

Victimization During the Nigerian Civil War:

A Focus on the Asaba Massacre

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the great people of Nigeria – “Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we WILL stand!”

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ABSTRACT

This paper traces the source of the contemporary conflicts in Nigeria to the civil war in 1967 that resulted in the victimization of civilians mainly from the ethnic Igbo tribe. The main focus will be on the victimizations that took place on October 1967 in a town situated in the south-eastern part of Nigeria called Asaba when the federal troops massacred hundreds of boys and men in the town. It will also suggest that employing a holistic approach in conferring about the past victimization of civil war, will lead to a possible restoration of cordial and peaceful relationship between communities in the country.

According to professor Jacob Festus Ade Ajayi¹, “Nigeria’s problems are deep and complex. The way forward is a continuing dialogue between society’s collective memory and the present. But where collective memory is deficient or defective, contemporary society runs the risk of losing its guiding compass. There has been a disturbing tendency for the Nigerian society to downgrade or even to ignore the past. We need to look through the rear-view mirror of history in order to learn the right lessons and chart a meaningful way forward as a nation.”²

Keywords: Nigeria, Biafra, Asaba, Asaba Massacre, Victimization, Lack of redress

¹ Professor Ajayi is a historian and the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos in Nigeria.

² Garba, K. A., Lawal, I., Raheem, N. (2014) “Path to Nigeria’s Development, Ade Ajayi.” *The Guardian Newspaper*, 16 May, p1

Chapter One

Introduction

Decades after Nigeria gained independence and despite the fact that the country is rich in natural and human resources, the country has remained underdeveloped as 46% of the population lives under the poverty line³. The reason behind this situation can be linked to various ethnic politics and social conflicts played and caused by the leaders, religious fanatics, greedy politicians and self-centered individuals.⁴ Before gaining independence in 1960, the colonial rulers were said to have employed ethnicity as a core administrative strategy in the governance of Nigeria.⁵ After independence, ethnicity became a standard for ascertaining the amount of contribution to the national development effort and especially for allocating and distributing power and natural resources.⁶ The Federal Republic of Nigeria as it is known today is situated in the western part of Africa. It is a country rich in natural and human resources consisting of three main tribes namely; the Hausas, Yorubas and Igbos. There are approximately 270 ethnic groups and languages⁷ with indigenous religious beliefs and practices. However; Christianity and Islam are the most practiced religions in Nigeria today. Due to these diverse tribal-ethnic and religious factors, the country has faced and is still facing major conflicts. Furthermore, many Nigerian politicians are of the opinion that the amalgamation of the country in 1914 was a mistake⁸ and it is the origin of the ethno-religious conflicts the country⁹. Ethno-religious conflict is a

³ <http://data.worldbank.org/country/nigeria>

⁴ Kalejaiye, P. O. & Alliyu, N. (2013) *Ethnic Politics and Social Conflicts: Factors in Nigeria's Underdevelopment*. The Journal of International Social Research 6 (27) p251

⁵ Ibid 255

⁶ Anugwom, E. (2000). *Ethnic Conflict and Democracy in Nigeria: The Marginalisation Question*. Journal of Social Development in Africa 15(1) P61

⁷ Gordon, A. A. (2003) *Nigeria's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*. United States of America. ABC-CLIO, Inc. p2

⁸ Falola, T. & Aderinto, S. (2010). *Fragmented Nations and Fragmented Histories*. In: *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*. New York: University of Rochester Press. P240

⁹ Albert, I. O. (1999). *The Sociocultural Politics of Ethnic and Religious Conflict*. In: Uwazie, E. E., Albert, I. O. & Uzoigwe, G. U. *Inter-ethnic and Religious Conflict Resolution in Nigeria*. United States of America: Lexington Books. P69

situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation.¹⁰ The Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1970 was one of the bloodiest wars in sub-Saharan Africa¹¹, which was anchored on ethnic rivalry.¹²

In recent history, the 20th century was dominated by many such conflicts with records of large-scale violence and war crimes that mainly affected civilians.

The use of poison as weapons during World War I; the mass murder of civilians and destruction of properties when Germany invaded Belgium in 1914; the Nazi Holocaust during the Second World War; the genocides in the Balkans, Rwanda and mass killing in Burundi are just a few examples of the many atrocities recorded during various wars.

