

**Ibadan Journal of Peace & Development**  
**Vols. 5 & 6 May 2015 pp. 216-229**

## ***Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria***

*Uchenna David Enweremadu*

### **Abstract**

*Between 6 July, 1967 and 15 January, 1970 Nigeria was engulfed in a bitter civil war which took the lives of at least one million people. The war was ignited when the former Eastern Region declared itself an independent and sovereign state under the name of Biafra and unsuccessfully attempted to secede from the rest of the federation, following a widespread massacre of people of Eastern Nigerian origin in the Northern part of the country. Once the war ended, the Nigerian government announced a number of reconciliatory measures which aimed at overcoming the ethno-regional animosities which gave rise to the war and strengthen national unity. Decades after, new separatist groups have emerged in the same region, include a group calling itself Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB). This article examines the relationship between Nigeria's post-civil war reconciliation policies and the re-emergence of separatist groups in Eastern Nigeria. It argues that Nigeria's attempt at post-war reconciliation has not been totally effective, mainly due the poor implementation, the adoption of contradictory policy measures which were conceived to be punitive by the Easterners, especially the Igbos, continued lack of security of Igbo lives and properties which were among the issues that gave rise to the Biafran war, and perceived marginalisation of the Igbo in the area of distribution of national power and economic resources. The author recommends immediate restructuring of the country and institutionalisation of an equitable power sharing formula to address the concern of the Easterners.*

### **Introduction**

*The birth of the Nigerian state on 1 October, 1960, following colonisation by Great Britain, was accompanied by inter-ethnic wrangling, extreme distrust and bitter power struggle among the various ethno-regional groups forming the Nigerian federation (Nnoli, 1978). This situation was exploited by the First*

*Republic politicians and their ethno-regional oriented political parties to access political power which they perceive more or less as a zero-sum game. As ethno-religious violence spread, the army was force to intervene in order to put an end to such centrifugal forces. The decision of the Nigerian military to intervene in politics on 15 January, 1966*

Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science,  
 University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria.

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 217**

unfortunately heightened these frictions when the military itself became divided along ethno-regional lines, ultimately culminating in a civil war, between 6 July, 1967 and 15 January, 1970.

The war cost the life of an estimated one million lives. The casualties came from both sides. However, most of the deaths occurred in the former Eastern Region<sup>1</sup>, briefly known as the Republic of Biafra, which had, following a widespread massacre of people of Eastern Nigerian origin in the Northern part of the country, declared itself an independent and sovereign state and unsuccessfully attempted to secede from the rest of the federation. The crisis was by far the most difficult challenge Nigeria has faced as an independent and sovereign state. Apart from the lives lost, the 30-month conflict also led to the loss or destruction of several public and private properties, including businesses and key public infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, roads, etc. strengthening the already existing distrust among Nigeria's over 250 ethnic nationalities, notably the largest three, or majority ethnic groups, the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani.

After the war, it became necessary for the Nigerian government to adopt some reconciliatory measures to overcome ethno-regional animosities and suspicion which gave rise to the war and strengthen national unity in the country. This was exactly what happened. Once the war ended, the victorious federal government undertook several policy measures and programmes ostensibly directed at healing the wounds inflicted by the war, also known as the Nigeria-Biafra war. The declared goals of these measures were to foster

a spirit of unity and national sense of belonging among the former combatants, especially the people of the former Eastern region who had been devastated by the war. More than four decades after the war, there remains a lot of doubt among the people of the old Eastern region, especially the Igbo who formed the majority of the population of the secessionist region, about the implementation and impact of the reconciliation policies conceived and implemented by the Nigerian government following the cessation of hostilities. The feelings of the Igbos were aptly captured in a statement made by the leader of the Ohanaeze Idi-Igbo, the foremost Igbo socio-cultural group:

With the treatment the Igbo are getting in Nigeria, it is obvious that the Nigeria/Biafra war is not over. The only thing that can show it is over is for our brothers to help us achieve Igbo presidency. All hands must be on the deck to make it a reality (President General of Ohaneze Ndi-Igbo, Dr. Raph Uwechue, cited in *The Punch*, 30 April, 2012).

