

**ANGUISH AND HOPE, TRAJECTORY AND ERASURE: THE STRUGGLES OF THE
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA**

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ABSTRACT: *The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) face a dual narrative of anguish and hope as they navigate their historical trajectory and ongoing erasure. This paper examines the IPOB's enduring struggle for self-determination, cultural preservation, and political recognition, grounded in the tumultuous legacy of the Nigerian Civil War. Despite systemic oppression, violent crackdowns, and international neglect, IPOB is propelled by an unwavering aspiration for sovereignty. This study explores the complex interplay between historical grievances and contemporary advocacy, situating IPOB's plight within broader themes of decolonization and indigenous rights. Through a critical analysis of IPOB's journey, this paper illuminates the resilience and determination of a people striving to reclaim their dignity and future amid adversity, underscoring the urgent need for a just and inclusive resolution to their protracted struggle.*

Keywords: *Self-determination, Cultural preservation, Decolonization, Political recognition, Indigenous People of Biafra*

A. Introduction

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a secessionist political organization that has since 1967 sought to break out from Nigeria.¹ This organization is not “Indigenous” in the context of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) discourse. However, the analogies of UNDRIP and the Tsihqot’in Nation can be used to help the IPOB causes. The pioneer of the IPOB was Lt. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, who severally fought for the Independence of the states under the organization. The following states under the IPOB were Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers – the Easterners. This organization was as a result of the oppression and political marginalization of the Eastern part of Nigeria by the colonial masters and the long-lasting domineering power of the Northerners. It is important to note that Nigeria was part of the countries that voted against the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.²

The anguish and hope of the Indigenous People of Biafra is narrated in this thesis. Explored is the trajectory of the Indigenous People of Biafra in Nigeria, their struggles, the wars, the starvation, the killings and their defeat. There continues to be a political and economic oppression of the Easterners by the Northerners in Nigeria. This research paper further explores the influence of the British on the Nigerian state that obstructed the Biafran dream.

I. Colonization and Political Marginalization

The Whiteman War never finishes

¹ Esther Ajiboye, “Polarisation and the Sustenance of Biafra Secessionist Discourses Online” (2020) 55:4 Journal of Asian and African Studies 475–491 at 3.

² This article is part of a chapter in my LLM thesis which is currently published at UVic’s library.

The Whiteman war is always big.

- King Koko of Nembe³

No region in Africa was attractive to the Europeans the way Nigeria was. This attraction existed long before gold and diamonds were discovered in South Africa. The Nigerian trade which consisted of palm oil and palm kernels were established and greatly enjoyed by the Europeans. It was the source of income and livelihood for the Igbo. The resources of peanut and cocoa was also a lucrative business that the colonial masters could not overlook. This was despite the massive profits the Europeans could make out of the sale of gold and diamond in South Africa.⁴ The Europeans saw that Nigeria was a great asset and they could make more money from all regions in the country. For instance, there was the River-Niger oil that was to be explored which the British regarded as a principal route to the rich Nigerian hinterlands.⁵

The British came into Nigeria and threatened to go to war against the indigenes. Considering that Nigerians were not armed or fully equipped to go to fight the British, Nigeria surrendered to the whims and caprices of the British.⁶ Some Nigerians were brave enough to go to war despite their foreseen defeat. There is a long list of incidents and defeats; King Jaja of Opobo was crushed and exiled in 1887 for opposing the British advance into the interior market; the Ijebu were attacked and defeated in 1892; King Nana Olumu of Itsekiri on the Benin River was attacked and removed from his fortified base at Ebrohimi in 1894, Oba Ovonramwen of Benin lost his throne and kingdom in 1897; the Nupe and Ilorin were attacked and defeated in 1897; King Ibaniduka of

³ Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and violence in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) at 1.

⁴ See Falola, *supra* note 2 at 1.

⁵ *Ibid* at 1.

⁶ See Falola, *supra* note 2 at 1.

Okirika was removed from power and exiled in 1898; and Ologboshere, who wanted to regain Benin's independence, was defeated and executed in 1899.⁷ Each time a war was lost, a king was forcibly removed or killed; the British Empire was expanding and Nigeria kept losing their Independence.

