Igbo secondary school at Kano was, according to Isichie, citing Coleman's *Nigeria Background to Nationalism*, "a centre of enlightenment for the children of all Nigerian groups in that education-starved northern city" (Isichie, 1976:188). Furthermore, she notes that 'the admission policy of Yaba Higher College gave preferences to the products of government colleges; hence, Igbo students from Umuahia Government College were admitted. Also, the opening of University College Ibadan in 1948 was another apple opportunity for Nigerians, from all parts of the nation, to acquire University education at home and come together. In essence, education during the colonial period bridged the gap between the different ethnic groups; it was a catalyst to nationalism, before and after independence.

Analytically, the colonial education brought into being opportunity for enlightenment among Nigerians. Before independence, they formed political parties with the aim to 'develop a united nation out of the conglomeration of peoples who inhabit Nigeria.' They established newspapers that help spread shared beliefs and experiences, and stirred nationalism all over the country. In contradiction to traditional nationalism, modern nationalism was pursued by heterogeneous people. It is, therefore, my submission that if there were no western education, Nigerians would have been less conscious in modern nationalism and politics because the founders of the first generation political parties (the Nigerian National Democratic Party by Herbert Macaulay, a Surveyor and Nigeria Youth Movement by Dr. J. C. Vaughn, a medical practitioner, Ernest Ikoli and Samuel A. Akinsanyan, both journalists) were educated Nigerians (Uwuchue, 1981).

### **Perception of Nation and Nationalism in Nigeria**

Many Nigerian *elite* have been engaged in the debate on whether Nigeria is a nation? Should a Nigerian be loyal to his/her ethnic group of origin before the federation or vice versa? Defining nationalism as a feeling of agitation inspired by cultural parameters like: history and ancestry, language, traditions, religion and racial affinity, suitably answers these questions. Unless one has contrary evidence, a people, who share any or all of those aforementioned features in common, had always and will in most instances, pursue collective social; economic and political interest for the benefit or betterment of members of the group, particularly in an ethnic nation. Adekunle described nationalism as a nation centred ideology, adding that it is an instrument of nation building through which national aspirations, values and ideas are expressed and inculcated, ethnocentrism are suppressed and national loyalty generated (Adekunle, 2002). By implication, where two or more ethnic nations that share common values; aspirations and ancestry, pursuing same together they are a nation. Like the Yoruba people have different *ethnies* - Egba, Ijebu, Ondo, Ado, etc - within the Yoruba nation; the Edo people has Benin, Esan, Urhobo, Itsekiri, etc.

In view of the above, the definition of a nation by Montserrat Guibernau (2004) as ‘a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself’, thus satisfies the positioning of pre-modern nations, across Nigeria. For the purpose of this paper, therefore, a nation is an *ethnie*,<sup>3</sup> which in its broad sense is a cultural community differed from the State that is often a plural political community. Thus, a nation can exist without a state (if it has no political sovereignty) in comparison with a nation-state, which has the qualities of a sovereign State and exercises same within international community. But nations cannot operate without national identities and symbols, therefore, they use ethno-symbolism to express and inculcate values and ideas, while nation-states are characterised by the use of national symbols. These national symbols are examples of shared national culture. Hence, Monteserrat submits that “attributes sustaining the belief in common ancestry are key to national identity and they foster a sense of belonging which generally engenders loyalty and social coherence among fellow-nationals....” These are qualities of modern nations like Nigeria, which are sovereignties within the international community.

Nigeria has a multifaceted definition of national loyalty and national identity for and by its citizenry. According to Ojukwu (1989), “the granting and accession to independence was not an end but rather the beginning... of the journey to nationhood”. Where has Nigeria missed it all? We are told that during a national discourse, Awolowo argued that ‘for Nigeria to move forward and progressively as a nation there was no need to consider our inter-ethnic differences and cultural background’, but contrary Ahmadu Bello insisted that ‘we must understand our differences as diverse ethnic-nations to build the nation Nigeria’. Both leaders were right in possessing their own perception of Nigeria, but these perceptions did not coincide because while the latter held the belief in evolution of a modern nation from existing ethnic nations, the former thought of establishing a modern nation, since it never existed, without recourse to traditions. This kind of divergence cannot build a nation. Where common values are not identified national integration is not attainable.