Since the end of the Nigerian civil war, dozens of books and articles have been published on the conflict. Many of these works focus on the cause, nature and impact of the conflict (Tamuno, 1989; Momoh, 2000). But only very few studies have directly or comprehensively examined the impact of the post-war reconciliation measures, which is a considered an important aspect of any post-war reconstruction effort. An assessment of Nigeria's post-war or conflict reconciliation measures, has become crucial today in the context of unending political instability and threats of a possible reigniting of a civil war and disintegration of the federation coming

**218 Uchenna David Enweremadu**

from the same Eastern region that was involved in the civil war. For some years now, the Eastern region, now known as the South East and South-South regions have been witnessing a proliferation of activities of secessionist groups whose discourse have largely centred around some of the policies pursued by the Nigerian government both immediately after the war and in recent times, which are believed to have gone against the official policy of postwar reconciliation. It is against this background that this article examines some of the strategies of reconciliation pursued by the Nigerian government after the Biafra war. This is done with a view to ascertaining its manner of implementation and current impact on peace and national unity among the various sections of the Nigerian population notably groups which took part in, or were affected by, the conflict. The study is guided by the following specific research questions:

- (1) What specific policies and programmes were adopted by the government in furtherance of post-civil war reconciliation in the country?
- (2) How relevant were these measures, especially in terms promoting and sustaining peace and national unity and what factors have affected their implementation?
- (3) Is there a relationship between the implementation of Nigeria's post-civil war reconciliation policies and the re-emergence of separatist groups in the country, particular in the former Biafran region, in recent times?

- (4) How can increasing threats to national unity and peaceful coexistence among the diverse segments of the Nigerian population be more effectively addressed?

This article was motivated by a desire to provide urgent answers to the above questions. By focusing on post-civil war reconciliation, the present article will also be helping to fill the lacuna in the literature of the Nigerian Civil War created by the insufficient attention paid to the issue of postwar reconciliation by Nigerian scholars. Aside its academic value, this study will similarly assist current leaders, as well as other major stakeholders, in their elusive search for peace and national unity. In terms of methodology of research, this article employs the qualitative research method, where secondary data was utilised. The data were collected through desk review, involving an in-depth review of published materials, including books, journal articles, newspapers and magazines articles, official reports and publication of government and international agencies on the Nigerian civil war and its aftermath.

### **Postconflict Reconciliation: An Overview of Literature**

Although a large body of scholarly works exists on conflict and postconflict reconstruction in Africa (Deng and Zartman; 1991; Wallensteen, 2002; Ali and Mathews, 1999), not much has been done on the subject of post-conflict or war reconciliation in the continent. This is partly explained by the fact that post war reconciliation, or reintegration, as it is sometimes called, has only recently been

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 219**

recognised as a necessary component of post-violence reconstruction by policy makers in Africa. Among the scholarly works that have been devoted to the general subject of postwar reconstruction, there is however a good number which have attempted to examine some aspects of reconciliation, such as the meaning and goals of postwar or conflict reconciliation.

On the meaning of postwar or conflict reconciliation, Spear is of the opinion that it is the whole process involved in establishing lasting peace in a post-civil war environment (Spear, 2006:68). Rigby offers a more comprehensive definition: those activities, initiatives and processes that are primarily concerned with bringing about a restoration of relationships between those divided by conflict and enmity (Rigby, 2006:47). This processes, according to Rigby, should ideally comprise three stages or forms of activity which he termed a typology of reconciliation work: dealing with the past or memory work; human security or peace work and making things right or justice work (Ibid: 48).

The goals of postwar or conflict reconciliation have equally attracted some scholarly interest within the literature on post-conflict reconstruction. According to Brouneus, the main goal of postwar reconciliation is not to terminate one war, but prevent another one from starting (Brouneus, 2003: 52). Along the same line, Oyeleye sees it as a post-conflict exercise aimed at preventing a re-occurrence of hostility between former adversaries (Oyeleye, 2010:92), while Fischer sees it as a necessary requirement for lasting peace (Fischer, 2011: 405). The submissions of these three authors point to the same

conclusion, which is that, post-conflict reconciliation measures have one overriding goal, the prevention of any possibility of re-emergence of conflict between former adversaries, especially over the same issues that led to past conflict.

While there appears to be some sorts of consensus on the meaning, and especially the goals of post-civil war reconciliation, two opposing forms of or approaches to post-conflict reconciliation have been highlighted in the literature.

The first form was stressed in the works of Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse (2003); Wallenstein (2002); where reconciliation occurs in the immediate aftermath of a negotiated settlement to a violent conflict. This form of reconciliation usually involves the hitherto warring sides negotiating, through the help of external actors or mediators, a settlement which results in the establishment of new structures for governance. In other words, former enemies - often with a long history of violence between them - find themselves faced with the challenge of implementing the new negotiated structures for the future management of their differences on a minimally cooperative basis.