As the empire of the British was expanding, they kept on finding more ways to gain full domination over Nigeria. One of the ways was through the Catholic missionaries. The indigenous elders allowed the government and Catholic missionaries to educate and imbibe religious values on the Eastern part of Nigeria in order to get rid of vernacular spoken in that region.⁸ The colonial masters saw the vernacular as evil and at all cost wanted people residing in the Eastern part of Nigeria to desist from speaking such evil language. Father J. Kirchner, who was one of the missionaries in the Eastern part of Nigeria, painted a clear picture of the reason behind putting an end to vernacular when he wrote:

To open an out-station or Catechist-post, and to establish a school, were one and the same thing. If a missionary entered a village which possessed no school, his first action was not to preach about the Kingdom of God, rather he endeavoured, first and foremost, to win the people over for the school. He had to speak only about the school, for the people either did not understand much about religion and the foundation of a Mission, or they did not want to know anything about these things. But if he spoke to them about intelligent and educated people (like the Whites), about well brought up and neatly clothed school children who even understood and spoke the language of the Whites,

⁷ *Ibid* at 1. This list was greatly and accurately compiled by Toyin Falola. For further readings about the history of violence that occurred in the Southern part of Nigeria; see <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/reader.action?docID=474474>

⁸ Nicholas Omenka, "The Role of the Catholic Mission in the Development of Vernacular Literature in Eastern Nigeria" (1986) 16:2 *J Relig Afr* 121–137 at 121.

the whole crowd would send out an outburst of enthusiasm and would say: "That is excellent! we too would want our children transformed in this way."⁹

Theoretically speaking, the purpose of colonial rule was to alter the customs, traditions, and institutions that the British deemed harmful to Nigerian progress. The British did not tamper with the existing political and social institutions. In practice, however, colonial policies made tremendous changes to Nigerian societies in many ways, particularly in Southern Nigeria, which suffered the most significant alterations to political institutions and economic orientation.¹⁰

II. **Amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Part of Nigeria**

In 1906, the amalgamation of the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos with the Niger Coast Protectorate occurred. The aim was to form a single Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.¹¹ Lugard left Nigeria 1906 but returned in 1912 to oversee the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates. Upon completion in 1914, Lugard became the first governor general of the pre-colonial territory also known as Nigeria for five years. The main goal of Lugard was not farfetched, as governor general of Nigeria he had unfettered powers. He wanted to centralize the administrative apparatus.¹² Lugard never liked the administrative models that was practiced in the southern Nigeria. He believed that such model would end up causing chaos.¹³ He also thought that the rule practiced in southern Nigeria was “direct” and not “indirect”. As a result of this, the British colonial officers had enough power to influence the affairs of the native courts and councils. This

⁹ *Ibid* at 124.

¹⁰ Toyin Falola & Matthew M Heaton, *A history of Nigeria* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) at 152.

¹¹ *Ibid* at 117.

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

was where the problem started. Lugard failed to recognize the rule of system practicable in the southern Nigeria. Lugard imposed the system of administration applicable in the north on the south – making emirs out of southern kings and chiefs.¹⁴ Lugard kept on searching for the southern chiefs to bestow sole authority on. In view of his search, he decided to extend the powers and duties to traditional rulers in southern Nigeria.¹⁵ He gave the traditional rulers powers that they never had before. This was how Lugard gained total control over the southern Nigeria.

According to Falola and Heaton:

“The ostensible reason for amalgamating the Nigerian protectorates was economic. Despite the efforts of Lugard and his successors to reorganize the finances of northern Nigeria, the economy of the northern protectorate had floundered under indirect rule and had not become fully self financing as of 1914. Taxation had not produced enough revenue to cover the administrative needs of the protectorate, and commerce had not grown sufficiently to make the region profitable. To finance itself, the northern protectorate relied on annual subsidies from southern Nigeria and an imperial grant-in-aid from the British government to the tune of approximately £ 300,000 per year. Both the Colonial Office and Lugard believed that centralizing the protectorates under a single administration would be economically beneficial. Amalgamation would allow for a streamlining of existing expenses and would allow the central administration to divert resources as it saw fit – allocating southern revenue to the north as necessary. It would also allow for the centralization of infrastructural and development schemes, reducing waste and eventually bringing about the integration of the southern and northern economies on a much greater scale.”¹⁶

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Falola & Heaton, *supra* note 9 at 117.