Knowing there are diverse nations within the Nigeria's multi-nation-state, the most preferred conception of a nation will be to state that ‘a nation is the prevalent grouping that can

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<sup>3</sup> The term *ethnie* was popularised by Anthony D. Smith. He defined a nation as in an *ethnie*, that is, a community of common myths and memories. Smith’s suggestion was that pre-modern *ethnies* form modern nations because there is continuity between both. As such Nigeria’s nation-states evolve out of pre-modern nations.



commands a person's allegiance because of shared affinity; it is a grouping in which the populace are united based on shared sense of belongingness; shared language of communication and transmission of cultural values; common origin frequently reassured by their historical antecedents and reality, within a geo-political territory. All these attributes qualify Nigeria as a nation without annihilating the component ethnic nations, but rather working for their common good. Therefore, Nigeria is not a nation, but a nation-state comprising many nations (a multi-nation state). The spirit of true nationalism which elite, like Achebe, seeks to bequeath is conspicuously expressed in the words of Ojukwu, *"I am a Nigerian. But I am also an Igbo. It is my being Igbo that guarantees my Nigerianness.... Consequently, my Nigerianness shall not be at the expense of my Igboness"*. To actualise Nigeria's nationhood project within such context, Ojukwu opined that there should be established institutions and national enterprise that inspire nationhood with legislation to encourage nationalism as well as repudiate acts that are inimical to nationhood – unpatriotic activities. This implies that for the nation-state to command the loyalty of its nationals there must be established national identities and symbols of nationhood (Ojukwu, 1989).

From the foregoing, nationalism is non-existent without a nation, just as national institutions are important for promoting nationalism, there must be common national identity to promote that sense of belongingness. Until, when there are common identities and symbols, nationalism would not stir national integration. Therefore, national integration is an art of creating a balance in the synergy between two or more incongruent elements to produce a common congruent element, that is, an identity. It is a situation, where togetherness is not determined merely by skin colour, language or cultural affinity but by shared belief in co-existence and nationhood. It will be observed that during the civil war, Biafra's national symbols and identities were indigenous and used to inculcate nationalism in the Igbo people. This must have inspired the change of Nigeria's National Anthem nine years after the war to 'Arise O, Compatriots' for purpose of instilling the ideas of comradeship and patriotism in succeeding generations of Nigerians (Ekhatior, 2012). Hence, producing patriotic nationalist and realising national integration are possible within the 'Nation-State', Nigeria.

### **Ethnic Nationalism and the 'Blame Game' in Nigeria**

Whatever has been written about the civil war, by Achebe in his memoir and his critics or reviewers, are critical exposition of facts not mere cynicism due to ethnicity. Whether the different issues are hoax or not, there is a popular maxim, which states, *"in every rumour there is an iota of truth"*. Since the Nigeria-Biafra war ended in 1970, there have been an out pour of literature in as part of efforts to put in written historical perspective the events, starting with colonial political developments to the post-independence political crises, which precipitated the bloody civil war. One would expect that these accounts are synergised as Nigeria's history to be taught for the reconstruction and development of the nation. Pathetically, all civil war literatures have been criticised by ethnic nationalist playing the 'blame game'. The questions that kept stirring such frantic emotions are: what events led to the war? Who precipitated the immediate outbreak of the war? Why was the war prolonged? Why were children starved and allowed to die of hunger, amidst abundant humanitarian aids? Whereas veritable historical facts are bound that answer these questions, most pro-Hausa-Fulani, pro-Igbo and pro-Yoruba ethno-centrists will not refrain from their primordial ethno-political rivalry. These ethnic conflicts and political rivalry have remained to be the major challenges to national integration; meanwhile, national integration is a veritable prerequisite to nation building in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria.

The first issue that stirred present accusation and counter accusation was the perspective by a personality of Professor Chinua Achebe's calibre. In his view, Chidi Nwaonu (2012) asserted that *'any book written, from the perspective of a Biafran particularly one as high profile as Achebe will elicit a spirited response, it would be equally depressing if it didn't'*. He further described Achebe as 'a sensitive man of letters who abhorred war in its abstract, its object and its reality particularly because this war was what destroyed the culture and country (Nigeria), which he so much revered.' Damola Awoyokun (2013) did not subscribe to that view; he argued that one cannot claim abhorrence of war after playing a leading role as a roving ambassador to the aggressor. He opined that,

What the tribes that constitute Nigeria need to learn for the unity of the country is the democratization of their tribal loyalties. And that inevitably leads to gradual detribalization of consciousness which makes it possible to treat a person as an individual and not basically a member of another tribe.

