

ASSESSMENT OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR IN IBIBIOLAND, 1967-1970

Idara C. Aniefiok-Ezemonye, PhD

Department of History and International Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

Nigeria's political, social and economic debacles sprang from the faulty foundation the British laid in uniting Nigeria in 1914 (Orji and N-Ue, 2013). By 1960, political struggle, majority and minority ethnic groups rivalry and sporadic violence characterised Nigeria soon after her independence (Aniefiok-Ezemonye, 2023). The prospects of peace and unity for Nigeria seriously deteriorated. There was an increasing possibility that the Eastern region might secede from the rest of the federation. These crises culminated in the secession of the Eastern Region from Nigeria and its declaration as the Independent Republic of Biafra on 30th May, 1967 by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Military Governor of the Eastern Region. Ibibioland which belonged to the South-Eastern State in the Eastern Region automatically became a part of Biafra owing to the secession. The war began in Garkem and within months, Ibibioland was penetrated by both the Biafran troops and the federal troops, all in a bid to seek their allegiance. Using the qualitative historical method of research that involves the adoption, analysis and extraction of relevant content of oral and documentary data, the paper seeks to examine the Nigerian Civil War event as it occurred in Ibibioland, and how disrupted villages and towns were abandoned in advance of both the Biafran and Federal troops. The findings of this paper reveal that the war produced realities that were political, psychological and humanitarian irrespective of which side of the divide the people were on.

Keywords: Nigeria, Civil War, Secession, Ibibioland, Eastern Region and Troops

Introduction

Nigeria in the twentieth century was characterised by one crisis after the other all of which precipitated the Nigerian Civil War in 1967. Until the declaration of Biafra, everyone within the borders of the nation was a Nigerian. The Nigerian Army was dominated by the Igbo in the middle officer ranks. When Aguiyi Ironsi approved twelve promotions from major to lieutenant colonel in May 1966, the Northerners read it as another move by the Igbo to take over the army since eight out of the twelve gazetted officers were Igbo and only one was a Northerner.¹ The killings of the first coup in January 1966 worsened the ethnic imbalance that ran through all the senior ranks of the army. For the next six months, Nigeria was thrown into a state of despair and the first step was to divide the army with the repatriation of Northerners from the East and Easterners from the North. In August 1966, the departing Northern troops from Enugu left with their arms and ammunition and the East was left with only one hundred and twenty rifles in the Enugu garrison.² The killings of people from Eastern Nigeria in the North went on with varying degrees of intensity. On September 19, 1966, Northern soldiers from the 4th Battalion, drove down to Makurdi and Gboko in Tivland and started killing Easterners. Troops and mobs ran frantically through the strangers' quarters of all the major

towns in the North, killing, looting and burning. Thousands of Easterners were hidden and later smuggled back to the East abandoning everything they possessed. These killings were indiscriminate and there was nothing to differentiate one Easterner from the other so the non-Igbo peoples of eastern Nigeria shared the same fears and fate as the Igbo.³

The September-October 1966 massacres of Easterners in the Northern towns of Zaria, Kano, Gusau, and Sokoto sparked off another refugee problem. Over one million persons were displaced and evacuated to the Eastern Region.⁴ Before the war broke out in 1967, the regional administration already had a major economic problem which was the rehabilitation of the large numbers of people who had fled their places of residence and work and returned to Eastern Nigeria, seeking security, safety and stability. The demobilisation of the workforce aggravated the unemployment problem. Refugees from Ibibio areas were not readily welcomed into the region. A number of them particularly from Uyo, Ikot-Ekpene and Abak were discriminated against and even attacked when they tried to cross into Aba.⁵ In 1967, the civil war broke out and it took a toll on the human lives of both the Igbo and other ethnic groups in the Eastern Region, sparking a massive humanitarian crisis and devastation among adults and children.⁶

The Choice Theory

Understanding the why and how of the different perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War would create a space for a better understanding of choices made by individuals, families, and communities before, during and after the war. To this end, the choice theory provides an explanation and interpretation of the aforementioned concerns. As developed by Willaim Glasser, the choice theory states that humans are motivated by a quest to satisfy certain basic needs which include: survival, belonging, power, freedom and fun. The Nigerian Civil War situation saw the choice theory play out because the Ibibio people supported both the Federal and Biafran troops respectively depending on which side guaranteed their safety and survival at any given time.