This approach reflects the South African experience following the fall of the Apartheid regime. More recent examples include the Sudan/South Sudan settlement. In the South African case, external mediation led to a decision to liberalise the political space, adopt a new constitution and conduct multi-party democratic elections. While in the case of Sudan, it led to a cessation of hostilities, the adoption of a referendum to decide the

## 220 Uchenna David Enweremadu

question of independence of South Sudan and an agreement on the sharing of oil assets between both parties in the event that voters opt for independence. This pattern of reconciliation may appear attractive due to the cooperation it encourages. However, it can be in reality very complex and challenging. One of the biggest obstacles to such cooperation is that, because of the violence of the past, their relations are based on antagonism, distrust, disrespect and, quite possibly, hurt and hatred. It is hardly a recipe for optimism, no matter how effective or perfect the new governance structures being negotiated may be (ibid: 11).

The second approach to reconciliation is said to occur where conflict or war has been terminated neither through a negotiated settlement between the belligerents nor through exertion by external third parties, but through military victory on the battlefield by one of the parties in the imbroglio (Oyeleye, 2010). The defeat of one of the parties means that the victorious side can proceed without any obstruction from either the defeated party or external actors to design and impose any programme of settlement or reconciliation it deems fit. The Nigerian-Biafran post civil war reconciliation programme follows this second approach. I will, following Oyeleye, argue that 'the failure of the Nigerian-Biafran reconciliation policies is mainly explained by the fact that the Biafran war did not end either by negotiated settlement or by exertion from external powers, but rather because Biafrans were defeated in the battle field and gave up the desire to secede'. This placed the secessionists at the mercy of the federal forces. And as a result, 'the Biafrans were involved

in neither formulation nor the implementation of any of the reconciliation policies and programmes adopted after the war by the Nigerian government (Oyeleye, 2010:84).

### **Nigerian Experience in Post-Civil War Reconciliation**

The remote and immediate causes of the Nigerian Civil War are still subject of considerable debate. Most scholars however agree that the conflict was preceded by several years of inter-ethnic wrangling, extreme distrust and bitter power struggle among the various ethno-regional groups forming the Nigerian federation. These situations spilled out of control following the decision of a section of the Nigerian military to intervene in politics on January 15, 1966. The coup resulted in the assassination of some leading politicians and senior military officers mainly from the Northern and Western regions of the country, and as a result became perceived as an 'Igbo' or Eastern coup. Six months later, a counter-coup occurred, mainly instigated by Northern military officers, which resulted in a gruesome murder of large number of Easterners, including senior military officers and tens of thousand of civilians, especially those living in the North.

The military government led by General Yakubu Gowon, which assumed power after the coup, proved unable to restore order and prevent further killings. These events ultimately culminated in a civil war, between 6 July, 1967 and 15 January, 1970, which will cost over a million lives. Most of the death occurred in the former Eastern Region, briefly known as the Republic of Biafra, which had, following a widespread massacre of people of

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 221**

Eastern Nigerian origin in the northern part of the country, declared itself an independent and sovereign state and unsuccessfully attempted to secede from the rest of the federation.

After 30 months of fighting, in which over a million lives were lost, most from hunger and starvation that arose from the decision of the federal forces to impose a blockade over the Biafran territory, the secessionist movement collapsed and agreed to rejoin the federation. The defeat of the secessionists was also helped by several other factors, prominent among which was the ill-preparation and ill-equipment of the Biafran Armed Forces (Oyeleye, 2010); internal suspicion and wrangling within the Biafran enclave (Momoh, 2000), and of course the open support offered the federal forces by the major world powers (Tamuno N. Tekena and Ukpabi C. Samson, 1989). Apart from the huge number of lives that were lost, the war caused severe socio-economic set-backs in the Eastern region, especially in terms of infrastructures, homes and business that were destroyed or damaged. Politically, the Easterners who were once in the forefront of Nigerian politics and public service, also lost their position in Nigeria, having fled in large number to the East just before the war started.

Following the defeat of Biafra, the victorious federal government promised to be magnanimous in victory. Thus, upon signing the instrument of surrender by the leaders of the secessionists region, a 'No-Victor-No-Vanquished' policy was proclaimed by the victorious federal government. This was immediately followed with a programme of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Recon-

struction, also known as the policy of the 3Rs. As Oyeleye observes 'the thrust of the 3Rs was to create an atmosphere conducive for resettling those displaced and others who fled their homes; reunite families and friends; rebuild physical facilities which had suffered some damage during the civil war; and place demobilised armed forces personnel in gainful employment in civilian life (Oyeleye, 2010:76). In more political terms, the 3Rs policy implied the absorption of ex-rebels into regular politics, public service, including the military; official pardon to the rebel leaders (including Ojukwu, the leader of the rebellion), payment of financial benefits, such pension and gratuity, to former rebels, and to a limited extent, the release of confiscated properties of some members of the rebel (notably Ojukwu).