¹⁶ See Falola & Heaton, *supra* note 9 at 116 – 117.

III. Nigerian Biafran Pogrom

The Nigerian Biafran Pogrom is also known as the 1966 anti-Igbo pogrom. It was the series of massacres that were committed against the Igbos who were resident and carrying on business in the Northern part of Nigeria. This massacre started from May 1, 1956, to September 29, 1966.¹⁷ This massacre was a result of the January 1966 Nigerian coup d'état that was led by young Igbo army officers. Two Igbo army officers tried to stop the coup in Lagos and the North: Aguyi-Ironsi and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu respectively. Months after the coup, the Northerners felt threatened that the Igbos were going to take control of the country. The Northerners had to retaliate and carried out the July 1966 Nigerian counter-coup. That coup aimed to kill the Igbos living in the North and Southern army officers more than half of them were Igbo. The rivalries between both ethnic groups increased and it led to further massacres.¹⁸ The Northerners succeeded in killing between 8,000 to 30,000 Igbos living in the North were brutally slaughtered. On account of their loved ones who were massacred in the North, the Igbos killed some of the Northerners who were living in Port Harcourt and other Eastern regions in the country.¹⁹

IV. The Aburi Accord

Between January 4th and 5th 1967, the members of Nigeria's then ruling military government, the Supreme Military Council (SMC), met for the first time at Aburi in Ghana under the auspices of the Ghanaian Head of State: Lt-General Joe Ankrah. Following a second bloody army coup in July 1966, the Military Governor of the eastern region of Nigeria Lt-Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu

¹⁷ "1966 anti-Igbo pogrom" in *Wikipedia* (2021) Page Version ID: 1009891367

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1966_anti-Igbo_pogrom#:~:text=The%201966%20anti%2DIgbo%20pogrom,estimated%20to%20have%20been%20killed>

¹⁸ EC Ejiogu, "Chinua Achebe on Biafra: An Elaborate Deconstruction" (2013) *J Asian Afr Stud* at 3.

¹⁹ Early Trumpet Media, *Tragedy of Nigeria unlearned lessons* (20 December 2020) at 00h: 3m: 54s, online (YouTube): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-85_-xpsOQQ>. This YouTube video captures the events of the massacre of the Igbos living in the Northern part of Nigeria.

had refused to attend any SMC meeting outside the eastern region of Nigeria due some security concerns.²⁰ The Aburi Accord seemed to be an extension of peace from the military government. It also included agreements that ordinarily, the federal government of Nigeria would not have considered. Surprisingly, the federal government could not fully implement the agreements in the Aburi Accord but came up with a partial implementation of the agreements. Despite this, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu outrightly rejected the federal government promulgation on the Aburi agreement citing its ‘inclusion of the emergency powers’ of the Head of State which was not part and parcel of the initial agreement. He knew that any emergency powers arrogated to the Head of State was a concentration of powers in the hands of the Head of State which was not what Ojukwu bargained for at Aburi.²¹ The federal government on the other hand went ahead and implemented the Aburi decisions one year after the fight for Biafra came to an end. This implementation pulled through even though it did not satisfy the terms suggested by Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on behalf of the eastern part of Nigeria.

There were so many implications for the collapse of the Aburi Accord and they included the creation of states in Nigeria by the federal government, diplomatic tensions and economic tensions. It is not hidden that the trajectory leading to the Nigeria Civil War of 1967 had oil as a central issue. The petroleum industry in Nigeria was a relatively young one long before the war. The British had already seen that oil was the country’s future economic development. Furthermore, the federal government was already benefiting from the largesse of oil companies’ revenue and would rather not sacrifice this money spinner on account of any rebellious act.²² As a result of this,

²⁰ Otoabasi Akpan and Blessing J. Edet, “From ‘Jaw-Jaw’ to ‘War-War’: Aburi Accord and the Nigerian Civil War, 1967 – 1970” (2018) at 94, online (pdf): <<https://jhms.academyjsekad.edu.ng/vol0401-4-JHMS.pdf>>.