The Declaration of Biafra and the Struggle for Ibibio Allegiance

Ibibioland is one of the minority areas that lay in the periphery of the Eastern Region. The declaration of the independence of the Eastern Region under the name, the Republic of Biafra by Lt.-Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu on May 30th, 1967, had the enthusiastic support of almost all the Igbo. When the Republic of Biafra was declared, it was against the wishes of a large majority of the Ibibio people who had for long alongside their fellow minorities demanded a separate state free of Igbo domination. While Biafra claimed that the minorities were wholeheartedly in support of the secession, the federal government maintained that the minorities had been longing to be liberated.⁷ To Udoakaha Esuene, South-Eastern State Military Governor, the Igbo wanted slaves and not allies and he emphasized that the Ibibio would not be their slaves.⁸

However, loyalties were divided regarding the fact that the supporters of the Biafra secession were those who felt that the Easterners as a group had shared the same fate as victims of the 1966 massacres and expulsion from the north, while those who aligned with the Nigerian government saw it as an opportunity to have a separate state of their own and be free from any domination.⁹ Some of the Ibibio were apathetic about the secession and the war with the federal government because they saw the declaration of the Republic of Biafra was viewed both as an Igbo agenda and a manifestation of Lt. Col. Ojukwu's premeditated resolve. Their

dissatisfaction was further fuelled first by the action of the Federal Military Government on May 27th 1967: Eastern Region was split into three: East Central State for the Igbo, with Enugu as its capital, South-eastern State for the Efik and Ibibio, with Calabar as its capital, and Rivers State for the Ijaw, with Port Harcourt as its capital.¹⁰

Following Ojukwu's declaration, a good number of federal soldiers backed by several armoured ferret cars, a chatter of machine guns and artillery rockets were followed with war songs like *Ojukwu banza*, and *Ojukwu shege*. The war started at 5:30 am, July 6, 1967 in Garkem, Ogoja, Cross-River State with two battalions when Lieutenant Gado Nasko of the Nigerian Army fired the first heavy and sustained artillery shots. The Biafran troops that were already stationed at Garkem suffered casualties as a result of the strike but stayed still in their newly dug trenches where they took cover. The Federal Military Government mobilised troops to stop the secession by first advancing through the periphery into what was now Biafra. The federal victory was ascribed to the work of saboteurs and lack of cooperation by the Ibibio people of the areas concerned. The immediate movement of the federal troops from Oron to Ikot-Ekpene within forty-eight hours was blamed on the inhabitants of those areas who either hid enemy troops in their houses or led them through bush paths.¹¹ The only natural reaction from people was to turn and run in different directions. Families were displaced. The people were, in the Biafran sense, only moving from one part of Biafra to another, and, in the Nigerian sense, from one part of Eastern Nigeria to another. People were displaced internally and refugee camps were established at Nto Edino and Ikwen. The federal troops opened four fronts- Okutu and Obollo Afor in Nsukka and Gakem and Obudu in Ogoja and with mass artillery and infantry support, they were able to overrun these border towns in the first week of the fighting.

Biafra Military Activities in Ibibioland

Biafran troops made attempts to stave off the invasion of the federal troops. The 52nd Brigade under Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Eze, the commander in Calabar covered areas from the Cameroon border to Eket, Opobo and Uyo. Biafran troops occupied the National Museum, Oron on Idua Oron. The museum was used as a military base with concrete bunkers to serve as a lookout across the estuaries of the river towards Calabar. Many of the artifacts and wooden sculptures were used as firewood for cooking while others were sent to Umuahia. Local people in the Uyo area complained bitterly about the treatment by Biafran troops.