Interesting as it may sounds, one expects Awoyokun to toe the line of this sacrosanct ideology that he most excellently suggests at the onset of his review. Instead, he deviated and treated Achebe as an Igbo. His criticism was stuffed with obvious elements of ethnic sentiments, thus this prolific scribe wrote without a penchant of his counsel, that:

Instead of writing the book as a writer who is Igbo, Achebe wrote the book as an Igbo writer ... All the places that should alarm the moral consciousness of any writer, Achebe is either indifferent to or dismisses them outright because the victims are not his people. However, in every encounter that shows Igbos being killed or resented by Nigerians, or by the Yoruba in particular, Achebe intensifies the spotlight, deploying stratospheric rhetoric, amassing quotes from foreign authors with further elaborations in endnotes to show he is not partial. Achebe calls upon powerfully coercive emotive words and phrasings to dignify what is clearly repugnant to reason (Awoyokun, 2013)

In democratising tribal loyalty, Awoyokun should have underplayed the character of an Igbo, Achebe, and address the euphemistic expressions, in 'There was a Country', which stirs emotions rather than teach history. According to Mazi Chike Chidilue, 'Awoyokun did not meet the mark of adequate intellectual depth and strength to grapple the labour of Hercules'. Arguing that there is no difference between 'a writer who is Igbo and an Igbo writer', except that, in his opinion, the Igbo writer may be said to be one who writes in Igbo language. Chike contended that Awoyokun was guilty 'as an accomplice to lies' for also playing down accounts of Igbo victimization during the war in his review, like the latter said Achebe did in 'There was a Country'. It is pathetic to note that since Nigeria's independence, this 'blame game' beclouds the sense of nationalism of many Nigerians with ethnicity and malignity. It destroys the fabrics of our nationhood and breeds social ill like corruption and political instability. We shall analyse some aspects of our nation building antecedents where ethno-politics have taken hold of nationalism and national integration.

Secondly, the issues that stir the 'blame game' are the emergence of ethnic politics and the structure of the post-independence government. Prior to independence the political parties that were formed collapse due to the pressure from the united anti-colonial nationalist force to



ethnic base. There were re-organisations throughout the different constitutional processes, especially between 1945 and 1960, but by independence, they were all national in form and rooted in ethno-regional political ideology and scramble for power. The *raison d'être* for the political manoeuvring as stated by Isichie (1976) was that "Nigeria nationalists and British politicians and administrators did not disagree about the ultimate goal, but they differ in their estimate of how rapidly the goal should be attained, the form independence should take (a federal or unitary constitution) and the role to be played by the traditional rulers". The implication for the future was that in a federal state with inherent imbalances and regional political parties, none could sway the realm of power alone. Osaghae (1998) stated that there was the inevitable need for an alliance between two, while the third will be an opposition. The only way a single party could rule was for the Northern People's Congress (NPC) to win all seats in the North. Therefore, after the 1959 election, the independence political arrangements appear equitable, but Ademoyega (1981) describes these arrangements as a time-bomb buried in the foundation of a political edifice.

Accordingly, "the patterns and directions of post-independence politics were established in the short-lived first republic, and this has made it the reference point for discussing the country's political problems and searching for solutions" (Osaghae, 1998: 31). The coalition between the NPC and NCNC to form a national government with AG in opposition in the first republic was the product of ethno-political rivalry and discord. This has been also reproduced for the past 53 years of post-independence in Nigeria. Kadiri (2013) in his critic of 'There was a Country' titled, *Achebe's Igbo Before Others Fairy Tale* made the ensuing allusions, that: following the 1959 election results: NPC – 148, AG – 75, and NCNC – 89, Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo led AG offered to form a coalition government with the Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe led NCNC. On December 20, 1959, the NPC-NCNC entered a coalition agreement. This decision to shift alliance to the North was presumed to be a betrayer by Westerners and desire by the NCNC leaders to take advantage of the educational lethargy of the NPC leadership and control the government. He further asserts that in contradiction to the views peddled by Achebe, Nnamdi Azikiwe's NCNC never regarded Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa as jihadist in 1959 when they enter a coalition and if religion was important, Azikiwe should have chosen AG for a coalition government. Kadiri was engulfed by ethnicity in defence of Awolowo's refusal to join in any coalition government. His argument was a contradiction of Awolowo's account in one of his treatise *'Adventure in Power Two: The Travails of Democracy and the Rule of Law'*. The account by the political sage was that the AG sought to destroy the basis of the feudal concept of Northerners. They enlightened the Northerners that none was born to rule except those freely elected by the people. These earned AG, especially Awolowo, the wrath of the entire feudal hierarchy (Awolowo, 1987: 2-3). But Kadiri stated that:

