

CHAPTER 10

THE ADVENT OF MILITARY RULE AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR (1966-1970)

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- identify reasons for military intervention in Nigeria;
- explain circumstances behind the Aburi Accord;
- point out the remote and immediate causes of the civil war in Nigeria;
- relate the course of the Nigerian civil war and the end of it;
- show the impact of the war on social, political, economic lives of Nigeria;
- show the effects of the civil war on women and children from the Eastern Nigeria.

In the first six years of Nigeria's independence (1960-1966), political instability became rife. There were highhandedness in political pursuits, insensitivity to the plight of the suffering masses, political banditry, lack of political ideology, unprecedented ethnic prejudices, persecution of perceived rivals and opposition and fragrant breach of court rulings, law and the constitution. The impasse which eclipsed the entire Western region and which was waiting to be re-enacted in other regions begged for a military interregnum. On January 15, 1966, the military claiming a constitutional duty toppled the Zik-Balewa led-administration and truncated the Republic.

10.1 Reasons for Military Intervention and Rule in Nigeria

Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, the leader of the military putsch declared that their mission was a revolution geared towards flushing out corrupt political leaders, swindlers, bribe seekers both of high and low places, ten percent contractors, beneficiaries of the social malaise, those that unduly highlighted the country's big stature at international circles, unrepentant tribalists and nepotists. The mission of the revolution was to restore the pride and habitability of Nigeria for every citizen and to move it away from a war theatre it had become.

The coup was a bloody one as it recorded the slaughtering of four prominent Northern politicians, two from the Western region and only one from the East. The coup was welcomed by Nigerians across the regions as civil servants and the masses celebrated the fatal end of the republic in their offices and private homes. For quite a long moment, the Western Region had some respite. Since the coupists could not retire or eliminate the senior officers in the service, they were compelled to

hand over leadership to Major-General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi-Ironsi, the most senior military officer as the Head of State and supreme military commander of Nigeria armed forces.

The revolutionaries led by Major Kaduna Chukwuma Nzeogwu had planned a 14 state structure for the country so as to douse tension. This was not to be. They were arrested and imprisoned. Ironsi, who by the position of his rank assumed office unprepared, was more confused and unassuming.



Fig.10.1: Major General Aguiyi Ironsi-First Nigerian Military Head of State

Major-General Ironsi overlooking the fate of the coup plotters and its sensitivity to national question and unity went ahead to demand for the rotation of the governors, promulgated a unification decree, abolished the Igbo State Union, allowing the Northern dominance of the supreme military council and the promotion of 21 senior military officers of which 18 came from the East. This was viewed as the continuation of Igbo domination and within a space of six months the Northern military top brass staged a counter coup in which Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi was killed and toppled.

While on a state visit to Col. Fajuyi the military governor of Western state on July 29, 1966, some group of Northern officers assassinated him together with his host, Col. Fajuyi and some prominent Igbo high ranking officers. The Igbo pogrom which had started in Kaduna, Kano, Zaria and Jos on May 28, 1966 spread across the North on the death of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi. Even while an ad hoc constitutional conference held in Lagos between September 18th and 24th 1966 was on, the Ibos across the North and the Middle Belt were massacred, dispossessed and chased about.

As soon as Ironsi was killed on July 29, 1966, there was a bloody riot in the North in which the rioters carried placards bearing the word “ARABA” meaning “Time for secession”. According to the Northern rioters, they had no intention of staying in a federal state not ruled by the North. The North was willing to secede if Britain had not dissuaded them from doing so. Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was not particularly attuned to the happenings and in the appointment of Lt. Col.

Yakubu Gowon as Head of State. He contested that Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, the most senior officer should assume the leadership especially as Gowon's headship was not formally endorsed by the Supreme Military Council as the military ethics demanded.



Fig 10.2: Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon - Second Nigerian Military Head of State

While the Ojukwu's protest lasted, the Igbos in the North and West were horrifyingly murdered. Their means of livelihood destroyed, their worship places burned and many were made homeless. About 30,000 Igbos were killed between July 29– September 24, 1966 while about 1.8 million of them fled the North.