Subsequent years also saw the introduction of a host of other policy and constitutional decisions aimed at promoting peace and national unity, and guaranteeing political stability. These decisions included, for instance, the creation of new states and local government (or more appropriately, the splitting of existing administrative units) to strengthen the central government, *vis-a-vis* the federating states (Suberu, 1998), establishment of federal unity colleges in all the states of the federation which drew its students from all pans of the country with a view to promoting 'positive inter-ethnic relations and perceptions, and to combat ethncism and tribalism; initiation of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), a mandatory one-year community service programme for all university graduates aimed at exposing young Nigerians to other ethnic

## 222 Uchenna David Enweremadu

groups and cultures, helping to forge bridges of understanding, trust and mutual co-existence; adoption of a federal character law or the quota system to guarantee equal or fair access to state patronage to all segments of the population (Nweke, 2001; Mustapha, 2002), and more recently the introduction of a power sharing mechanism (widely known as the principle of rotational presidency) (Akinola, 1996), to address persistent fear of political marginalisation by various ethno-religious groups. The last major attempt at reconciliation occurred in March 2012 when the Nigerian government, in a display of national unity, honoured Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, leader of the Biafra secessionist movement with a national burial (*TELL*, 12 March, 2012:56). The extensive nature of these policies and programmes, plus the fact that they were conceived and adopted voluntarily by the victorious federal government without any prompting from external actors or the defeated rebels, has led some commentators to adjudge the Nigerian-post war reconciliation and reconstruction effort as unprecedented, and even successful.

### **Limits of the Nigerian Post-Civil War Reconciliation**

In some ways, the Nigerian experience of post-civil war reconciliation can indeed be seen as unprecedented in modern history, as some writers have observed. Siollun (2009) argues this point succinctly:

contrary to what happens in other climes, when the war ended, the Igbo (rebels) grimly expected that their defeat would be followed by their •wholesale massacre. However the leader of the victorious army refused to proclaim victory, declared a general amnesty

for all those who fought against him, invited members of the defeated side to join his administration, refused to conduct trials of, or execute the defeated, and refused to award medals to his own soldiers who had fought the war for years. He even allowed some members of the enemy's army to join his own army. For their part, the Igbos quietly accepted their new fate in a united Nigeria, went back to their farms and businesses, and rebuilt their destroyed homes without any thoughts of sabotage or guerrilla warfare. Note that all this happened without a United Nations resolution or peacekeeping force, international peace plans and conferences, or the protracted years of long negotiations that it normally takes to resolve modern conflicts.

In a very similar tone, St Jorre observes that: "when history takes a longer view of Nigeria's 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" (De St. Jorre, 1972:171).

The above submissions on the policy of 3Rs are quite understandable, considering the bitter and factitious nature of the Nigerian civil war. Yet such submissions did not take into account the manner in which these policies were implemented by the Nigerian government, or even the long term impact of the policies. Where the reconciliation policies faithfully implemented as they were announce? And to what extent have these policies achieved their overall goals, namely increased national unity and peaceful coexistence of the various groups.

I will begin with the question of implementation. While most of the policies announced by the Nigerian government under its 3Rs policies are quite relevant and commendable, the implementation of these polices were negatively affected by several

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 223**

factors. One of these factors is that the proclamation of the policy was selective, having excluded some people judged to be 'unworthy of any amnesty' or 'every consideration of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reintegration', for whatever reasons (Efiong, 2001:22). The second factor is that the implementation of the 3Rs policies were effectively followed by a deliberate policy of disempowerment politically, economically, socially and militarily (Ikpeze, 2000:90). A third factor affecting the implementation of reconciliation is the fact that the policies did not include or directly address the issue of security of Igbo lives and properties in the post-civil war era, even though it was among the major issues that gave rise to the Biafran war. Giving that the second and third factors have been more extensively discussed in scholarly literature and even in popular social media patronised heavily by eastern Nigerians, including those calling for resuscitation of the Biafran project, it might therefore be more appropriate to focus on them in this article.