Awolowo declared that taking part in the Federal Government should not be based on personal and tribal interest but on national interest. He emphasised that appointed Ministers, top civil servants and directors of government corporations were to serve the entire nation and not a specific tribe. Awolowo based his refusal to join the Federal Government on the feudalistic and reactionary characters of the NPC leaders. Awolowo stated categorically that if the Action Group Party decided to partake in the Federal Government he would not accept any post including that of the Deputy Prime Minister that he was being offered

By this, Kadiri has affirmed the views of Osaghae (1998), who stated that the NCNC-NPC coalition was because leaders of both parties had close links since the 1950s. And NPC leaders were not comfortable with the anti-north and radical inclinations of Awolowo led AG. Also, the NCNC allied with Northerners to dissuade them from seceding, avoid deepening the bitter competition between Igbo and Yoruba and out of pressure from the western supporters of the NCNC (Isichie, 1976: 230 and Osaghae, 1998: 33). As stated earlier, further political coalitions followed swiftly, these end up causing one crisis and the other. The politicians exploited ethnic differences until the first republic collapsed, while the military came to power and continued the malaise of ethnic nationalism.

Just as the cause of the political pandemic of Nigeria has been traced to the first republic, the civil war, also, had its roots in the first military coup. It is imperative to note that the NPC-NCNC coalition was one of the avenues for the easterners to emerge at the echelon of power. Also, it set the stage for the realignment of views by Awolowo and Azikiwe, following the population census crisis just as it precipitated the formation of political alliances towards the 1964 general election. After the December 1964 elections, the power struggle between Azikiwe and Tafawa Balewa was in reality between Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA). This tussle was extended to the exercise of control over the military.

The army became involved in Nigeria's politics for three reasons; the first was the politicisation of the institution by introducing the quota system to balance its lopsided representativeness (Osaghae, 1998: 55). The army were being deployed by politicians for political uses, like in the workers strike and Tiv riots. In separate accounts, Ben Gbuile and Adewale Ademoyega, reveals that there were plans by the NNA to use the army for a callous political motive against UPGA loyalist in Western region, which was confirmed by the sudden restructuring within the army. Thirdly, the military intervened to rid Nigeria of 'political profiteers, swindlers, the men 'who seek bribe and ten per cent'. They were determined to disunite Nigerians so that they remain in administrative centre; these men were tribalists and nepotists' (Isichie, 1976: 243). Unfortunately for Nigeria, successive military regimes have used these reasons continuously as their excuses to usurp political power. As long as they remain in power, they abused the rule of law, suspended the constitution, and entrenched authoritarianism through obnoxious decrees and corruption.

In the analysis of the first military intervention in Nigeria, the ethnic character of the coup plotters have been most trumpeted because the military officers that planned and executed the plot were mostly Igbo officers. It is argued Ironsi had the unique opportunity to savage the nation from the ethnic mess; instead, he relied on Igbo advisers, banned political parties, and introduced a Unitary Government with Decree 34, on May 24, 1966, despite oppositions from the Northerners. Sternly opposed to the unification was Hassan Kastina, who from his expression, inherited this opposition from his father. According to Omotoso, in opposition to these accusations Kastina said,

'on the contrary, such deployment will lead to confrontation. I remember my father telling me once of the reaction of one of the Emirs to the suggestion from a British officer that Southern District officers be posted to the North. The Emir said something like we do not wish those who did not conquer us to rule over us (Kole Omotoso, 1988: 253).

Furthermore, Ironsi left the most pressing issues unattended. For instance, the military officers involved in the coup were not brought to book; Awolowo and other political prisoners were not released as well. From May to September, 1966, the nation was in state of serious pandemonium. This misperception, Isichie (1976) stated, was caused by fears, by rumours and counter-rumours.