The development halted the ad hoc conference on constitutional reforms and stopped Ojukwu's attendance to Supreme Military Council meetings. As a result of the palpable insecurity and the Igbo-phobia, the Eastern leaders opted to meet with the rest of the Nigeria leaders in Aburi in Ghana. The Aburi conference took place between 4th and 5th of August, 1966.

At the Aburi conference, Ojukwu demanded that Gen. Gowon drop the title "Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces" if he was not able to control the army and put an end to Igbo holocaust in the North and West. He requested for a confederacy; that displaced Igbos in the North and West be rehabilitated and their property recovered and accepted to reverse the order given to non-Igbos in the Eastern Region to vacate. The council also agreed to pay staff of government and employees of statutory corporations their full salaries till March 31, 1967 who fled for safety as a result of the pogrom and mayhem of 1966, provided they had not found new jobs. It was also agreed that the ad hoc constitutional conference be resumed. The meeting accepted to meet in Nigeria after the Aburi conference in a would-be determined place.

It was also agreed in the meeting the Supreme Military Council (SMC) chaired by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces be regarded as the military high command; and that its headquarters be headed by the Chief of Staff and that all regions should be represented. Furthermore, area commands were to be established in each region to be over seen by the Area Commander.

Coming back from Aburi, the Federal Military Government discovered that they had conceded all to Ojukwu and decided to breach the accord. This received the support of Britain and top officers

in the public service. But for the Easterners, the cliché was “On Aburi Accord we stand”. It has been conjectured that the main reason the federal government declined implementation of the Aburi Accord was due to the presence of crude oil in the East which had begun to anchor the Nigerian economy. Realizing that they had conceded to Ojukwu a regional autonomy in which every region is responsible to its own affairs, the federal government reneged on the agreement.

Those who attended the Aburi conference were Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina, Military Governor of the Northern Region and Lt. Col. David Ejoor, Military Governor of Mid-West Region. Others were Major Mobolaji Johnson, Military Governor of Lagos, Alhaji Kam Salem, Inspector-general of police, Mr. T. Omo-Bare and Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odimegwu Ojukwu, military Governor of Eastern Region.

Many factors have been adduced for the intervention of the military in Nigerian politics. Historians seem to agree on the following causes or reasons for the war which can be classified into remote and immediate causes.

Remote and Immediate Causes of Military Intervention

- i. The imbalance or lopsided nature of the Nigerian federation in which the North has greater geographical dominance of the South. While the South was divided into two regions, East and West, the North remained intact coupled with advantage of a lingua franca (Hausa), one faith (Islam) and culture.
- ii. The 1953 Kano riot which pitched the North against the South with the North refusing independence until “as soon as practicable”. This generated a lot of hostility and ill-feelings between the two poles.
- iii. Mutual suspicion, distrust and craze for power concentration. The unwholesome quest for the dominant tribes to politically determine events and the North or the South angling to outwit each other in the power game led to political skirmishes. This manifested in the 1962 Action Group crises, 1963 census controversy, 1964 general election crisis and the 1965 Western election crisis.
- iv. Corruption, embezzlement of public funds, insensitivity to the plight of ordinary Nigerian, and nepotism coupled with the ostentatious living of the political leaders attracted the military into governance.
- v. The flouting of the constitution with impunity by political parties, regional and federal governments was to the military a breach of trust and also unpatriotic.
- vi. The general breakdown of law and order and the wanton destruction of lives and property of innocent masses. Most Nigerians were rendered homeless while some were maimed.
- vii. The military perceived possible disintegration of the country going by growing antagonism amongst political parties and the lack of faith in the Nigerian project where even Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and some leading Northern leaders described Nigeria as Lugard’s mistake of 1914. Earlier, Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo had declared

Nigeria to be “a mere geographical expression” in which he requested early self-rule for the Western region and inclusion of some clauses in the constitution to expedite possible secession.