²¹ *Ibid* at 96.

²² See Akpan & Edet, *supra* note 19 at 99.

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared at 5.00 AM on 30 May 1967 that “the territory and the Eastern part of Nigeria, together with her continental shores and territorial waters, shall henceforth be an independent and sovereign state of the name and title “the Republic of Biafra.”²³

B. The Struggle of Secession

I. Nigerian-Biafra War of 1967

“We went to that war with nothing, we went empty-handed.

Some held machetes, and some had sticks.

The Nigerian state had machine guns.”

- Francis Njoku²⁴

“Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came ...

“Neither party expected the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the Bible and pray to the same God: and each invokes its aid against the other.”

²³ See Akpan & Edet, supra note 19 at 99.

²⁴ “Nigeria treats us like slaves’ - but is Biafra the answer?”, *BBC News* (6 July 2017), online: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40506251>>. Frank Njoku, who at the time was 69 years old, was a Biafran War veteran remembered and narrated the conflict 50 years on.

The Nigerian-Biafra War also known as the (Nigeria Civil War). It was a civil war that was between the government of Nigeria spearheaded by General Yakubu Jack Gowon, who at the time was the head of state of Nigeria. This war was against the secessionist state of Biafra led by Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. The reason behind the cold war was because the Eastern part of Nigeria wanted to form their sovereign country known as the “*Republic of Biafra*.”²⁶ It also occurred because of the ethnic violence and anti-Igbo pogroms. Biafra represented the aspirations of the Igbo people who could no longer coexist with the Northern Nigeria dominated by the federal government. Biafra has since become an identity of the predominantly Igbo ethnic nationality of Nigeria also known as the IPOB.

The Biafra struggle thus, is synonymous with the struggle of the Igbos for equity, justice and fairness within the Nigerian State.²⁷ The aim of separating from Nigeria was to enable the Biafrans to have total control over their lands and natural resources. Most importantly, to prevent the political marginalization against the Igbo community. The Nigerian federal government did not take the decision of the Biafrans in good faith. They attempted to militarily force the Eastern Region, which had seceded as Biafra, back to Nigeria.²⁸ The Igbos who lived and carried on 90% of their businesses in the Northern part of Nigeria were brutally killed. Their shops, farms and

²⁵ Ntieyong Udo Akpan, "The Struggle for Secession, 1966-1970: a personal account of the Nigerian Civil War" (London: F. Cass, 1972) at 3.

²⁶ Theodore Okonkwo & Kato Gogo Kingston, "An Assessment of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of Biafra to Self-Determination under International Law" (2016) 6 Sjhr Vol 6 Number 1 at 89.

²⁷ *Ibid* at 3.

²⁸ Odigwe A Nwaokocha, "Remembering the Massacre of Civilians in Anioma land During the Nigerian Civil War" (2019) 4:7 Rev Bras Estud Afr at 1. online: <<https://seer.ufrgs.br/rbea/article/view/91243>>.

every means of livelihood were destroyed and burnt down by the Northerners. This act on the Igbos living in the North started in May 1966 and lasted till October 1966.²⁹ Two well-respected PhD scholars in Nigeria, explained some of the unresolved issues revolving around the existence of Biafra.

According to Theodore Okonkwo and Kato Gogo Kingston:

“The problematic issues with the Biafra project are partially fueled by the inclusion of non-core Igbo ethnic territories in its geographical map. As of 1966, all the ethnic peoples in the former Eastern region were geographically placed on the Biafra map for the purpose of secession struggles. After the defeat of the Biafra agitators in the civil war, the Nigerian Federal Government redesigned the map of the country by creating several states from the former three regions. The successive creation of states disconnected the core Igbo states of Anambra, Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, and Enugu from the Niger Delta (South-South) States of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. It becomes very complex for the non-core Igbo states to fully identify with the Biafra project. One constantly given reason is that the Niger Delta states are comprised of several independent indigenous peoples with their various unique native customs, tradition and heritage and, an attempt to be coerced into Biafra would be a violation of their rights to self-determination. It is important to infer that, the same reason contributed to the fall of the Biafra Republic in 1970. As of 1966 and currently, the map of Biafra arguably shows that the territory comprises nearly 77,310 square kilometres of land with land borders with Nigeria and Cameroon. The shoreline is the Gulf of Guinea in the south.”³⁰

²⁹ See Akpan, *supra* note 24 at 110.