Researches have shown that the consequences of wars have a high impact on not only the developmental and environmental aspects of the affected area but also on the human well-being of those who in one way or other experienced them either through active participation in the conflict as soldiers or just being civilians in conflict. They suffer from different kinds of traumatic reaction with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) being the principal condition¹³. The rights of affected civilians are violated, as they are not protected from the violence and the atrocities associated with armed conflicts therefore, many may be suffering from various conditions such as anxiety,

¹⁰ Salawu, B. (2010) *Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Nigeria: Causal Analysis and Proposals for New Management Strategies*. European Journals of Social Sciences 13(3) p346

¹¹ Akresh, R., Bhalotra, S., Leone, M., Osili, U. O. (2012) *War and Stature: Growing Up during the Nigerian Civil War*. American Economic Review: papers & Proceedings. 102(3) p273

¹² Anugwom, E. (2000). *Ethnic Conflict and Democracy in Nigeria: The Marginalisation Question*. Journal of Social Development in Africa 15(1) P62

¹³ American Association of Psychologist (2014) *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*

depression, withdrawal symptoms, Rebellion aggressive behaviours and lack of trust.¹⁴

Nigeria as a country also experienced the bitterness and evils of war when the civil war broke out in July 1967 and ended in January 1970. The Nigerian Civil War had a devastating impact on its citizens. It resulted in the loss of their properties and means of livelihood, women and young girls were raped and most importantly many suffered the loss of their loved ones. The war recorded the death of over 2 million civilians¹⁵ mostly due to starvation and systematic attacks by the warring factions – described as the first black on black genocide in postcolonial Africa¹⁶. Most of the dead were from the Eastern and Mid-western region of the country.

Literature about the Nigerian civil war has records of why the war started, how it ended and how the country in general suffered at a result. However, many years after the war, episodes of war crimes such as the Asaba massacre, Calabar massacre and other incidents that took place in other smaller towns in the Midwest of Nigeria were unknown to the outside world as records of the killings of civilians, the plights of their families and the devastation of the mass killing were absent from the records of the war. For instance, decades after the war, the Asaba massacre remained officially ignored by the government but the survivors and families of victims kept the memory alive through oral accounts¹⁷.

In 2001 General Gowon at a conference on the Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath¹⁸, in his keynote address stated that the wounds of the war have healed. However this statement may not necessarily be a fact as there was inadequate

¹⁴ These conditions are related to PTSD

¹⁵ Uzokwe, A. O (2003). *Surviving in Biafra*. United State of America: iUniverse.

¹⁶ Okocha, E. *Blood on the Niger: The First Black-On-Black Genocide- The Untold Story of the Asaba Massacre During the Nigeria-Biafra War*. Nigeria: Gomslam Books.

¹⁷ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p14

¹⁸ This conference was organized by the Program on Ethnic and Federal Studies (PEFS) University of Ibadan

immediate or long-term focus on the traumatic effect the war had on those who had suffered as a result of the war¹⁹. The reality on the ground suggest the opposite to General Gowon's statement and it is unrealistic to assume that the country in general has healed from the legacy of the war as the ethno-religious factors, which fuelled the civil war are still very much obvious in the country today.

As the Nigerian civil war ended in January 1970, General Yakubu Gowon - the Head of State at that time- established a policy of "no victors", "no vanquished" which meant that taking a fresh appraisal of the war crimes and atrocities could not be done as there would be no retaliatory action against anyone or groups of people. He also initiated his 3R program of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation and granted amnesty for the majority of those who participated in the war. The main aim of the 3R program was to repair the substantial damage done to the economy and infrastructures especially in the eastern region as a result of the war²⁰. Unfortunately, this program was hardly carried out as the government was ineffective in the implementation especially in regards to the rehabilitation of the people. For instance, reconstruction of damaged homes were done by individual families without the help of the government which meant that process of reconstruction and rehabilitation was slow and according each person's capabilities²¹. The issue of reconciliation appeared to be disregarded as the inability to revisit the war crimes made it virtually impossible. Many were left to pick up the pieces and allow time to be the healer of their wounds.