The Biafran army bunker was made of concrete and iron rods with protectors where Biafran soldiers took cover to defend their territories from possible attacks by the federal troops. The bunkers and trenches were laid and dug in several places and littered with unexploded bombs and other weapons. Igbo soldiers were sent to the non-Igbo areas especially those along the borders with instructions to keep the people down, detain or kill all who dared raise a voice in protest against the idea of Biafra.¹² The people were threatened that by the time the Federal troops came to regain control, their lands would be flattened and there would be no one left but grass and weeds. By the second week of the fighting, arson, looting, rape and all kinds of torture became a norm. Villages were burnt down, farms and barns were completely looted, and churches and shrines were outrageously desecrated. Civilians were reported to have been incarcerated by Biafran soldiers. Biafra stationed some of its troops in the Ibibio area of Oku Iboku in Itu. In the beginning, the relationship Itu people and the Biafran soldiers was cordial. However, as time went on, because of their nefarious activities, the relationship went sour and the people tolerated, accommodated and co-operated with them because of the need to

survive. According to Obong Bassey Etuk, the Ibibio people fought in the civil war alongside their compatriots on both the federal and Biafran sides. Those who supported the federal troops were more courageous and outspoken than their counterparts on the Biafran side.¹³

Some Ibibio persons saw the war as an extension of the political feud between Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Effiong Okon Eyo (Eyo of Uyo and Obong Ikpaisong Ibibio ye Annang) who they believed should become the premier of Southeast State but was replaced by Michael Okpara.¹⁴ Biafran soldiers who came to Uyo to dislodge the influence of Effiong Okon Eyo were stationed around Eyo's hometown, Mbierebe Akpawut and Oron.¹⁵ In Etinan, Asuquo U. Asuquo reveals that he was unaware of the war until 1968 when a group of Biafran soldiers swooped on the villagers and began to arrest and take away people; there was no specific support for the Biafran cause among the people who did not know what brought the war and how Biafra came about. When the soldiers came, they all pledged their support for them out of fear and shouted 'One Biafra, we support you' and they were equally ready to do the same to the Nigerian soldiers when they came.¹⁶ In Ikot-Abasi, Obong Mayor Obot Hanson, a high chief, narrates that various Ibibio communities became aware of the war because of communal conflict. The majority of the people did not know what was happening and as such did not support Biafra wholeheartedly because they knew that as a minority group, they would not benefit from them.¹⁷

When the Biafran army began recruiting volunteer soldiers, some male youths turned out for recruitment not because they were interested in actual fighting but because they expected the army to provide at least shelter and food for them. In other words, enlistment was mostly based on the financial attraction of military service. From May to October 1967, recruitment into the Biafran army was a voluntary affair. Enlistment was attractive to younger men, especially those who had returned from other parts of Nigeria after the killings of 1966.¹⁸ Boys of fifteen years or more who were strong and courageous enough were allowed to join the army even though at the early stage of the war, the recruiters were selective of those who joined the army. After the first major battles, it became clear that the war was very different. As the war progressed, the number of soldiers recruited voluntarily was insufficient to match the needs of the war and voluntary recruitment by youths dwindled after the first experiences of warfare with poor military equipment and inadequate training. Recruitment into the army was done inappropriately and training camps for Biafran officers were hastily constructed; the army was ill-equipped and lacked adequate administrative support. The Biafran army which was still under formation was almost completely administered and maintained by donations from the civil population. Ntieyong Akpan, Biafra's chief secretary, described how men, armed with machetes, stones and shotguns that they had not been trained to use, were dispatched to the Nsukka fronts in their thousands; this exercise convinced him of the hopelessness of the situation while he stepped aside and wept for the innocent men that were huddled in lorries and driven to certain death.¹⁹ To B.J. Ikpeme, a retired Senior Medical Officer in the Eastern Region, the Igbo leadership, which did not like the minority agitation, decided either to force the non-Igbo minorities into the new republic or eliminate them. Hundreds of people were carried away to an unknown destination and many more were killed by the Biafran soldiers.