- viii. The wooing of the military by major political parties was another reason. The NCNC, NPC and AG were each looking up to the military to back it up and assist in manoeuvring others. The military soon discovered that it could make some vital impact.
- ix. The coup d'etat in Ghana, Togo and other African countries influenced the Nigerian soldiers to also take over the reins of power to control the economy.
- x. The low level economic development in the entire country was unacceptable. Rather than use the resource to build industries and develop other infrastructure, the politicians wasted the money on fighting perceived opponents, banking abroad, marrying wives and funding re-election bids.



Fig. 103: Lt. Col Odumegwu Ojukwu



Fig. 10.4: Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi

10.2 Causes and Course of the Civil War

It is apparently difficult to separate the reason for military rule in Nigeria from the cause of the Nigerian civil war. This is because the military which was thought to be more cohesive, disciplined and focused exacerbated tribal fears, reprisal attacks and political recklessness.

Some unguarded actions taken by the Aguiyi-Ironsi regime politicized and balkanized further the military. Some of these were:

- i. The continued detention of the January 15, 1966 coup plotters without trial and punishment instead, they were kept in detention and paid their salaries and other entitlements.
- ii. His unilateral decision to promote some 21 military officers from the rank of Major to that of Lt. colonel and 18 of them being Igbos even while the Supreme Military Council had placed a caveat on the promotion of officers for a period of one year.
- iii. The reversion of the country into a unitary system of government without due consultation and without waiting for the report of the Commission on Constitutional Review. His promulgation of Decree No. 34 drew the ire of the North. The decree established a national government; and also abolished the regional governments but in its place established provinces placed under military prefects; integrated both the federal and regional civil service into a single unified service.
- iv. His refusal not to abrogate the contentious Decree No.34.

These engendered bad blood among Nigerians especially from the Northern Region.

In order to contain the excesses of the Eastern-led military junta, the Northern military officers led by the Chief of Staff of the Nigerian Army, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon staged a counter coup on July 29, 1966 which they termed “sweet revenge”. The intention of the coupists were to break up the

country and to revenge on the East but were prevailed upon by British government and some notable Nigerians.

The unprecedented destruction of lives and property that followed the coup and targeted at the Igbos in the North put paid to national unity. A massacre called the ‘Igbo pogrom’ across the North and West reached its peak between September and October, 1966 in which many Igbos lost their lives and means of livelihood. This the Easterners saw as a breach of rights and of the Aburi Accord.

Gowon’s decree No. 8 issued on March 17, 1967 in which Federal Military Government amassed emergency powers was unacceptable to the East as it was not part of the Aburi Accord. The decree among others empowered the supreme military council to declare a state of emergency under the following condition.

- (a) If a region exercised its executive authority in such a way as to impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive authority of the federal government.
- (b) If the democratic institutions in the country were threatened by subversion, and
- (c) If continuance of the federal government was in danger.

As a follow up to this threat, Lt. Col. Ojukwu promulgated three edicts which made the legal system in the East autonomous and which appropriated all federal revenue accruing from the East thereby abolishing the revenue allocation and sharing formular. In reaction, the federal government sanctioned the East and placed embargo on transactions, communications and economic dealings with the East. In order to contain with the situation, Ojukwu regionalized all federal establishments in the East by April, 1967.

However, the federal government constituted a National Reconciliation Committee among which included the Chief justice of the Federation Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief F. Mariere the adviser to the Military Governor of Mid-Western Nigeria. The committee met with Lt. Col. Ojukwu at Enugu on March 5, 1967. The discussion ended in a stalemate with Ojukwu holding firm to the Aburi Accord and his unilateral implementation of it since the federal government had reneged.

On April 24, 1967, Ojukwu in a diplomatic conference warned the federal government over its intention to divide the country into 12 states pointing out its ugly consequences. On May 26, 1967 Ojukwu met with the Consultative Assembly, Chiefs and Elders of the region. The Assembly empowered the governor to “declare, at the earliest practicable date, Eastern Nigeria a free, sovereign and independent state by the name and title of Republic of Biafra”. The federal government immediately declared a state of emergency throughout the country with only Gowon left to assume full powers. On May 27, 1967, Gowon created the 12 new states. The structured followed this way: Kano state, North East, North West Central, North Central, Benue-Plateau and North (from the North); Mid-West state; Western State; and East central, South Eastern and Rivers State (from the East), and on May 28, 1967, he repealed the Decree N0.8. Following this development Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on May 30, 1967 declared the Eastern region “the Republic of Biafra” with himself as the head of state.