The pogrom and massacre preceding the civil war were concisely analyzed and depicted by Achebe as a calculated and organised plot to annihilate the Igbo people. One is left with no choice than to imagine how rabid Igbo nationalism makes Achebe to conclude that 'the one thing Nigerians will always certainly united against is the Igbo ethnic group'. In contradiction, Achebe (2012: 74-76) subsequently concedes that "the Igbo as a group is not without its flaw... there is a strand in contemporary Igbo behaviour that can offend by its noisy exhibitionism and disregard for humility and quietness". But in reality the crises and killings that led to the civil war were fallout of the bitter 'politicisation of ethnicity, feigned by the corrupt *elite*', who encourage the gullible members of their ethnic group to cast aspersion on other ethnic nationals. Therefore, one would better conclude that the civil war started as a result of the coup and counter-coup led by dissident military officers against corrupt politicians and military leaders. With support from some undisciplined army officers the unfortunate incident was hijacked by berserk civilians. These officers engaged in callous killings everywhere, due to the failure of the January 15, 1966 coup. So, when Nigerian civilians, the political *elite*, blame Army Officers for hijacking political power, the later accuse them of mismanaging the affairs of the nation.

Thirty months after Nigeria became a republic the nation was at war, which lasted for thirty months. The war formerly started as a police action declared by the Head of State to arrest Ojukwu and his ilk, gravitated to a campaign to crush the rebellious Ojukwu and his collaborators. It became a full scale war when on 9 August, 1967 (Forbsyth, 1977: 118) Biafra forces commandeered by Brigadier Victor Banjo, overran the Mid-west state and even occupied Ore town with an intention to move farther to Lagos. In retaliation the Federal forces made a chase against the People's Army of Biafra, with attack from all fronts – via Nsuka and Calabar towns, they encircled the Biafrans in the East-central state. Amidst obvious defeat on the Biafra side and advantage on the Nigeria side, why did the war linger on?

Reminiscing on the civil war one finds different ethnic nationals in Nigeria engage in accusation and counter-accusation over activities that elongated the war. The first factor for analysis is the 'power tussle' between Gowon and Ojukwu. From July, 1966 to January, 1967, Ojukwu refused to recognise Gowon as the new Head of State; he demanded that an official statement be made on the whereabouts of Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons Ojukwu boycotted several meeting with the Supreme Military Council and rejected the Decree Number 8 to implement the Aburi accord. This decree made Nigeria a loose federation with a weak centre, but Ojukwu wanted a confederation as stated in his address titled '*On Aburi We Stand*'. On May 27, 1967 twelve states were created by Gowon; according to Isichie it was 'a sincere attempt to prevent further ethnic rivalry'. In response Ojukwu met with Eastern region consultative assembly, same day, and declared the independent Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 (Ben, 2012). The recalcitrant nature and power quest of Ojukwu have made him to turn down all overtures for peaceful settlement before and during the war. According to Achebe

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<sup>4</sup> National Archive Ibadan (NAI), CWC/1/1/2: Aburi Report (1967), Meeting of the Supreme Military Council of Nigeria held at Peduase Lodge, Aburi, Ghana, on 4th and 5th of January,

describing Ojukwu's personality, he wrote, "*those of us who knew Ojukwu did not harbour this sentiment.... Ojukwu's background and temperament, for good or ill, influenced the decisions and choices that he made throughout the crisis and during much of what many believe was 'a personal war and collision of ego' with Gowon*" (Achebe, 2012: 120). Many ethnic loyalists still believe that Ojukwu was fighting for the self-determination and freedom of the Igbo people. Those who live with similar or such ethnic chauvinism are myopic supporters of politicians, who parade such blind ambition to charade their ruthless craze for power in our present political sphere.

Nowadays, politicians appeal to ethnic sentiments to recruit supporters, bodyguards and thugs. These sycophants work only for the enthronement in power of ethnic politicians after which they are relegated to the background and exploited by the same ethnic *elite*. These supporters and their fellow downtrodden masses are the dispossessed of the earth (Agbasiere, 1999: 119). They do not enjoy any improvement in standard of living, the spoils of office does not translate into adequate, efficient and effective basic social amenities. Blindfolded by ethnic propagandas, the masses blame other ethnic groups for their woes. During the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, some Igbo people re-christened Biafra as *Bia na furu*,<sup>5</sup> meaning 'come and suffer' this idea was not popular because it was a taboo for anyone within the Eastern region to be anti-Biafra, but they that were myopic about their ethnic nationalist struggle did not share this sentiment. Rather than calling their ethnic political leaders to order, the Igbo people have continued blaming the Nigeria government for the civil starvation of the Easterners, political marginalisation of Igbos and socio-economic underdevelopment of Eastern Nigeria.