*Reconciliation and Disempowerment*

Undoubtedly, some of the sources of the bitter memories associated with the Nigerian civil war and prevalent among eastern Nigerians are traceable to actions taken by, and occurred under the same regime which initiated and spearheaded the policy of reconciliation, namely the Yakubu Gowon administration (1966-1975). This applies especially to the monetary policies, notably, the change of currency and the 'twenty pounds policy' that were introduced by the Nigerian state immediately after the war. Under the

'twenty pounds policy' policy, each easterner who had cash deposits in the country's banks before the war was paid twenty pounds, irrespective of how much he or she had in his account(s) before the war. The change of currency ensured that whatever cash (Nigerian currency) in possession of the defeated Easterners could not be used in the post-civil war Nigeria. These policies were widely considered as punitive and spiteful of the Easterners, particularly the Igbo who had already lost **everything**. Most importantly, they represented a calculated attempt to 'neutralise any savings possessed by the Igbo and their capacity to rehabilitate and re-integrate into the Nigerian economy' (Amadiume, 2000).

These monetary policies were later re-enforced by the passage of the Nigerian Enterprise Promotion Decree, popularly known as the Indigenisation Decree, in 1972. This law made it mandatory for certain categories of businesses owned by foreigners to be transferred to Nigerians. To achieve the goals of this decree, the government directed commercial banks operating in the country to provide loans to Nigerians to buy up these firms. As the Oha-Na-Eze Ndi Igbo submitted in its petitions to the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC),<sup>2</sup> the timing and manner of implementation of this decree 'ensured the effective exclusion of the Igbo from ownership in Nigeria's industrial sector, as they lacked the financial muscle to participate. In other words, as the vanquished were dispossessed of what they had, the victors were deliberately empowered to through the banks to purchase our national patrimony'

**224 Uchenna David Enweremadu**

(cited in Oyeleye, 2010:91). Similarly, the implementation of the reconciliation policy has been criticised for its failure to prevent a situation in which several properties abandoned by Easterners, especially Igbos who fled to the eastern homeland for their safety, were illegally appropriated by other communities and never returned (Ibid: 94).

Indeed, it is for these reasons and many more that some scholars and opinion leaders have argued that the policy of 3Rs was a 'mere rhetoric' (Efiong, 2001:22).

Subsequent actions by successive military regimes compounded the challenge of implementing postwar reconciliation in Nigeria, by extending the policy of disempowering the easterners, especially the Igbos, to the political spheres. Under these military rulers, there was persistent complains of lack of equitable political representation, as expressed for instance in the inequitable manner in which states and local governments were created leaving the Igbo with the least number of state and local governments relative to other major ethnic groups. There was also lop-sidedness in the location of federal institutions and infrastructural projects such as airports, seaports, large-scale industries, strategic military installations, etc. against the easterners.

This was then complimented by a deliberate denial of and exclusion from the control of certain sensitive institutions and positions of public power at the national level. For instance it took the Igbo almost forty years to produce an Inspector General of the Police and Chief of Army Staff. Even when their region boasts of many qualified and competent officers. More importantly, forty-

six years after the war, the Igbo have yet to produce a Nigerian President, military or civilian. As Duruji argues, these actions have been made possible by the fact that many of the military brass that dominated these regimes were elements that fought the Biafran rebels at the war front, and thus still had a vengeful attitude as expressed in their exclusionary policies and programmes towards the Igbos (2012:71).

*Unending Ethno-religious Violence*

A second major issue that has undermined the effective implementation of the reconciliation policies is the regular and most times unprovoked destruction of Igbo lives and properties, especially in the northern part of the country which has a history of ethno-religious violence. Although ethnic and religious violence is widespread in Nigeria. It is a known fact that the Igbo have suffered it more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria. The Igbos are the most dispersed of all Nigerian tribes. They are settled in large numbers in other regions of Nigerian and are known to have huge investments, including businesses and landed properties, spread all across Nigeria. This has unfortunately exposed them to constant violence and harassment, especially during periods of intense political and ethno-religious tensions. It is important to recall that a lack of security of Igbo lives and properties were among the issues that gave rise to the Biafran war. Unfortunately, neither the 3Rs policy nor any other subsequent government policy has directly addressed the issue of security of Igbo lives and properties in the postwar era. This has continued to be a major factor influencing how the easterners

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 225**

perceive postwar reconciliation in Nigeria.

Oyeleye is, therefore in my view, very apt when he observes that:

Among the Igbos today, there continue to exist a feeling of alienation within the political structure called Nigeria. Recurrent attacks on them, as an ethnic group in the post-civil war environment has not abated. They continue to be targets of attacks even for flimsy reasons like religious riots and protests that they have not initiated. For example, as recent as February 2000, hundred of shops owned by Igbo traders were razed to the ground following the institution of Sharia law in some Northern states of the country. It may therefore be argued that despite the effort at reconciliation, inter-ethnic group relations in Nigeria have deteriorated in the immediate post-civil war environment rather than improve (Oyeleye, 2010:100).