On July 6, 1967 the federal troop launched attack on Biafra thus commencing a civil war. General Gowon dismissed Lt. Col. Ojukwu from the Nigerian Army, and by law relieved him of his position as the military governor of the East and ordered for his arrest. Gowon insisted on keeping Nigeria one. As the police action turned into a full scale war, the international community took sides.

In the war, Britain, America, Soviet Union, France, Belguim, Holland and Czechoslovakia took side and sold arms to the Nigerian side. On the side of Biafra was Portugal South Africa, Israel and later France who reserved its position. African countries such as Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon and Ivory Coast supported Biafra. Because the war was largely fought within the domain of Biafra, international humanitarian agencies provided the war-torn masses with relief materials. These included international committee of the Red Cross, Joint Church Aid, African Concern, Canair Relief Organization, the Catholic Caritas International and the French Red Cross Society. The Nigerian Government prevented O.A.U from interfering and brokering peace claiming that it was an internal affair.

Between 1968 and 1969, O.A.U. Consultative Committee on the Nigerian civil war and Common wealth secretariat midwived fourpeace talks between Nigeria and Biafra in Kampala in Uganda, Niamey in Niger, Addis Ababa in Ethiopia and Monrovia in Liberia. These however yielded no fruit. It became obvious that the two parties were irreconcilable and would prefer to settle scores on the battlefield.

In the course of the war, the Nigeria troops violated the law of war, they often prevented relief materials entering into Biafra making the number of people who died in the conflict from the Biafran side as a result of starvation and related illness to rise astronomically. Justice Chukwudifo Oputa panel put the figure at one million. They also used napalm bombs in wiping out several Biafran enclaves, killing women and children.

According to Frederick Forsyth who wrote on the civil war, the Biafra Republic commenced the prosecution of the war with about two thousand soldiers in three battalions overwhelming fresh recruits without military vehicles, no armour and artillery. The only weaponry at their disposal consisted of two mortars, very limited ammunition, half a dozen light machine guns, few sub machine guns, bolt action rifles, a few hand-grenades and commercial quarrying explosive, dane guns matchets, clubs, stone, knives and the Ogbunigwe (locally-made bomb). They had no bazookas, mortars and heavy machine guns. Biafra was reputed for its propaganda machinery evoking international sympathy, brainwashing the Biafran youths with seeming catchword of Biafran invincibility and the construction of the Uli International Airport which served the Biafran international exchange links needs. It however, got limited military aids from its allies such as France, Israel and Ivory coast.

The federal government having adopted the doctrine of starvation and legitimate weapon of war as enunciated by Awolowo moved hard against the East. They blockaded the East with all arsenals at their disposal and influenced foreign countries and volunteer agencies to do the same against Biafra blocking relief flights. They used Egyptian pilot mercenaries to fly Nigerian Air force

MIG-17 Fighters, and Soviet Ilyashin 11-28 bombers on civilian targets like markets, residential areas, hospitals and Red Cross base.

In order to survive, Biafra managed to acquire two old planes, a B26 and B25, and three helicopters. The two old planes were fitted with machine guns and locally-made rockets. They could deliver locally made bombs. The Biafran Navy at Calabar had just a small patrol boat formerly used by the Nigerian Navy for anti-smuggling operation. With the combined efforts of 29th battalion, 63rd battalion and the navy, the Biafran Navy was able to sink Nigerian warship at Oguta on September 14, 1968.

Biafra developed two standard airports, those of Uga and Uli airports. The Uli airport at the time became the busiest Airport in Africa seconded only by the Johannesburg Airport in South Africa. Yet, it operated between 10pm to 4am. The petroleum refining technology was ranked the best in Africa. The Uli airport was important because it proved to be the only access to outside world. Its airline was “Arinabello”. Through it, petroleum products were distributed to international clients. Refineries were established at Uzuakoli and Amandugba near Owerri.