¹⁹ Ekhaton, O. G. (2013) "There Was A Country": *The Reminiscence of the Nigeria Biafra Civil War and Elite Perception of National and Nationalism in Nigeria*. p18. In a paper presented at an expert workshop tagged "Nation, Nationalism and National Integration in Nigeria". Available at: https://www.academia.edu/5701730/There_was_a_Country_Remimiscence_of_the_Nigeria_Biafra_civil_wae_and_Elite_Percept_ion_of_Nation_and_Nationalism Last accessed on 24th April 2014

²⁰ Falola, T. & Genova, A. (2009). *Historical Dictionary of Nigeria*. United States of America: Scarecrow Press, Inc. p97

²¹ Rev. Fr. Ejike, A. (2010) *Nigeria-Biafran War: Social and Economic Effects on The Nigeria Igbos*. Oasis Journal 1 (1), p90. A further discussion on this subject will be provided in a different chapter , which will be discussing the aftermath of the war.

In the year 2011, the Federal Government of Nigeria approved compensation for the victims of the Asaba massacre.²² This gesture, though over four decades after the event may have come as a relief to some of the victims. However, this raises a question, as to whether the compensation is proportionate to the seriousness and significance of the violation. It is also important to state that having a proper insight of the victimization of civilians during the Civil War and establishing a transparent mechanism that involves reconciliation and reparation for victims may foster the achievement of justice for both past and present victims in the country.

1.1 Aims and Objective of the Study

The main focus of this study will be to examine the effect of the Asaba massacre during the Nigerian civil war and to investigate the consequences of the lack of redress for victimization in Asaba during the Nigerian civil war.

The research is premised on the idea that lack of redress for victims is a factor that is connected to the contemporary ethnic rivalry in Nigeria.

1.2 Significance of the Study

In the present day Nigeria, law and order seem to be at the edge of breaking down as the country has been affected by inter-communal, ethnic, religious and political violence. As a result of these conflicts, people (mostly civilians) have lost their lives. Policy makers, opinion leaders, various NGOs and the general public have been burdened with assessing the importance on how to deal with this phenomenon. It is therefore important to revisit the effects of the Civil War so as to examine the

²² <http://allafrica.com/stories/201110280385.html>

contemporary relevance of past victimization with the main aim of introducing and administering punitive measures that will be more victim-focused for the future.

Chapter Two

2 Nigeria Before and After Independence

The direct cause of the Nigerian civil war is an intricate issue resulting from tension and violence between ethnic groups and regions within the country particularly between Northern and Eastern Nigeria. This chapter will discuss the origins of ethno-religious conflicts in the country and how these conflicts became entrenched in the creation and decolonization of Nigeria. It will also discuss how these factors are also linked to the origin of the Nigerian civil war.

2.1 The Decolonization of Nigeria: Self-determination and Secession

Self-determination is one of the most controversial and potentially explosive issues in modern political theory and international relations.²³ The right to self-determination is a basic principle in international law and has been recognized since 1919 when the League of Nations was established.

According to Article 1 of the United Nations Human Rights International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; “All peoples have the rights of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”²⁴ Although right of self-determination is a fundamental principle of the UN, there are still questions as to whether it is recognized outside the context of the traditional de-colonization. The end of colonial rule in Africa bestowed a chance for a peaceful application of the rights to self-determination as it provided the framework for the creation of new states. Nigeria

²³ Musgrave, T (1998). Self-determination and National Minorities. Review by Hadden, T. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)*. 74, (1), p196

²⁴ Part 1 Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 23 March 1976, in accordance to Article 49

along with many other African states gained their independence from colonial rule at various times in the 20th century. On the 1st of October 1960 Nigeria became an independent and became a republic in 1963²⁵ after severing institutional ties the country had left with Britain. This led to the country's first indigenous Governor-General Doctor -Nnamdi Azikwe - being re-designated as President. In practice, the right to self-determination may be deemed to have been exercised as at the time of gaining independence, powers to govern were transferred from the colonial powers to a locally formed government. However, it may also be argued that in order for right to self-determination to be fully exercised, there should be a revision of the boundaries created by the colonial government as self-determination could result in complete independence, integration with neighbouring state, free association with another state or any other status decided upon by that people.²⁶

The entity known as Nigeria was created in 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated by an act of the British Empire. The apparent reason for the enactment of this act was economic calculations²⁷ rather than political reasons as the northern part of Nigeria had neither enough resources nor access to the sea or as many educated people as the south.