It was in response to Nigerian government's half-hearted and uncoordinated implementation of the postwar reconciliation programme, that the concept of 'Igbo marginalisation' was invented. Since then, the term has been consistently evoked to express the inadequacies of Nigeria's post-civil war reconciliation processes. Whether real or imaginary, these feelings remain strong in the consciousness of most Nigerians of eastern origin. The extremely emotional reactions which followed the death, on 26 November 2011, of the former Biafran leader, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, was a clear indication that a lot still needs to be done to heal the wounds occasioned by the 30 month old conflict.<sup>3</sup>

**Impact of Reconciliation on National Unity**  
Giving the half-hearted and contradictory manner of its implementation, it is little

surprising that Nigeria's postwar reconciliation programmes have had only very limited impact on those who the policy wanted to reconcile. The question of impact of reconciliation raises the issue of the extent to which increased political stability and sense of national unity, the actual goals of the 3Rs policy which embodies the Nigerian postwar reconciliation efforts, have been achieved. Arising from the half-hearted and contradictory manner in which Nigerian reconciliation policies were implemented, political stability and sense of national unity which are key goals of Nigeria's post-civil war reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, have remained key challenges and divisive issues before Nigerians even until this day. In other words, after forty five years, opinions remain divided on how much political order and sense of national unity have been achieved grace to Nigeria's model of postwar reconciliation. While some Nigerians believe that the continued existence of Nigeria as one indivisible state is an evidence that the management of the postwar reconciliation programmes has been largely effective, others especially those from the Eastern region will think otherwise.

It is noteworthy that the Nigerian state has remained intact since the end of the civil war, despite unending threats to its existence. The Nigerian political elite have - also managed to prevent a reoccurrence of a second civil war, a rare feat giving the plethora of ethno-religious clashes that has been witnessed. Yet, moments of tension have also not been scarce. At the national level, violent clashes between rival ethnic and religious groups have broken out with increasing frequency in

## 226 Uchenna David Enweremadu •

different parts of the country (Higazi, 2011). More specifically, some violent groups with separatist visions have emerged from time-to-time in the country, and among Nigerians in the diaspora, and these ironically include a group calling itself 'Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MOSSOB)', which periodically engages the Nigerian security agencies in scuffles and openly canvasses for the disintegration of the federation (Duruji, 2012, Agwu, 2004).

The MOSSOB case, or as Harnischfeger puts it, 'the resurgence of Igbo separatism' (Harnischfeger, 2012:1) suggests that while a large number of Nigerians east of the Niger probably did not witness the conflict, and are strongly committed to the idea of 'One Nigeria'<sup>4</sup>, bitter memories of the war and its aftermath remain very much alive in the heart of many easterners who think that Nigeria's post-war reconciliation programmes have failed to resolve the issues that gave rise to the conflict, namely the lack of security of Igbo lives and properties ( Oluokun, 2012) and perceived marginalisation of the Igbo in the area of distribution of national power and economic resources (Harnischfeger, 2012: 13). As a result, rather than make all Igbo to embrace the idea of one united and indivisible Nigeria, the implementation of the 3Rs policy, at best, have divided the Igbos into two camps- one group believes that the future of Igbos is best secured in an independent state, while the second believe that the future of Igbos is best served by being part of a better and more equal union of Nigerian nations if it is achievable, where the rule of law, justice and true democracy reign (cited in Eke, 2012).

A close reading of political developments

in contemporary Nigeria show that these contradictory thinking and memories, along with their interpretations, which Amadiume described as "the Politics of Memory" (2000), will likely continue to pose threat to the stability and unity of the country for generations to come if efforts are not made to urgently and effectively overcome them. Activities of groups such as MOSSOB which continues to openly canvass for the disintegration of the Nigerian federation, are a constant reminder of this fact. The increasing popularity and vitality of these pro-secessionist groups, even in the face of state repression suggests that some causative factors, as well as unsavoury memories associated with the war, are still very much with us (Agbu: 21; Thomas, 2010: 57) .