The food directorate produced corn mill with soyabean supplements. Army uniforms were produced by dyed civilian clothes. Shoemakers at Aba replicated military boots and salt was produced at Abakaliki, Okposo and Uburu to curtail the spate of Kwashiokor. In all, there were ten technology groups into which Biafran eggheads were grouped. These were:

- i. Airport and road design development group;
- ii. Chemicals and materials Research and production group;
- iii. Heavy equipment and industrial materials research and production group;
- iv. Weapons productions group.;
- v. Biological processes and products groups;
- vi. Refinery and fuel group;
- vii. Rocket research and production group;
- viii. Electrical and Electronics devices group;
- ix. Explosives research and production group; and
- x. Essential food processes and production group.

On June 1, 1969, within two years of the civil war, general Odumegwu ojukwu, Head of State and Commander-in-chief of the Biafran Armed Forces declared publicly the principles of the Biafran revolution which became known as the “Ahiara Declaration”. The declaration addressed corruption and immoral practices noticed amongst soldiers and top government officials. It set up special tribunals to try anti-revolutionaries. Ahiara declaration touched on the ideals of brotherhood, primacy of the people, accountability, social justice, communal ownership of property, encouragement of private enterprise and of the army becoming the people’s army. Ahiara Declaration put Biafra on the path of the Tanzanian system known as “African socialism”. This part to socialism even at its

rudimentary form was a clear signal to the Western capitalist countries that Biafra would go communist if allowed to be independent.

Again, the way and manner offenders were court martialled in the spirit of the Biafran revolution sent jitters on people. Ojukwuunder mined the effects of enforcing a revolution and at the same time, prosecuting a civil war. Historians are of common opinion that the Ahiara Declaration sought to achieve the following:

- i. Build up a dream for the state of Biafra;
- ii. Instill conscience and encourage patriotism;
- iii. Establish an ideological framework to run the new state of Biafra;
- iv. Doggedness and never-let-die spirit in the face of daunting challenges like the civil war;
- v. Declaring to the world at large that Biafra had an objective for prosecuting the war.

The document as a text and manifesto touched on vital areas that tend to embolden the need for self-rule and even supreme sacrifice to save Biafra. The document commented on the struggle, the myth surrounding the negro, issue of self-determination, the threatening Arab-Muslim expansion, the African exploitation by the imperialists, the Anglo-Saxon genocide, the Negro renaissance and the Nigerian corruption. The declaration also touched on re-discovering independence, the sanctity of the people, shaking off Nigerianism, main principles of the revolution, the task of a leader, social justice, property and the community, egalitarian society, practicing the revolution, right to work, health and welfare, culture and higher education, self-reliance and the qualities of the individual Biafran. It also looks at the nature of certain institutions such as: The judiciary, the police, the armed forces, training and education and the public service. In all, 30 critical issues were touched as forming the base for the new Biafran state.

By the close of 1968 Biafra was totally devastated by the Nigerian forces which closed in on Biafra. By the last quarter of 1969, many of the Biafran enclaves had fallen and occupied by Nigerian troops who looked more healthy, better motivated, experienced and with sophisticated weapons. Biafra managed to put up some resistance owing to the Biafran Radio propaganda, the resilience of the people and the ultimate desire to remain an independent state.

On January 6, 1970 Biafra surrendered to Nigeria. Gen. Philip Effiong the next in command to Gen. Ojukwu surrendered the Biafran flag to Col. Olusegun Obasanjo. Ojukwu. Left through the Uli airstrip before the Nigerian Government declared him wanted. He went into self-exile to Ivory Coast under the embrace of the Ivorian president Houphouet-Boigny who granted him asylum with his family. With the war over, General Yakubu Gowon granted amnesty to all Biafran rebel soldiers. He declared a “no victor no vanquished” policy to integrate the Eastern Region and also announced his policy of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction although this agenda was not vigorously pursued. The Igbos and Easterners however were accepted back to the Nigerian state and Mr. Ukpabi Asika assumed full authority as the Governor of East central state before he was replaced by Col. Anthony Ochefu.