While it administratively made sense to manage Northern and Southern Nigeria together, it did not appear to make practical sense, as there are differences between the peoples – in terms of religion and culture.²⁸ Prior to the amalgamation, the main ethnic groups of people and other minor ethnic groups in the country were leading

²⁵ Chapter 1 (2) of the 1963 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

²⁶ Shaw, M. N (1997). *Peoples, territorialism and Boundaries*. Available: <http://ejil.org/pdfs/8/3/1457.pdf>. Last accessed 17th April 2014

²⁷ Falola, T. & Heaton, M. M (2008). *A History of Nigeria*. New York, Cambridge University Press. P116. Also see Uche, C. (2008). Oil, British Interest and The Nigerian Civil War. *The Journal Of African History*. 47(1) p115

²⁸ Uche, C. (2008). Oil, British Interest and The Nigerian Civil War. *The Journal Of African History*. 47(1) p115

their lives independently of one another.²⁹ For instance, the old Benin Empire (now located in the south-western part of Nigeria) had established diplomatic relationships with foreign countries like Spain, Brazil, and Portugal³⁰. The colonial powers did not take into consideration the diverse socio-political and economic settings of these cultural characteristics; the parties involved were neither consulted nor were their consent sought before this historical event took place. The colonial boundaries were imposed quite arbitrarily upon a very varied, numerous and in some cases scattered population, solely by agreement among colonial powers themselves.³¹

The right to self-determination may lead to secession. However, acts of secession may be achieved through peaceful means or through the use of force, which may invariably lead to the outbreak of civil wars. Historically, the most common reaction to act of secession has been to oppose and to keep it under control. Self-determination based claims to independent statehood may lead to violent breaking apart of a state, but also results in the creation of a new state³². Furthermore, in limited cases, when an entity initiates a move for secession, such an act can succeed after negotiations with the parent state and the end result will be a peaceful secession. For instance, the case of Kosovo's path to secession was met with resistance, which led to conflict between the Kosovar Serbs and the Kosovar Albanians as the latter fought for independence³³. In March 1998, after almost two decades of peaceful struggle of ethnic Albanians to secure an independent state, violent ethnic conflict started³⁴. However, on the 17th of February 2008, Kosovo declared its independence and has been recognised as

²⁹ Surviving the Biafra (intro)

³⁰ Orji, J. N. (2011) *Political Organization in Nigeria Since the Late Stone Age: A History of the Igbo People*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P89-90

³¹ Panter-Brick, S. K. (1968). The Right to self-determination: its application to Nigeria. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)*. 44 (2) p.255-256

³² Economides, S. (2013). Kosovo, self-Determination and the International Order. *Europe –Asia Studies* 65(5), p827

³³ Koppe, M. (2010). The Conflict in Kosovo: A Humanitarian War. *The Academic Journal of New York University's Center for Global Affairs*. 4(2)

³⁴ Wolff, S. *The Kosovo Conflict*. Available: www.stefanwolff.com/files/kosovo.pdf. Last accessed 7th July 2014

independent by 70 states, including 22 out of the 27 EU member-states as well as the United States of America and all other Yugoslav republics barring Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina³⁵.

2.2 The Nigerian Civil War

The remote cause of the Nigerian civil war is linked to the three factors; the amalgamation of the country, the 1946 constitution (also known as the Richards Constitution) and the tribal crises that followed the 1960 independence.³⁶ The promulgation of Richards Constitution came into force in 1947. It brought about the country being divided into three regions – namely the North, East and West Region. It made provision for an African majority in both the Regional and Central Houses of Assembly.³⁷ The constitution recognised ethnic differences and granted large measure of autonomy to the respective regions and ethnic groups.³⁸ However, it also became the basis for an unequal and unwieldy federation as the Northern region became twice the size of the East and the West.³⁹ According to the American Jewish Congress⁴⁰, “*The political division of Nigeria during the colonial period into three regions— North, West and East— exacerbated the already well-developed economic, political, and social competition among Nigeria’s different ethnic groups.*” As a consequence, the period between 1954 and 1957 saw the emergence of several movements within the minority groups for the creation of more states in different parts of the country due to fears of political or religious domination by the major ethnic groups⁴¹. In 1963 the