The Biafran propaganda during the war was so effective and convincing that some individuals did not doubt the Biafran government's claim of the invincibility of its army. In the early months of the war, a piece of propaganda circulated in Biafra featuring a picture of a

ten-year-old child dressed in a baggy uniform. It was captioned “there is none too small or too big for the important job of defending the Fatherland. The young officer above has sworn to bring back ten heads of Nigerian soldiers in strict adherence to the charge made to the nation.”²⁰ For Biafra, radio was most effective and their main arena of propaganda was in the news talks and analysis; it was also in the public address with jingles. War situation reports were obtained from correspondents at the war front through phone calls or the army.²¹ Eastern Region Government commenced a sensitization drive in 1967 to inform the people about events within and outside the region. In Ibibioland, pupils in primary school students in high schools, or apprentices learning one trade or the other were barraged with stories of the hostility of Nigerians towards citizens of the Eastern Region. Schoolchildren were reassured that the regional government was determined to defend its territory and people. Songs were used to internalise these messages and stir up sentiments in favour of the region’s quest for independence. Biafra Anthem and songs were taught to the pupils and were sung in schools in Biafran territories in Ibibioland.²² Lives of children were disrupted by the civil war; from constant displacement, and the cessation of school activities to air strikes on schools and hospitals. Children were unkempt and dressed in raggedy clothes and they reacted differently to incidents they beheld and witnessed especially through the songs that were composed and used in favouring the war. Speeches, songs and pictures of victims of the massacres of their friends or siblings instilled fear (which was a familiar damaging emotion), anxiety, anger and panic in children; sounds of cries of human beings in distress, pain, suffering and starvation and emptiness, with the noise of open fire and the agony of affected persons, often characterised a typical day.

Biafran soldiers were all out hunting down saboteurs and traitors, and whole villages and communities were uprooted and people had to flee for safety. The soldiers also confiscated vehicles and paid off the drivers; trading posts, sea/fishing ports, streets and communities were renamed early on in the war to New Onitsha, New Owerri and New Umuahia and this was done with signposts; in Uyo, New Owerri was created within Ewet Offot.²³ This ill-treatment was dreaded by Ibibio people who concluded that if Biafra won the war then all Ibibio people would become slaves.²⁴ In Ikot Offiong and Ikot Ade Akpan, the Biafran soldiers arrived in the early hours of the morning between 1am and 3am to avoid being detected. There, they dug trenches of 20 by 20 feet covered with planks, sand and grasses to serve as a hiding place. They also converted the primary school at Ikot Offiong to their barracks which suffered severe aerial bombardments from the Nigerian soldiers. The people who were disenchanted with the Biafran soldiers enabled the Nigerian soldiers to penetrate their communities through the creeks to round up the Biafran soldiers who were stationed near the Itu River. In Mkpatt Enin, the Ibibio had friendly relations with the Biafran troops who were accommodating but as time went on and tensions grew, some Ibibio men were suspected of collaborating with Nigerian soldiers and thenceforth the Biafran troops became an unwelcome occupying force.