The most controversial debate stirred by Achebe's 'There was a Country' is due to his reference to Awolowo as the mastermind of the starvation the Igbo people suffered during the war. There are different sides to the argument; the 'blame the victim' side, led by Yoruba 'justification-ist' and the anti-annihilation side led by Igbo 'marginalisation-ist'. The former attributes all the causes of the war and the starvation to the Igbo leaders. In their opinion it was Ojukwu's refusal to allow food and relief materials through a land root and selfish insistence on airlift, to enable him and his cohort Hank Wharton to supply more arms to Biafra, which caused the starvation, hunger and death of Biafrans. The latter argues that the starvation and hunger were not accident of history, misadventure due to bad strategies or inevitable by-products of war, but a calculated and deliberately executed integral part of Nigeria's war policy, (Forbsyth, 1977:195-240) designed by Awolowo and implemented by Gowon and his military commanders to exterminate the Igbo people. Whatever the arguments may be, our understanding of English grammar tells us that when the first two syllables from both words (Gen-o-cide and Su-i-cide) are removed you have the suffix *-cide*. Therefore, it should be agreed that there was a *-cide* that is 'killing'. Neither the belligerent nor the beleaguered can earn any glory from the inhumanity. This is why there is a loud outcry against the present spate of religious and ethnic conflicts across the nation.

Another issue taken up by these perpetrators of the blame game was the pursuant of principles of self-determination and struggle for secession versus the protection of minority rights and preservation of 'One Nigeria'. The Secessionist Biafra leader, Ojukwu in his declaration of Biafra Republic on 30th May, 1967, said

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<sup>5</sup> Mr Onyia, 64years, Launderer. He hails from Enugu and lives in Benin City; he was interviewed at his residence on 5th of April, 2013.

“Conscious of the supreme authority of Almighty God over all mankind, of your duty to yourselves and prosperity; Aware that you can no longer be protected in your life and in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria; believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves... hereby solemnly proclaim... an independent sovereign state of the name and title of ‘The Republic of Biafra’...” (Ben, 2012: 85-87)

Driven by the desire and calls to fight for their life, property and future independence, many Easterners made self-sacrifice to contribute to the war and they fought with desperation. The argument for their quest to leave Nigeria was that the nation was no longer inhabitable for them. Since they were not welcomed as members of the Nigerian fold, they decided to exercise their right to separate existence as a nation (*The Nigerian Observer Newspaper*, July 11, 1968: 1-12). Biafra’s strategies for realising the vision of self-determination were based on inspiring ethnic nationalism. The national anthem adopted for use was a poem Azikwe had written on Onitsha describing it as the ‘land of the rising sun’. Renowned Easterners like Christopher Okigbo, Richard Ihetu (Dick the Tiger), etc. went to the battle field, while Achebe, Kenneth Dike, Njoku, Azikwe served as diplomats. Their leadership disposition encouraged many peasants to join the Biafra army fighting on bare foot with no weapons. To achieve their aims they resort to fighting at every front and with all they had at their disposal. At the end, the ‘anti-annihilation-ist’ accused the Nigerian force of massacre in Asaba, Ogoja, Nsuka, Calabar, etc. On the Nigerian side, the Federal government claimed its mission was to preserve the nation as an indissoluble entity. Adding that, the case against the Republic of Biafra was the domination of the ethnic minorities in the East and Mid-west. The ethnic minorities in question also have a right to freedom of self-determination to be part of Nigeria. In this case the ‘blame the victim’ side claim that Ojukwu and his ‘Nnewi Clique’ did not obtain the general consent of the not less than five million non-Igbo minorities in the former Eastern region. They argued that Ojukwu and his cohorts, representing about seven million Igbo people, denied the non-Igbo minorities the right to self-determination by not consulting them legally (*The Nigerian Observer Newspaper*, 1968). In his nationwide broadcast on September 2, 1967, Gowon informed Nigerians that the basis of fighting was to keep Nigeria federation one. The only alternative to that, he said, is the emergence of “domination of one region by another, one ethnic group by another, or one national by another” (Ani, 1967: 58).