³⁰ See Okonkwo and Kingston, *supra* note 25 at 100.

Ntieyong Udo Akpan brilliantly observed that:

“In the early hours of July 6, 1967, the Federal troops crossed into the East from three points in the North. The strategy of the East had succeeded. The Federal Government had started the war, and the East was doing no more than defending itself: a natural reaction. I have described in the Introduction the joy and excitement with which the news of the Federal invasion was received and welcomed everywhere. To the Biafrans, this was their moment. Boys left their schools and the university in large numbers for enlistment in the army, women offered to abandon their occupations in order to cook for the army, and so on. All those who had offered to fight and avenge the killings of 1966 were regarded as heroes, whose names would be immortalized in the history of Biafra.”³¹ The actions of the Nigerian state led to the death of over 3.5 million Biafrans, most of whom were civilians. It was also recorded that most of the people surrendered to the Nigerian state out of starvation.

a. True-Life Stories shared by victims of the Biafra War

I conducted a survey on Twitter to enable people who were affected at the Biafra war or knew those who were affected to air their views. I must say that several people were still hurt by the incident and the rage still existed in them. A lot of people shared their experiences, while some told stories that were narrated by their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents. In the light of this, here are some true-life stories about the Biafra War that you do not know and may find interesting:

³¹ See Akpan, *supra* note 24 at 111.

R.O. Ikem shared that there was a maternity at the back of his house in the village. During the civil war, the Nigerian soldiers blew the maternity home open and killed so many women including one “Mama Ejiofor” who at the time was delivering.³² Interestingly, I received a private message from one of the concerned users of Twitter, who shared her grandmother’s experience but asked that I keep her anonymous because her grandmother is still alive and for other personal reasons. In respecting her opinion, I would summarize her grandmother’s story without calling names or popular places in Nigeria to avoid tracing it back to the victim.

On the 29 February 2021 at 12:00 PM, Mrs. A narrated her grandmother’s (GM) experience during the Biafra war that started in 1967 and came to an end in 1969. GM was 18 years old, when the war started and was on her way to her father’s farm to cultivate the remaining yam before they die of hunger. On reaching there, GM saw the federal government soldier men burning down most of the farm bans in that area. GM tried to stop them when one of the soldiers slapped and held GM to the ground. This soldier and 3 other soldiers took turns and forced themselves on GM and raped her. After that tragic incident, GM could not walk properly because she was badly wounded. On reaching home, GM’s father was heartbroken and quickly prepared a traditional herb to prevent infections as a result of the rape. GM’s father decided to run away with his wife, GM and his two sons to Cameroon. After the Biafra war of 1969, they returned back to their hometown and realized that their lands and properties were occupied by total strangers. They could not take the lands away from the strangers because they were seen as the new and original owners of the lands and properties. GM and her family went to a nearby village and built a small

³² R.O. Ikem, “Behind our house in the village was a maternity, the Nigerian soldiers blew it open killing women including mama Ejiofor was said to be giving birth then” (28 February 2021 at 5:26 PM), online: Twitter https://twitter.com/Better_days1/status/1366150138679410690?s=20

hut with sticks and hatches to have a roof over their heads. Shortly after, GM's two brothers died of hunger. This was an unforgettable and traumatic experience for GM and every other victim.