William Norris of the *London Times* reported that Ibibio men (old and young) who were reportedly suspected of collaborating with advancing Nigerian troops were beaten to death at Umuahia on April 2, 1968.²⁵ They were frog-marched across an open space while the local people attacked them with sticks and clubs; children were roasted alive, young girls were torn in two by shrapnel, pregnant women eviscerated and old men blown to fragments. Joseph Effiong, a native of Oku Iboku, who was ten years old when the war started, said he was among those who were evacuated from Kano by the Eastern Region government. He narrated

that the war was fierce at Oku Iboku because it was one of Biafra's strongholds where every effort was made to stop the advancement of the federal troops from Calabar Province.²⁶

Ekpe Udoete was ten when the war started and he was befriended by soldiers who manned a checkpoint in Uyo, where he sold kolanuts and collected bullet shells. According to him, his best friend was a Biafran military man called Bassey and he liked his shiny gun which he often fired just to impress him and his friends. In one of his conversations with Bassey, Bassey learned that he had an elder sister who was fourteen at the time and asked him to call her for him. Ekpe's excitement as he was running home to get his sister was cut short when he got home and received a good beating; he was never allowed out to the checkpoint any longer.²⁷ Preparing to stay alive in the event of an attack was frightening as there was no official warning of an impending attack; the scene resembled a production line in a factory- the mother hurries to cook, girls stack mattresses on tables for the family to take cover under, father and sons fetch a bamboo ladder that was used to place branches on the roof of the house.²⁸ Usually, there would be no bombing for days or weeks and people on such days went into the bush to explore hiding places.

In 1968, Philip Effiong, in Aba, charged the people of Calabar, Uyo and Opobo Provinces to intensify their war efforts towards saving Biafra from destruction after recalling the murder of Major Ekanem and Major Isong. He noted that a great number of youths volunteered their services to the cause of Biafra and urged them not to relent. In the same year, James Udo-Affiah, Administrator for Uyo Province and Commissioner for Health, while addressing the four-man delegation of chiefs and members of the Uyo Divisional Public Enlightenment Committee in Uyo called on all Ibibio people to discard the idea of oppression in the new Republic of Biafra.²⁹ Contrary to Effiong's speech and the address presented by Udo-Affiah, a public opinion poll of Biafra provinces conducted by the Appraisals Committee of the Directorate for Propaganda presented a discovery that many Ibibio people lacked understanding of why the war was being fought; they were primarily interested at the end of the war and this interest represented a measure of their neutrality and ambivalence.³⁰ In some villages and towns where the people were initially indifferent or sharply divided on which side of the conflict to join, incidents like the shooting of many villagers and the burning down of houses of suspected saboteurs by Biafran soldiers in Ikot Okpot and Idoro, Ikot-Ekpenyong in Ibiono Ibom and Ukwok made them tirelessly work towards frustrating the Biafran cause.

Obong Edet Bassey Etuk was one of those detained in what he described as a concentration camp while about four hundred people were carried away to an unknown destination.³¹ The Ibibio referred to Biafra as "mbiangafia", which means a spoilt trap that cannot catch animals; some persons joined the Biafran army out of vexation which stemmed from intimidation and suppression. Throughout the duration of the civil war, spying on Biafra's strengths, weaknesses, approaches, ambushes, locations and sources of supply was carried out by women, boys' scouts and fishermen for the federal troops. Under the pretence of tapping palm wine and harvesting oil palm fruits, tapers and harvesters effectively used their height advantage to also spy on the Biafran soldiers.³² Relationships between the Biafran state and the Ibibio worsened with the emergence of violent attacks against border villages in the course of the war. Strategies of survival in the face of army presence were of primary importance to the people and this shaped their behaviour towards Biafra. Some soldiers used their position to enrich themselves and the power and influence of a uniform to lay claim to

civilian's personal property. They killed livestock like goats and other animals found in and around people's compounds and villages, invaded and ravaged farms and forcefully took away people's crops. Farmland cultivation was difficult because of fear of being hit by bullets, landmines and bombs. The Ibibio people who engaged in crafts could not practice their skills because they were either recruited into the Nigerian or Biafran army or they were war casualties.