³⁵ Bekaj, A. R. (2010). The KLA and the Kosovo War: From Intra-State Conflict to Independent Country. *Berghof Transitions Series*. 8, p33

³⁶ Rev. Fr. Ejike, A. (2010) Nigeria-Biafran War: Social and Economic Effects on The Nigeria Igbos. *Oasis Journal* 1 (1), p89

³⁷ Okafor, S. O. (1974) Ideal and reality in British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria. *African Affairs* 73(293) p469

³⁸ Nwachuku, A. L. (1974-75). In the review of The Second World war Politics in Nigeria , 1935-1953 by G. O. Olusanya. *Political Science Quarterly*. 89(4) p898

³⁹ Okonta, I. & Douglas, O. (2003). *Where Vultures Feed: Shell, Human Rights and Oil*. New York: Verso p16

⁴⁰ Baum, P. (1968) In the Memorandum of The Commission on International Affairs. American Jewish Congress. *The Tragedy of Biafra*

⁴¹ David, A. E., Danmole, H. O & Taiwo, I. O. Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Affairs. P16

<http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/aghhalinoso/Aghalino%20The%20Military%20and%20Creation%20of%20States.pdf> Accessed on the 4th of May 2014

Midwest region, which was also the first state to be created in Nigeria⁴² was carved out of the western region⁴³.

Six years after Nigeria gained independence, ethnic and religious tensions began to rise, which subsequently led to a massacre by the natives of northern Nigeria of thousands of Igbo people who had taken up residence in that part of the country⁴⁴. The Igbo people mainly are located in the eastern region (namely, Abia Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo States) and in some parts of the south-south region (Delta and Rivers States) of Nigeria. The killings were orchestrated events that began following the aborted coup d'état of the 15th of January 1966, which was led by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu⁴⁵ -a Christian and ethnic Igbo. The Coup resulted in the death of Prime Minister of Nigeria, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, alongside many other northern and western leaders. The fact that no major Igbo political leader was killed gave the incident the appearance of an Igbo coup. It also led to end of the first Republic of Nigeria⁴⁶ and the rise of Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi – another Igbo Christian man⁴⁷ as Head of State. However, his reign was short-lived. His government was overthrown as a result of a counter coup d'état that was led by military officers from the Northern Nigeria and was replaced by General Yakubu Gowon – a Christian Ethnic Hausa. As the tension grew in the country, the debate for the creation of more states intensified and as a result, in 1967 the head of state created twelve states out of

⁴² Vande, P. T (2012). Ethnicity and the Politics of State Creation in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal* 8 (16) p39

⁴³ Natufe, O. I. (1999). Midwest and the Future of Nigerian Federalism: *An Essay in Honour of the Midwest History Monrth 1999*. www.dawodu.net/igbo.htm accessed on 4th of May 2014

⁴⁴ Nkpa. N. K. U (1977). Rumors of Mass Poisoning in Biafra. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 41 (3) p333

⁴⁵ Major Nzeogwu was born in the Northern part of Nigeria. He was a Christian whose parents were from Okpanam, which is a town close to Asaba.

⁴⁶ Olumide, E & Ekanade, T. (2011). The First Republic and the Interface of Ethnicity. *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences*. 2 (2.2Quarter II), p2.

⁴⁷ Soillun, M (2009). *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966 – 1976)*. New York: Algora Publishing p84.

the four regions⁴⁸. In the creation of the new states, five major principles were expressed namely⁴⁹:

1. No one should be in a position to dominate or control the central government
2. Each state should form one compact geographical area
3. Administrative convenience should take into account the history and wishes of the people.
4. Each state should be in a position to discharge effectively the functions allocated to the regional governments.
5. The new states should be created simultaneously.

The tensions deepened and many Igbo people in the north began to flee and returned to the east where their ethnicity was predominant as they believed that their safety in the north of Nigeria could no longer be guaranteed. They were forced to leave their homes and their jobs as a result of the violence they were experiencing. The Igbo people were aggrieved as they were denied their basic human needs of equality, citizenship, autonomy and freedom⁵⁰ as no one was held responsible for the pogroms in the North where over 30,000 Igbo people including military officers that were based in the north were systematically and ethnically cleansed.⁵¹ In addition, the government did not put in any efforts to address the violence against the Igbo people and the difficulties which the Eastern Region was facing regarding settling those seeking refuge. This further resulted in anger and tension between the federal government and the Eastern Region and subsequent calls in the East for independence.