10.3 The Impact of the Civil War in Nigeria

The Nigerian civil war had some far reaching impact on Nigerians. These can be grouped under socio-political, economic and effects on women and children.

a. Socio-Political Impact

- i. The Nigerian civil war changed the social and political climate in Nigeria. First, it perpetrated military dominance in Nigerian politics. The military ruled Nigeria for 13 years before it was persuaded to midwife the Second Republic in 1979. Akin to the military factor was also the Northern or Hausa/Fulani domination in the armed forces, the police and in the political leadership of the country. This dominance which has continued up to the present time has greatly polarized the country with the idea of secession being re-echoed across the country.
- ii. Second, the war brought with it a deeper feeling of distrust amongst the tribes. Having fought the war and lost, the Easterners lost sense of pride and dignity. Most of their cities remained unshackled after the war and they have been subjected to marginalization which of recent has resulted into the formation of the movement for the Emancipation of Niger delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) led by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike.
- iii. The destruction of infrastructural facilities in the East made the Igbos to scavenge for all manners of jobs, employment and means of livelihood. Immediately after the war, there was no functioning industry in the East and the public service could only absorb few educated ones. In the bid to survive young Igbo girls flooded the cities for prostitution and the men started illegitimate businesses. Most cities in Nigeria became overcrowded with the available social amenities and facilities being over stretched. This obviously led to inflation and high cost of living in the cities.
- iv. The war led to mass dismissal of Igbo public servants. Those in the army and police were also sacked. A lot of those who survived became unemployed at the end of the civil war. Since the Gowon's 3Rs (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) was a lip service, the Igbos once again started losing faith in the Nigerian project.
- v. The vindictive enactment of abandoned property law helped in dispossessing the Igbos of their landed property all over the federation. This was more pronounced in Lagos and Port Harcourt. This clandestine policy fanned the embers of inter-tribal hostility.
- vi. By the end of the war on January 13, 1970, the Igbos suffered a social stigma of "Igbophobia", exclusion of the Igbos from the policy-making bodies and regarded as social pariah amongst Nigerians.
- vii. The Nigerian war affected the education of Biafran citizens. For three years, the three levels of education stood still as schools served as military camps, hospitals or offices. In the North and West, education was not disrupted. After the civil war, some harsh economic policies meted against the Igbos frustrated possible educational intention of the average Igbo child. As

a result, there were many drop-outs in the South-East. This highly accounted for the imbalance in educational attainments between the South-East and the South-West.

- viii. The war in no small measure reconciled the North and South-West. Chief Awolowo was released from prison and made both a minister and the sage of the federal government. The North-West alliance lasted up till 1993 when Chief M.K.O. Abiola was denied the post of the Nigerian president which he clearly won by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida.

b. Economic Impact

- i. On the economic side, the civil war affected Nigeria both positively and negatively. On the negative side, it helped to destroy industrial and economic installations in the country particularly those facilities in the East. The diversified economy propped up by a relatively appreciable development in the agricultural sector collapsed. The mechanization of palm produce which had already taken off in the East relapsed. Investments on groundnut, cocoa, timber, iron ore, coal and the mining industries were neglected in pursuit of the “Liquid gold” (petroleum) found in the East. This resulted in monocultural economy that is over-dependence on oil and gas economy which has to a large extent hampered our growth in industry and technology.
- ii. By the close of the war, the economic standing of the East was weakened. The Balkanization of the East into three states through the twelve state structure squared the Igbos against their minority neighbours. Their unity was destroyed through statism as each state tried and struggled to survive and to attract federal attention as the devastation of the civil war was enormous. Most oil wells and communities from the South-East (East Central State) were ceded to South-Eastern, Rivers and Mid-Western states. This clipped the economic stronghold of the East. The effects of these have reflected on the rapid economic down turn of the South-East and border clashes with its sister states.
- iii. Rather than abjure corruption and ethnicity the civil war abetted it the more. It promoted the power struggle to control the reins of power at the federal level where the faith of the nation is determined. This consciousness has weakened further the national unity, economic development and produced mediocre in the governance of the Nigerian state. The economic mismanagement that follows as a result of mutual suspicion and tribal sentiments, kept Nigeria away from the path to economic development.
- iv. The Igbos were impoverished as a result of the war. Their property built or established in other states were tagged “abandoned property” were confiscated and taken as war booties. The policy of the Federal Commissioner for finance Chief Obafemi Awolowo to pay a flat paltry sum of £20 to every Igbo account owner in the Nigerian bank irrespective of his savings at the end of the war brought untold hardship to the people who were already devastated. Following this policy was the nationalization of industries which deprived the Igbos opportunity to hold equity or shares in the nationalized corporations since none of them had any money to acquire shares unlike their Northern and Western brothers.