From 1968, force and outright conscription were employed.³³ Conscription became a matter of life and death and it was introduced when villages could no longer provide a given number of people required to join the army. Conscription gave soldiers authority to seize or detain people but soldiers were not the only ones who captured people. This conscription was also handled by the local authorities, community leaders and age grades as long as they were able to provide and bring the number of recruits required to the nearest army base. Villages that fell short of recruitment targets were raided and attacked; the process became increasingly arbitrary as it was unclear who could draft men and who could be drafted. People escaped conscription by obtaining exemption passes through provincial administrators. Some others who could not get the pass either pretended to be a sick soldier suffering from shell shock or took to hiding in bushes during the day and returning to their homes at night. Conscription drives were often accompanied by the collection of taxes for the war effort. The largest of these levies were the jet levies which required villages to raise funds in cash and in kind in order to purchase fighter planes. In Ibiono, women made donations of yams, cocoyams, bags of garri, coconut, tapioca, palm oil and one bag of banana. Some others presented ten goats to the army in their area.

With the changing pattern, it became burdensome for Ibibio women who had to cater for themselves and their children singlehandedly. They were either displaced, threatened or intimidated; they were challenged by starvation and epidemics and confronted with increased responsibilities for the survival of their families and relatives.³⁴ The traditional roles of Ibibio women were challenged by the political, social and economic exigencies of the war; their roles became complementary and supplementary as towns and villages fell to the opposing army, as people died and fled and as scarcity of food increased. Ibibio women employed survival strategies to fight against threat, hunger, disease, rape, death and the general atmosphere of danger that loomed around them. To avoid being raped, some of the young girls and women disguised themselves as old women and as nursing mothers by rubbing kaolin (white chalk) on their bodies. Some tied wads of cloth on their stomach faking pregnancy, dressed in their finest clothes and tried to pass themselves off as the wives of military officers and a few others walked with a limp to make them look like old women.³⁵

In Itu, women were sexually abused and abducted rampantly and because of such incidents, people resolved to protect their wives, daughters and sisters by relocating them to inaccessible swampy areas.³⁶ Inyang Bassey narrates that some of the women who were abducted during raids by the Biafran soldiers never came back. She recalls that her mother's first daughter was abducted by Biafran soldiers and never returned; the grief over her loss was chiefly responsible for her mother's death.³⁷ Mrs Emem Hanson recalls that some who were displaced took refuge in the bush or farmlands; some others remained within their communities while others moved intermittently between their homes and bushes. Aid usually came in the form of food items which were supplemented with rewards from bush combing.³⁸

All the Biafran forces in Calabar, Uyo and Eket Provinces were regrouped in January 1968 to form the 12 Division under Colonel Akagha. The 12 Division had the 55 and 56 Brigades under command; the 55 Brigade was later replaced by the 58 Brigade. While the 56 Brigade based in Arochukwu was under Colonel Simon Uwakwe, the 58 Brigade based in Uyo was under Colonel Ifeanyi Aniebo. In March 1968, the federal troops commenced a massive daily bombardment of towns, villages and important institutions between Oron and Ikot-Ekpene and these attacks continued until the troops recaptured Uyo Province. From July 1968, the federal government launched starvation as a legitimate weapon of war. By 1969, Biafra shrank in size and with the attendant hardship, suffering, scarcity of food and other basic items, and with the federal reclaim of communities, the civil defence was deserted because families could no longer afford the luxury of sparing a member or two to a service that scarcely brought any financial benefits to the volunteer or her family.