### **Concluding Remarks and Agenda for Political Reform**

From the forgoing analysis, it is obvious that Nigeria's attempt at postwar reconciliation has not been totally effective contrary to what some Nigerian leaders we have us believe. Several factors have been responsible for this outcome, notably the manner in which the policy was implemented. The implementation of the policy was characterised by the adoption of some contradictory policy measures which were conceived to be disempowering and punitive by the Easterners and the continued lack of security of Igbo lives and properties which were among the issues that gave rise to the Biafran war. Additionally, There is also the unresolved issue of continued marginalisation of the Igbo in the area of distribution of national power and economic resources. All these have worked

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 227**

together to undermine the impact of the reconciliation measures adopted after the Nigerian civil war. Unending political instability and re-emergence of secessionist movements, especially in the eastern region, lends credence to the inadequacies of Nigeria's post-civil war reconciliation processes.

These developments underline the need for an urgent and permanent political solution aimed at redressing the legitimate grievances of the Igbo and other groups alienated by the exclusionary pattern of Nigerian politics, especially in the postwar era. This solution must include a more equitable power sharing formula which is widely considered to be a viable instrument in peacebuilding in countries emerging from civil wars and conflicts especially, deeply divided societies (Isumonah: 2006). Until now, majority of Nigerian leaders have continued to resist any restructuring of the country and institutionalisation of any such equitable power sharing formula, despite persistent clamour for such changes from some quarters. For instance, persistent calls for devolution of more powers to the federating units and amendment of the constitution to institutionalise 'rotational presidency' have been strongly resisted. Moved by this irrational disposition to an urgent national imperative, Agbu posed the following rhetorical question:

should Nigeria's leaders and politicians continue to hold on to the inherited colonial political contrivances and suffer perennial ethnic and religious violence and the risk of possible secessions or even civil wars, or should they boldly re-visit the basis and structures of the federation with a view to re-designing the polity through popular participation? (Agbu, 2004: 4).

While it may be difficult to anticipate any change in the irrational position of the ruling elite in refusing to acknowledge that there are still grievances among peoples of the Eastern Region arising from the civil war that should be addressed and that these grievances have contributed to the challenge of political stability and national unity, especially in recent times, it is however clear that tensions and conflicts will likely remain as long as there remains a perception of ethnic injustice and political marginalisation among some Nigerians. Indeed, as Nigerian war-time leader, General Gowon, observes, that Nigerians can only guarantee the stability and unity of their country as long as justice, equity, fairness remain the cardinal virtues that inform national policies (Gowon, 2001:18).

**Endnotes**

1. At Independence, the 'Nigerian federation was composed of three regions, North, East and West, each of which was dominated by one of the three majority language groups, the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West. The number later increased to four in 1962, when the Mid-West Region was created out of the former Western Region.
2. The HRVIC, was set up during the Obasanjo Presidency to probe into cases of human rights violations and injustices which occurred before 1999.
3. See, for instance, Maureen Chigbo *et al.*, 'Ojukwu: Exit of an Igbo Legend', in *Newswatch* (Lagos), 12 December, 2011.
4. One Igbo writer, Eke, argues for instance that, campaign for actualization of Biafra " can only undermine the confidence of other ethnic groups in Igbos and make it less likely for them to trust Igbos ... Igbos undermines their place

## 228 Uchenna David Enweremadu

in Nigeria by their agitation for Biafra at the time of crisis, and it is simply unwise to continue to do so when what majority of Nigerians seem to want is a better Nigeria. Igbo and Biafra have become intertwined with the future of Nigeria and it is impossible to conceive Biafra emerging through self-determination from present Nigeria, if genuine democracy takes root. To believe otherwise, would run in the face of the evidence and reality. It would be to apply faith where reason, knowledge, (evidence) and logic are needed" (Eke, 2012).