I also interviewed Mr. Basil Eze via Zoom, who while narrating the incident made reference to my late grandfather: Chief Osuofia 1 of Mgbowo.³³ He explained that my grandfather was one of the people who lost everything he had worked for during the Biafra war. He had 8 children at the time and had to find a safe place for his family but as soon as the Biafra war was over, my grandfather was referred to as “Naira and Kobo.” This name was a result of how my grandfather struggled to bounce back and remained one of the few rich men in our community. He used Naira and Kobo to purchase big tanks from the federal government. He leased some tanks and rented some, but he never sold them because he constantly needed Naira and Kobo.

It would also interest you to know that some families had to leave underground and seal the top of the ground with palm kernel leaves to distract the federal government. Miss Amara Chukwurah confirmed this assertion. She went ahead to state that her father and his parents had to eat rats to survive while living underground. They were afraid of coming out because the federal government would either kill them, force them to join the army (irrespective of their age) or subject them to slavery in their lands.

Several Twitter users responded to my tweet in search of answers revolving around the Biafra War that lasted for 3 years. Another user explained how the Nigerian soldiers invaded their villages and picked girls at random to marry forcibly. His grandmother had to wear local makeup to make herself look very old to prevent the Nigerian soldiers from picking her as a wife.³⁴

³³ Osuofia 1 of Mgbowo is an Igbo title given to a well-respected Chief in my community.

³⁴ Ezinwa Nkemakolam, “When the Nigerian Soldiers came to my village, they picked up random girls (including young married women) and forcefully made them their wives. My granny had to wear local makeup to make herself

II. The Ahiara Declaration

“He who brings home ant-infested faggots, should not complain about the visit of lizards’; so be it with the introduction of ‘our predicament’ in the speech under examination.”³⁵

The Ahiara Declaration was a speech made by the head of state of the secessionist Republic of Biafra, Lt. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in his address on June 1, 1969, in the town of Ahiara. In his address, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu gave a partisan account of the war and the events that led up to it. He encouraged the hungry-looking Biafrans to continue the fight. He went ahead to set out a political philosophy that would guide Biafra after delivering his speech. This laid down guideline was written by a committee of Biafran intellectuals, Chinua Achebe, who is a recognized novelist and poet. This declaration came shortly before the demise of the Biafra war also known as the Nigeria Civil War.

Samuel Daly observed that the Declaration had multiple meanings: it was both ideology and propaganda, and it served both proscriptive and descriptive purposes. Its influences included the broader intellectual currents of black internationalism, a novel theory of radical anticolonialism, and the idea of “African Socialism”—a communitarian philosophy that emerged in distinction to socialist thought in other regions of the world.³⁶

look old.” (March 1, 2021 at 2:09 AM), online: Twitter

<<https://twitter.com/ajokukk/status/1366284516743086080?s=20>>

³⁵ Victor S Alumona, “A critical rhetoric analysis of Ojukwu’s *Ahiara Declaration*” (2011) 9:1 *Afr Identities* 67–84.

³⁶ Samuel Fury Childs Daly, “The Ahiara Declaration”, (19 November 2020), online: *Oxf Res Encycl Afr Hist* <<https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-784>>

General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu without mincing words, called out Britain, particularly the “Anglo-Saxon branch of (the white) race”, for having repeatedly "sinned against the world" in the form of numerous genocides including that of the Biafran people:

“For two years we have been subjected to a total blockade. We all know how bitter, bloody and protracted the First and Second World Wars were. At no stage in those wars did the white belligerents carry out a total blockade of their fellow whites. In each case where a blockade was imposed, allowance was made for certain basic necessities of life in the interest of women, children and other non-combatants. Ours is the only example in recent history where a whole people have been so treated. What is it that makes our case different? Do we not have women, children and other non-combatants? Does the fact that they are black women, black children and black non-combatants make such a world of difference?”³⁷

Harold Wilson, UK Labour Prime Minister (1964-1970) stated that; the dead bodies of half a million Biafrans would not force the British to change her policies concerning the Nigerian Civil War. He went further to say that the Biafran Nation could not be allowed to be, for they did not trust what the Biafrans would become with their vast resources around the Russians or the French.³⁸

From the statement of Harold in relation to the Biafrans, it is obvious that the British intended to let the Biafrans die and that Ojukwu’s actions were justified. His government provided millions of rounds of ammunition, hundreds of machine guns and grenades, thousands of mortar and artillery