- v. On the positive side, the war led to foreign interest and investment into the Nigerian oil sector which is the mainstay of the economy. The patronage got from these foreign partners expanded the oil sector with the effect that Nigeria had an oil boom immediately after the civil war which resulted in the building of Port Harcourt, Warri and Kaduna refineries seen as the biggest in Africa.
- vi. The war brought in hunger for innovation in indigenous enterprise. Rising from a battered economy with government funds largely conceded to reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation, only few hands were needed in the public service. Most people became “emergency contractors”, importers, producers and providers of essential commodities and services. This helped to shore up the economy and brought about the needed economic recovery which within five years (1970-1975) brought Nigeria into limelight as a dominant economic power in Africa so much that General Gowon accepted that “Nigeria had so much money that the problem was how to spend it”.

c. Effects on Women and Children

Even before the outbreak of the war, the pogrom which resulted in the mass homecoming of over 2 million Igbos to their homeland from Northern and Western regions over-stretched the economy of the East. It brought with it poverty and untold hardships especially on women and children who were dependants. This became worsened with the outbreak of the civil war tending to Biafran secession and the Nigeria’s blockade of both air and seaports which brought insurmountable pressure on the available resources and food in the Biafran territory.

Since business, commerce and industry came to a halt and with the men pushing to the battlefield coupled with the air raids of the Nigerian combatants, women and children became disillusioned and incapacitated. The shortage of food supplies greatly affected pregnant and nursing mothers and children who, being faced with acute starvation became malnourished and sick. With the fall of Abakaliki in April, 1968 and Port Harcourt in May, 1968, major routes to medical and food supplies closed up. This put over 2 million children and 1.6 million women in the danger list of hunger and malnutrition. By June 1968, cases of kwashiorkor became rife and donor agencies were beckoned upon to assist.

The starvation ordeal exposed the Biafran women to sexual exploitation in the hands of relief dispensers who were mainly soldiers and public officials. Some women were also exploited to gain the release of either their husbands, children or relatives who were conscripted into the military even without training for the battlefield. Some women flirted with corrupt military personnel and public officers to have their relatives placed in the civilian “essential duties” from where they could help sustain the family.

In course of the war, many Biafran children were evacuated to foreign countries. Many mothers lost their children for inability to identify their babies soon after the war. This was heart-rending. Besides, women passed through agonies as they watched their children and husbands die,

conscripted, maimed, and lost in the war. Some men also passed through the trauma of watching their children, wives and relatives moved down or assaulted helplessly.

By the end of the war, most women who were either widowed or had their husbands maimed had “a dual mandate” of taking care of the children as well as being breadwinners. This in a way distorted the traditional Igbo patriarchy. This condition challenged the resilience of most women who sauntered into petty farming and trading even up to the coastal areas to make ends meet.

Again, many young girls were raped or abducted by soldiers. Federal troops, aware that most Biafran men were under military conscription raided some villages and homes to rape girls; some were abducted into forced marriages with Northern soldiers who took them to the North as wives. Even some Biafran officers indulged in the same game to case sexual. This continued even few months after the end of the civil war. This escapade had a permissive effect on women. It introduced prostitution in Igboland, sexual promiscuity and prevalent infidelity. Worst still, some of these sexual orgies produced bastards and ruined some girls and homes. This helped to desecrate the social virtues and values in Igboland and to a large extent, Nigeria.