It is, therefore, imperative to note that both sides were involved in the bombing of places where unarmed civilians dwell. In the Mid-west, Biafra forces plundered peoples’ lands and farms, conscripted young men into their army, abused and raped their women (Ikuomola, 2009). At Asaba and its environs Nigeria forces killed civilians with the allegation that they were serving as mercenaries to Biafra. It has become apparent that all atrocities the Nigeria forces committed were quickly classified as a means to curtail Biafra rebels that infiltrated the midst of civilians. One of the challenges of nationalism in Nigeria today is that the political elite are advancing this blame game in order to gain ethnic support for their political ambitions. Hence, the legacies of the civil war as could be deduced from this reminiscence is the proliferation of ethnic nationalism fifty (50) years after: 1967 - 2017.

### **Post War Rehabilitation and Nation Building**

The ‘Nigeria-Biafra war’ was fought with three prong strategies: the diplomatic, the psychological and the military (Abubakar Atofarati, 1992). Years after the civil war Nigerians



have not fully recovered from the nightmare created by its psychological devastation. Physical injuries and scars that could last a lifetime have been commonly identified as effects of war on soldiers without a focus on the psychological effects. According to Stan Tian, a psychologist, not until the late 20th century there was no focus on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in many soldiers and victims of war (Stan Tian, 2013). It is pertinent to emphasise that after the Nigeria-Biafra war there were inadequate immediate or long term focused palliative to the psychological trauma that Nigerians, who experienced the war, had suffered during and after. A recent study by Ikuomola A. Daniel reveals that children born, by soldier's rape victims, during the war do suffer from stigmatisation in the society. Another team of experts comprising Richard Akresh, Sonia Bhalotra, Marinella Leone and Una Osili carried out an investigation of the effects of Nigeria-Biafra war, 1967-70, on adolescents who were victims of the war. Their most salient findings were: that adult stature is more sensitive to the environment in adolescence than it is at younger ages; that the starvation, hunger, malnutrition and death experienced by most Biafran's children were a determinant of their adult status. They conclude that adolescent growth mediates the relationship between childhood stunting and adult stature, productivity and self-esteem (Ikuomola, 2009 and Richard, A., Sonia, B., Marinella, L., and Una, O., 2011). Some of the factors that exposed the Easterners to severe psychological trauma include: the claim that they precipitated the war, as it has been mentioned earlier; also, the Eastern region (South-east) was a battle front and civilians' exposure to war horror was so rampant. What wreaks more devastation was the hunger, malnutrition, starvation or death of children – teenage and adolescents, during the war and the maltreatment of civilians by both Nigeria and Biafra forces rather than protecting them (Adichie, 2006) Psychologists say that these factors reduce the post war productivity of war victims. These had created a mental conviction, among some of these Nigerians that their traumas were as result of the ethnic group they belong. They become ethnic nationalist despising national integration.

After the war, the federal government began a reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation process with the slogan 'No Victor No Vanquish'. First, there were reconstruction of the Niger Bridge, rebuilding of the University of Nsuka and other government parastatals in and outside the Eastern region. These were laudable efforts but they did not have direct impact on the improvement of the farmer(s)' wellbeing. The men whose compound and farms were raised to ashes did not feel the impact of the reconstruction programme. If houses were not built for them, fertilizers and farm implements or machines could have had direct positive effects on their lives. In Lagos, the Federal government established a Rehabilitation Centre at Oshodi to provide treatment for war veterans. The proximity of the centre to the Eastern region, where it could have been very effective and meaningful to the nation's re-building process was a proof of its inefficiency. According to Forbsyth, all the processes of reconstruction were fraught with corruption. Ukpabi Asika's mismanagement of the East Central State is a good example of the post war corruption until 1975 (Forbsyth, 1977: 284). Wide spread corrupt practices also hindered the efforts towards nation building in post war Nigeria.

On reconciliation, the Easterners were re-absorbed into the federal civil services and the Nigeria army. There were no war tribunal to try the soldier and civilians for war crimes. Commenting on the moves of the military to integrate Nigeria despite the crises, John De St. Jorre stated that "when history takes a longer view of Nigeria's civil war it will be shown that while the black man has little to teach us about making war, he has a real contribution to offer