⁴⁸ David, A. E., Danmole, H. O & Taiwo, I. O. Contemporary Issues in Nigerian Affairs. P18
<http://unilorin.edu.ng/publications/aghhalinoso/Aghhalino%20The%20Military%20and%20Creation%20of%20States.pdf> Accessed on the 4th of May 2014

⁴⁹ Alapiki, H. E. (2005). State Creation in Nigeria: Failed Approaches to National Integration and Local Autonomy. *African Studies Review*. 48 (3) p58

⁵⁰ Kalejaiye, P. O. & Alliyu, N. (2013) *Ethnic Politics and Social Conflicts: Factors in Nigeria's Underdevelopment*. The Journal of International Social Research 6 (27) p255

⁵¹ Uzoigwe, G. N. The Igbo Genocide, 1966: Where is the Outrage?
<http://www.genocidescholars.org/sites/default/files/document%09%5Bcurrent-page%3A1%5D/documents/IAGS%202011%20GODFREY%20UZOIGWE.pdf> Accessed on 25th April 2014

The Eastern Region under the leadership of Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu who was the then military governor of the region began threatening secession. Efforts were made to restore unity in the country as the people from the eastern region made real attempts to make the Federation of Nigeria a workable political community and it was only when these attempts had been unsuccessful that the right of secession was asserted.⁵² The act of secession on the part of the Igbo was asserted in terms of a right to self-determination. The Eastern Region consultative assembly voted to secede from Nigeria and on the 30th of May 1967 with Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, citing a range of violent acts directed at the Igbos and electoral fraud, he proclaimed the secession of the Eastern region from Nigeria and declared the independence of the Republic of Biafra⁵³. The Republic of Biafra took its name from the Bight of Biafra (also known as the Bight of Bonny), which is a bay of the Atlantic Ocean. The people of Biafra consisted of the Igbos (Aba, Abakaliki, Awka, Enugu-the capital, Onitsha and Owerri) and other Ethnic minorities (Calabar, Ikom, Ogoja, Ogoja, Port Harcourt, Uyo and Yenogoa). This act confirms the arguments of Allen Buchaman⁵⁴ as he states that the right to secede is a remedial right and a group should only be allowed to secede if it faces persistent violation of human rights or had been previously free.⁵⁵

On the 7th of July 1967, after various peace negotiations and attempts by the federal government and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to restore Nigeria as one nation, the federal government declared war on the Republic of Biafra. The war lasted about thirty months and received one of the highest humanitarian interventions in

⁵² Panter-Brick, S. K.. (1968). The Right to self-determination: its application to Nigeria. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)*. 44 (2), p256

⁵³ Ojeleye. O. (2010) *The Politics of Post-War Demobilisation and Reintegration in Nigeria*. Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Limited. p45

⁵⁴ Buchanan, A The morality of political Divorce from the fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec

⁵⁵ National self-determination and secession by Margaret Moore review by Stephen M saideman. *The American political review* Vol 94 No 2 June 2000 p 515

recent history⁵⁶ as it led to the deaths of over one million ethnic Igbo and other easterners in the country.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Omaka, A. O., (2014). The Forgotten Victims: Ethnis Minorities in the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970. *Journal of Retracing Africa*. 1(1) p 26-27

⁵⁷ Korieh, C. J. (2012). History and Politics of Memory. In Korieh, C.J *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and Politics of Memory*. United States of America. Cambria Press. Kindle Edition

Chapter Three

The Victimization, Impact and Aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War.

3.1 Victimization of the Nigerian Civil War

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 is a vital component of international humanitarian law that regulates conducts during armed conflict, specifically for the protection of individuals not participating in the conflict. These include civilians, health and aid workers, wounded soldiers and prisoners of war. In summarizing the Article 3 of Convention IV 1949⁵⁸, during armed conflict each party to the conflict is under an obligation in all circumstances to respect and protect all individuals who are not actively involved in the conflict irrespective of the race, colour, religion, faith, sex, birth or wealth. They include civilians and members of the armed forces who are wounded or in detention. Furthermore, violent acts such as murder, humiliating treatments, depriving individuals' access to justice are all prohibited.