Ibibioland Recaptured by Federal Troops

After the fall of Calabar on October 19, 1967, the advance of the federal troops into the centre of South-Eastern State was very much facilitated. Between November 1967 and February 1968, the federal troops took areas stretching from Calabar to Ikang, Aningeye, Akamkpa, Mbarakom, and Ikot-Okpora. They continued their advance to Obom-Itiat and crossed over to Itu where they encountered serious opposition by the Biafran troops before eventually taking hold of the town. With the fall of Calabar, Itu, Uyo and the rest of the mainland were militarily threatened and pressured. The Ibibio area came under Federal control in 1968 and, according to Uduak Charlie, was a direct intervention of God because the Biafran soldiers who dealt cruelly with them fled peacefully.³⁹ When the federal troops landed in Uyo province, they surrounded Uyo town and made it impossible for the Biafran troops to establish a defensive position anywhere. Aro-Ekpemiong near Uyo suffered tremendous assaults and there was fighting in Uyo; though the town did not suffer extensive destruction, the destruction was rampant and erratic. It is safe to say that almost all Ibibio villages were victims of various degrees of destruction, murder, looting and rape. According to Essien Udo Essien, in Itu, the federal soldiers came in through a certain bush path between the town and Ohafia and stationed local collaborators in all towns and villages who operated following an agreed plan and time. Unlike the Biafran army that recruited in towns, the Federal soldiers began to recruit in the villages and procured most of their arms from outside the country. The army was better organised and it made adequate provisions for the soldiers.⁴⁰ While food had to be supplemented by the local purchases on the Biafran side, Federal soldiers seem to have had sufficient funds for this purpose. Apart from aircraft and a whole lot of other sophisticated military equipment obtained from friendly nations, Nigeria was already manufacturing weapons. The Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DIC) was established by an Act of Parliament in 1964 to manufacture, test, store arms, ammunitions and explosives. During the war, DIC produced 8,000 submachine guns of 7, 622 soft core cartridges. By 1969, the figure rose to three million.⁴¹

Aruk Takon recalled that the secret entry of Nigerian troops into his community, Ikot-Abasi was heralded with the continuous chanting of 'One Nigeria, One Nigeria'.⁴² In another development, some Ibibio people supported the federal government by providing logistics and information for the federal soldiers through reconnaissance.⁴³ They also contributed personnel to the federal soldiers through the mobilisation of vigilante groups and provision of victuals to the troops by the women and palm wine by the men. When the federal soldiers landed in Calabar on October 18, 1967, about 169 civilians in detention were lined up and

shot by Biafran soldiers.⁴⁴ Militant fifth columns openly challenged the Biafran cause; although these men lacked proper military training and coordination, their better knowledge of the terrain gave them an advantage over the Biafran soldiers. Volunteer patriots were hurriedly assembled and trained and they effectively blocked access by sea to any military assistance that would come for the Biafran soldiers. In Itukho, a remote village in Ibiono, a large contingent of Biafran soldiers withdrawing from Itu and attempting to escape to Ohafia through Ikono, were ambushed and executed by the locals; this according to Koko Ina may be connected with the people's desire for vengeance on Biafra's annihilation of Ikot-Ekpenyong. In Oku Iboku, a platoon of soldiers was sacrificed to propitiate Uduoku- the community's titular deity.⁴⁵ Norris, in "Nightmare in Biafra", reported how high-flying Russian Ilyushin jets operated by the federal government dropped bombs in Itu, Opobo (Ikot-Abasi), Oron, and Uyo thereby slowly and effectively, creating a reign of terror.⁴⁶

One of the strategies used by the federal government was to drop leaflets in certain areas telling the Ibibio people what to do when they saw the federal soldiers. Violence towards the people was perpetrated by the federal troops that were accused of indiscriminate bombing of civilian-occupied areas; they also used their weapons to harass rivals, demand sex and commandeer supplies from civilians and one another. Selected areas were subjected to military aggression intermittently; animosity was seen in the manner in which the soldiers executed their assignments. The presence of soldiers gave rise to prostitution which was both an aftermath of women being forced to submit to the pleasure of the soldiers and also a consequence of the privations that resulted from the war. The extent to which women contributed to household income depended on first, whether their husbands were still within the military service age but were avoiding conscription by going into hiding hence their inability to effectively maintain their family and secondly, the military status of an area. In some Nigeria-held areas, men continued to be breadwinners as opposed to the Biafra-occupied areas which experienced forced recruitment as the war raged on.⁴⁷