³⁷ “Ahiara Declaration” in *Wikipedia* (2021) Page Version ID: 998180613.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ahiara_Declaration>

³⁸ I saw this statement as an image on Twitter, though it cannot be referenced but it explains the reason behind Ojukwu’s address and the defeat of the Biafrans at the Nigeria Civil War.

bombs, aircraft and armoured personnel carriers to the Nigeria federal government that tightened the noose of Biafrans.³⁹ Despite the suffering of the Biafran children, there was no international aid to help stop the hunger and famine. Until Daily Express cameraman David Cairns ran off a score of rolls of film and took them to London. In the 1960s, the British public had never seen such heartrending images of starved and dying children. When the pictures hit the newsstands, the story exploded. There were headlines, questions in the House of Commons, demonstrations, marches.⁴⁰ By implication, if David had not taken the pictures to London for help, the entire Biafrans would have been wiped off from the surface of the earth.

Shortly after the images reached London, the Red Cross found that 3 million Biafrans were in dire need of food and water. Harold did not succumb to the growing public pressure. He went ahead to assure the Nigeria federal government that: “The British government for their part have steadfastly maintained their policy of support for Federal Nigeria and have resisted all suggestions in parliament and the press for a change in that policy, particularly in regard to arms supplies.”⁴¹

When the British failed to render any form of aid to the starved and dying Biafrans, Bruce Mayrock, a 20-year-old student at the School of Graduate Studies set himself on fire outside the United Nations building in protest of the Biafran war.⁴² He died in May 1970 and the war came to

³⁹ “British interests, Nigerian tragedy”, (23 October 2011), online: *The Independent* <<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/british-interests-nigerian-tragedy-1136684.html>>

⁴⁰ Frederick Forsyth, “Buried for 50 years: Britain’s shameful role in the Biafran war | Frederick Forsyth”, (21 January 2020), online: *the Guardian* <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jan/21/buried-50-years-britain-shamesful-role-biafran-war-frederick-forsyth>>.

⁴¹ Mark Curtis, “Declassified UK: How Britain’s Labour government facilitated the massacre of Biafrans in Nigeria – to protect its oil interests”, (29 April 2020), online: *Dly Maverick* <<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-04-29-how-britains-labour-government-facilitated-the-massacre-of-biafrans-in-nigeria-to-protect-its-oil-interests/>>

⁴² “Columbia Daily Spectator 3 June 1969 – Columbia Spectator,” online: <<http://spectatorarchive.library.columbia.edu/?a=d&d=cs19690603-01.2.8&>>

an end in July 1970. The Biafrans need no soothsayer to tell them that the war came to an end when the Nigerian federal government stopped receiving the support they were getting from the British.

The final speech of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was and is still happening in Nigeria. He stated that “When the Nigerians violated our basic human rights and liberties, we decided reluctantly but bravely to form our own state, to exercise our inalienable right to self-determination as our only remaining hope for survival as a people. Yet, because we are black, we are denied by the white powers the exercise of this right which they themselves have proclaimed inalienable. In our struggle, we have learnt that the right of self-determination is inalienable, but only to the white man.”⁴³

C. Conclusion

This research paper attempted to discuss significant issues which show the anguish of the Indigenous People of Biafra. That at some point, turned to hope, then was eventually erased from the Nigerian state but not from history. From the trajectory of the Indigenous People of Biafra that existed for 3 years. It is safe to state that in the era of postcolonial Africa, no country suffered a more tragic experience than Nigeria. After the Biafran War ended in 1970, the dream of the Indigenous People of Biafra went down the pipeline for close to 51 years. Even though there have been several movements geared towards the reactivation of the erased Biafran history. For instance, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) which occurred in the early 2000s. Subsequently, in 2012, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) started

⁴³ See supra note 35.

gaining fame in the country. While it is necessary for the movement of Indigenous People of Biafra to be successful, I think it is pertinent to note that Nigeria is one of the countries that voted against the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) in 2007 and till date, has refused to implement the UNDRIP.

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