in making peace”.<sup>6</sup> To all nook and cranny of the nation, the Igbo people gradually returned with the slogan ‘*Akareja*’, meaning ‘he who has gone away must return’ (Forbsyth, 1977: 286). As an incentive to fostering the reconciliation process government offered to pay the sum of twenty pounds to civil servants, artisans and businessmen after the war. Those affected by this financial policy has never ceased to express their heartfelt contempt towards this monetary deprivation, which they claimed was designed to economically marginalise them. Also, some others lamented the sales, occupation or destruction of their houses outside the Eastern region, like in Port Harcourt, Lagos, Ibadan and Kano. On rehabilitation the federal government actions suggest a reliance on post war slogans: ‘No Victor, No Vanquish, 3R-reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation and One Nigeria’ without any concrete strategy for psychological rehabilitation. Being a people familiar with media propaganda during war, for a long period, the Igbo people saw no meaning in the idea of unity as broadcasted by the media. The post-war rehabilitation policy left the psychologically devastated masses with their low morale to continue in their post-war life.

Hitherto, the relics of the civil war are most obvious in the social attitude of Igbo people and their responses to post-war political and economic crises in Nigeria. One of the socio-cultural impacts of the war is the strengthening of Town Union Association and ‘August Meeting’ among the Igbo people. Such town meetings and associations have grown stronger and proliferated all over the nation after the war. Another very obvious effect of the war on the Easterners is the common reaction and response to post war political crisis in Nigeria. For instance, the Igbo People during the post-election violence of June 12, 1993, spontaneously embarked on mass migration into their enclave from all parts of the nation. The civil war experience had taught the Igbo people not to wait to be caught in political, ethnic and religious crisis before they run for safety. This attitude could be related to the call from Eastern leaders of thought after the pogrom of 1966. Though, there is a gradual change of attitude, as a result of advancement in information and communication technology, this psyche is an expression of their conviction that nowhere in Nigeria could be safer for the Igbo people more than the ‘Udi plateau’. It is on this ground that a post war (including the present ethnic and religious crisis) psychological rehabilitation is most desirous for Nigerians. The absence of this feigns ethnic nationalism (Igbo-marginalisation-ists, Yoruba-justification-ists, Hausa/Fulani-Oligarch-ists and Minority-segregation-ists).

## Conclusion

A Machiavellian principle states “*Men will not look at things as they really are, but as they wish them to be – are ruined*” (Niccollo Machiavelli). Accordingly, Nigeria emerged from the civil war as one nation on paper but on the ground the nation was highly divided with several ethnic loyalists, who believed in ethnic propaganda that has remained a huge hindrance to nation building. Our nationalist became ethnocentric and the political *elite* propagandist. The post-independence nationalist did not see the challenges of the nation as it were, but as they wished it should be explained. Sequel to this, successive government had plunged the nation into an economic, political and religious crisis. The dream of a Nigeria assured of political stability for socio-economic development had become a forlorn hope. An apparent repetition of the pre-civil war ethno-political crisis has engulfed the nation in a more draconian mode – Boko Haram, backed by terrorist agents from the Arab world. The only way Nigeria’s political class address the pertinent issues like: corruption, falling standard of education,

<sup>6</sup> As St. Jorre has rightly identified in his story of the Nigeria Civil war, the west and the international community is bereft of a policy equitable in termination of war

destructions of lives and property and above all failed institutions, is to blame or condemn those in power at all levels for administrative ineptitude. Rather than advance pragmatic strategies that could address these predicaments. Their only visible practical solution is, therefore, power grab. So, it is evident that most post-war crises and the Boko Haram menace are regenerated by ethnicity and the failure of our politicians to learn from the civil war experiences and build a healthy nation- Nigeria.

Obviously, the consequences of 'ethnic nationalism and the blame game' on nationhood in Nigeria today are adverse. The further disintegration of the diverse ethnic nationality is being advanced by the quest to alter our history. When we should learn fundamental lessons from what had happened in our history, avert its repetition and go on without guilt or timidity to achieve our common destiny, national integration and national development our leaders sweep these historical facts under the carpet. Finally, 'There was a Country' has demonstrated the danger in using the 'single story approach' to write history, due to its stereotype and ethnocentrism, because when such facts are subjected to historical criticism they become *ahistorical* or naked opinions. This paper reveals that collective national interest and nationalism can be attainable if the populace are unbounded from the apron of ethnic perceptions. Nigerians should be provided effective and adequate post traumatic rehabilitation in the event of civil strife so as to re-shape their social attitude. Only then could nationalism devoid of religious affinity or ethnic loyalty savage the nation from the epidemics of conflicts and corruption, which have inhibited development and national integration in Nigeria.

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