With those children witnessing the war, watching the trauma of their brothers’ or father’s conscription, murder, rape of their mothers, sisters or relatives and the utter disregard of pleas and human sympathy, they grew up with pent up anger, vendetta spirit and tribal hostility. This accounted for the rapid growth and spread of cultism and banditry amongst the youths in the South East soon after the war.

The war affected children under child-schooling age in the South-East. Some had their education disrupted as a result of the war, others had their sponsors killed in the war, and yet others experienced excruciating poverty that going to school became a mirage. There were as a result, a lot of primary and secondary school drop-outs and illiterate children and youths who moved about in search of survival. There were no free education, rehabilitation or measures put in place to cushion the effects of the war-torn area. Youths were abandoned to their fate mindless of its effects.

Summary

- The military that toppled the civilian administration of the First Republic was invited to do so through their unpatriotic displays, misgivings and self-centredness
- The disenchanted Nigerians became more apprehensive as the Military that claimed to be on a Zionist or reform mission fell into deeper and volatile river of segregation, tribalism and insensitivity.
- The corruption and divide in the rank and file of the military, the unwillingness of the rival military camps to harmonise actions and follow the pathway to peace plunged Nigeria into an avoidable civil war.

- The war projected the technological ingenuity and resilience of the Biafran people and showed the unwillingness of Nigerian Government led by Gen Gowon to allow the disintegration of the country until unity was once more achieved.
- The prosecution of the civil war had aftereffects of the lives of women and children and on the socio economic lives of the average Nigerians

Revision Questions

Objectives

1. One of the reasons advanced for the overthrow of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi regime was _____.
 - A. financial recklessness
 - B. playing tribal sentiment
 - C. his plan to remain in power
 - D. weak administration
2. Aguiyi-Ironsi was killed on _____.
 - A. a state visit to Ibadan
 - B. his way to reconcile Western leaders
 - C. fact finding mission
 - D. the ground that he killed the Prime Minister
3. The Igbo pogrom in the North which began in Kaduna started _____.
 - A. September 18, 1966
 - B. May 27, 1967
 - C. May 30, 1967
 - D. May 28, 1966
4. One of the reasons Lt. Col. Ojukwu gave for not accepting Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon as the Head of State was _____.
 - A. that Gowon was a Northerner
 - B. that Gowon was a bloody coup plotter
 - C. that Gowon was inferior to him
 - D. that Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe was supposed to be in-charge.
5. At Aburi conference the Federal Government conceded ____ to Ojukwu.
 - A. power to rule
 - B. confederacy
 - C. compensation
 - D. independence
6. The Nigerian Inspector-General of Police who attended the Aburi conference in Ghana was _____.

- A. Barr. Tafa Balogun
 - B. Alhaji Ibrahim Coomasi
 - C. Alhaji kam Salem
 - D. Mr. T. Omo-Bare
7. The bid to have autonomous states from the Nigerian nation started in _____.
A. 1953
B. 1951
C. 1962
D. 1966
8. In order to placate Chief Obafemi Awolowo and gain his support against Biafra, the federal government _____.
A. agreed to restore his premiership
B. rebuilt his damaged houses
C. released him from prison and appointed him a federal commissioner.
D. gave him a National Merit Honour award
9. On the declaration of an independent and sovereign state of Biafra, Lt. Col. Ojukwu and the federal government started off the war on
A. March 17,1967
B. May 30,1967
C. May 27, 1967
D. July 6, 1967
10. Gen. Philip Effiong on January 6, 1970 accepted Biafran defeat and surrendered to _____.
A. General Yakubu Gowon
B. Brigadier Shehu Yar'adua
C. Col. Olusegun Obasanjo
D. Brigadier B. Ogundipe.

Essay Questions

1. Explain in your own view, any three remote and immediate causes that led to the Nigerian civil war.
2. Highlight the factors that led to military intervention in the First Republic.
3. Why did the Northern soldiers in the Nigerian military over-threw Gen. Aguiyi-Ironsi?
4. “On Aburi Accord we stand’ was the stand of Ojukwu and the Igbos. What were the contents of the Aburi Accord?
5. How did the civil war affect Nigeria?

Discuss:

- A. Economically;
- B. Socio-politically; and
- C. On women and children.