The intensity of the war blurred the lines between combat and criminal violence brought about the proliferation of firearms and engendered social dynamics in areas of civic and public life where they had never been present before. To civilians, the difference between these forms of violence and outright assault, rape, or robbery was unclear. In turn, civilians imitated the protocols of military conflict which was all around them in how they treated one another. Tempers flared quickly when food was short and quarters were closed. Altercations also became more likely to be fatal and firearms were rarely far out of reach, allowing confrontations that might only have led to a fistfight in normal circumstances to end in death.

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In Uyo Province, thousands of refugees and natives had to be resettled in the feeding centres while sick bays were opened for the care of the destitute children. Mobile clinics were also established for camps, villages, and feeding centres. The shifting rhythm of the war subjected internal persons to continuous exodus from one community to the other as thick bushes, refugee camps, and school premises became provisional residences. The war disrupted life in towns and cities and the blockade and the famine it caused drove people into situations of desperation; many who lived through the war lamented that they lost their sense of security and never regained it.

Conclusion

The final days of the Civil War were strewn with refugees that were sitting and squatting, shivering all over with cold, too fagged out to continue their flight to safety and the rest of them lying huddled up in family pockets, snoring. Infrastructures, homes, schools, markets, dreams, careers, and aspirations were destroyed, the agricultural sector was in ruins, the traditional war implements and guns used by the people were forcefully confiscated and the Ibibio people were morally and psychologically distressed. The trauma of the war has lingered in the minds of some of the survivors who when poked on the issue vehemently refused to speak about it or divulge any meaningful information. Put differently, not all that should be known about the impact of the war on the Ibibio especially those from the war-affected areas have been made known.

The paper recommends that the multiple realities and perspectives on the war should be promoted and a more balanced and impartial narrative that spans ethnic, religious, and regional identities should be forged. The Nigerian Civil War should not be seen as a war fought to preserve the unity of the country, it should bear upon us the conscious effort to eliminate political, social, economic, cultural, ethnic and tribal intolerance and inequality. There can be no stability, real integration and national loyalty when there is no genuine sense of equity and fair play. However, complete accounts of the war can only be developed when people resolve to diversify the narrative and theme, question, revisit, learn, unlearn and relearn events of the war; these are capable of creating corporate existence, securing peace and stability.

Endnotes

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¹² B. J. Ikpeme, "The Secessionist Regime and the Non-Ibo Minorities in the East of Nigeria" at The Testament of the Peace Talks on the Nigerian Civil War, at Kampala, Uganda, in May 1968.

¹³ Obong Bassey Etuk C. 72years, Ex-service Man, interviewed at Uyo, March 28, 2021.

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¹⁵ Obong Okon A. Ekanem, C. 84years, Retired Civil Servant, interviewed at Ibesikpo Asutan, March 27, 2021.

¹⁶ Asuquo U. Asuquo C. 70years, Retired Police Officer, interviewed at Itu, March 24, 2021.

¹⁷ Mayor Obot Hanson C. 75 years, High Chief, interviewed at Ikot-Abasi, March 24, 2021.

18 Interview with Bassey Etuk.

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20 See Ndubuisi Okwechime, "Propaganda: The Soul of War Reporting", in *This Week*, Vol. 5, No. 4, July 13, 1987, ppn22-25.

21. Okwechime, "Propaganda: The Soul of War Reporting", 25.

22. Interview with Joseph Effiong.

23. Godwin Okon Ekpo C. 72years, Ex-service man, interviewed at Uyo, March 28, 2021.

24 Interview with Joseph Effiong.

25. Okwechime, "Propaganda: The Soul of War Reporting", 26.

26. Interview with Joseph Effiong.

27. Ndaeyo Uko, "Life on the Run" in *This Week* Vol. 5, No. 4, July 13, 1987, p 15.

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