## References

- Agbu, O. (2004), Ethnic Militias and the Threat to Democracy in Post-Transition Nigeria, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet Research Report No. 127.
- Akinola, A. A. (1996). *Rotational Presidency*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Ali, M. T. and Mathews, O. R. (eds.) (1999). *Civil Wars in Africa: Root and Resolution*, London, McGraw-Hill-Queen's University Press.
- Amadiume I. (2000), "The Politics of Memory: Biafra and Intellectual Responsibility", in Amadiume I. and An-Na'im, A. (eds.), *Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing and Social Justice*, London and New York, Books, pp. 42-44.
- Bloomfield, D., Barnes, T. and Huyse L. (eds.) *Reconciliation After Violent Conflict: A Handbook*, 2003, Stockholm, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.
- Brouneus, K. (2003). *Reconciliation: Theory and Practice for Development Cooperation*, SIDA (The Department for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations and Humanitarian Assistance), Uppsala, Uppsala University.
- Deng, M. F. and Zartman, W. (eds.) (1991). *Conflict Resolution in Africa*, Washington D.C., The Brookings Institution.
- De St. Jorre, J. (1972). *Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Duruji, M. M. 'Civic. The Ethnicity-Nationalism Dichotomy: Untangling the Renewed Demand for an Autonomous Biafran State in Nigeria', in Aderemi, S. A. (ed.), *Nationalism and Politics in Post-Colonial Nigeria*, Cologne, Rudiger Koppe Verlag (Topics in Interdisciplinary African Studies, Vol. 24, 2012, pp. 71-92).
- Efiong, P. (2001). Reminiscences on the War and its Aftermath, in *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath: Views from Within*, Programme on ethnic and Federal Studies (PEFS) Occasional Paper No. 1: pp. 19-29.
- Eke, E. O. (2012). Igbos, Nigeria, and the Future: Time to Bury the Ghost of the Biafra, <http://mgenaworld.com/feature/publication/eke/042312.html> (Accessed 23 April 2012).
- Fischer, M. (2011). Transitional Justice and Reconciliation: Theory and Practice, in Austin, B; M. Fischer, M; Giessmann H.J. (eds.), *Advancing Conflict Transformation*. The Berghof Handbook II, Opladen/Framington Hills: Barbara Budrich Publishers, pp. 405-430.
- Gavin, W. et al (1983). *Origin of the Nigerian Civil War*. London, Open University Press.
- Go won, Y. (2001). 'Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Some Preliminary Critical Notes', in *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath: Views from Within*, Programme on ethnic and Federal Studies (PEFS) Occasional Paper No. 1: pp. 1-18.
- Harnischfeger, J. (2012). *Igbo Nationalism and Biafra*, LECTURE delivered at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 26 March, 2012.
- Higazi, A. (2011). 'The Jos Crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy.' Fnednch Ebert Stiftung Discussion Paper No. 2, January.
- Ikpeze, I. (2000), Post-Biafran Marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria", in Amadiume I. and An-Na'im, A. (eds.), *Politics of Memory: Truth, Healing and Social Justice*, London and New York, Books, pp. 90-109.
- Isumonah, V. A. (2005). Problems of Peacemaking and Peacekeeping, in Albert O. Isaac (ed.), *Perspectives on Peace and Conflicts in Africa*, Ibadan, John Archers, pp. 198-216.
- Momoh, H. B. (2000). *The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-*

**Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Contemporary Nigeria 229**

- 1970: *History and Reminiscences*. Ibadan, Kenbim Press.
- Mustapha, A. R. (2002). Coping with Diversity: The Nigerian State in Historical Perspective, in Samatar A.I. (ed.), *The African State: Reconsiderations*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Nweke, O. J. (2009). 'The Challenges of National Integration in Nigeria', in *The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol. 5, pp. 91-107.
- Okwadiba, N. (1978). *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Oluokun, A. (2012). 'The Killing Spree: The Igbo Continue to Suffer the Highest Casualty in the Ongoing Attacks by Boko Haram Across the Northern states', *The News*, February 20, pp. 14-19.
- Osaghae, E., Onwudiwe, E. and Suberu, R. (eds.) (2002). *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath*. Ibadan: PEFS.
- Oyeleye, O. (2010). *The Politics of Post-War Demobilisation and Reintegration in Nigeria*. Farnham Surrey, Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Rigby, A. (2006). 'Civil Society, Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation in Post-War Africa', in Furley Oliver and May Roy (eds.), *Ending Africa's Wars: Progressing to Peace*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Ltd, pp. 47-62.
- Siollun, M. (2009). Nigeria's Post Civil War Reconciliation, [http://www.kwenu.com/publications/siollun/nigeria\\_postwar\\_reconciliation.htm](http://www.kwenu.com/publications/siollun/nigeria_postwar_reconciliation.htm). Downloaded 27 December, 2011.
- Spear, J. (2006). 'Disarmament, Demobilization, Reinsertion and Reintegration in Africa', in Furley Oliver and May Roy (eds.), *Ending Africa's Wars: Progressing to Peace*, Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Ltd., pp. 63-80.
- Suberu, R. (1998). 'States Creation and the Political Economy of Nigerian Federalism', in Amuwo K., Agbaje A., Herault G. (eds.), *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria..* Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., pp. 277-286.
- Tamuno, N. T. and Ukpabi, C. S. (1989). *Nigeria Since Independence; The First 25 Years: The Civil War Years (Vol. VI)*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Thomas, N. A. (2010). Beyond the Platitude of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation in Nigeria: Revolutionary Pressures in the Niger Delta, in *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 54-71.
- Wallensteen, P. (2002). *Understanding Conflict Resolution: War, Peace and the Global System*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