By virtue of this, any act that is carried as part of a plan or policy or on a large scale during armed conflicts (both international and national conflicts), that is in breach of the Geneva Conventions, will be considered as being a violation and therefore labelled a as war crime⁵⁹. In addition, the Geneva Conventions are binding on all contracting parties (member states) to which Nigeria is a party. However, the criminal responsibility will not be on the State but individual(s) will be held responsible for violating the law even if they were acting on behalf of the State. War crimes are a serious violation of the law committed during armed conflicts that are punishable. They can be divided into two categories: espionage and war treason; and

⁵⁸ Art 3 (1) (a-d) of Convention (IV) 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War

⁵⁹ What are war crimes? Available at: http://www.icc-cpi.int/en_menus/icc/about%20the%20court/frequently%20asked%20questions/pages/13.aspx. Accessed on 4th July 2014

other crimes, i.e., common law crimes and other violations of the rules and customs of warfare.⁶⁰

For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be on the victimization of civilians during the Nigerian civil war. During the war, military operations were executed by the federal troops to weaken the Biafran soldiers with the main aim of getting them to surrender. In retaliation, the Biafran soldiers, in resisting the Federal troops fought back by attacking towns that were under the protection on the federal troops or in support of a unified Nigeria. These actions meant that, apart from the combatants, many civilians found themselves coming under heavy assault by both the Federal troops and the Biafran soldiers. In the Midwestern region of the country, the Biafran soldiers were responsible for the mass killing of non-Igbo speaking people.⁶¹ In addition, they were also involved in raping, extortion, seizure of properties and other forms of inhuman and degrading punishment.⁶² The Federal troops were also involved in various assaults, which included atrocities such as rapes, looting and outright brigandry⁶³ were perpetrated against the Igbo people. In October 1967, an attack was carried out in Asaba following which many defenceless civilians were killed. In Calabar⁶⁴ between 1,000 and 2,000 Igbo civilians were killed in 1968.⁶⁵ More than 2000 Igbo civilian were killed in a massacre when the federal troops entered Aba⁶⁶ (Aba is in the eastern region of Nigeria). In addition, many more innocent, defenceless civilian lives were killed elsewhere as a result of brutal systematic attacks. Such attacks on civilians are in violation of the human rights and humanitarian laws.

⁶⁰ Berger, J. (1944). The Nature of War Crimes and the Problems of Superior Command. *The American Political Science Review*. 38 (6). P1204

⁶¹ Orobator, S. E. (1987). The Biafran Crisis and the Midwest. *African Affairs*. 86 (344), p379

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Achebe, C. (2012). *There Was A Country: A personal History of Biafra*. United States of America: Penguin Books. P137

⁶⁴ Calabar is in the southeastern part of Biafra

⁶⁵ Achebe, C. (2012). *There Was A Country: A personal History of Biafra*. United States of America: Penguin Books. P136

⁶⁶ Ibid. p137

In addition to the massacre of the Igbo people, by limiting the supply of food to the Biafra regions, the policy of enforced famine was perpetrated against them.⁶⁷ To buttress this intent, Mr. Alison Ayida - the head of the Nigerian delegation at the Niamey Peace Talks held in the Republic of Niger in 1968⁶⁸ declared “*Starvation is a legitimate weapon of war, and we have every intention of using it against the rebels.*” As a result of this action, 500,000 children, pregnant and nursing women died of malnutrition, starvation and other related diseases.⁶⁹ Therefore at this juncture, it is appropriate to question whether such deliberate killing of civilian amounts to genocide.

Raphael Lemkin coined the term genocide⁷⁰. According to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide⁷¹ it means any act committed with the intention to destroy, in whole or in part a national, ethnical, racial or religious group. These acts include killing of members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group and forcibly transferring children of one group to another. Genocides are man-made disasters that have long-term physical and mental impacts on the affected society.

In the case of the Nigerian civil war, there were contradictory reports regarding events as some observers of the war testified that they found no evidence of genocide or systematic destruction of property, although there were considerable evidence of

⁶⁷ Bartrop, O. (2002). The Relationship Between War and Genocide in the Twentieth Century: A Consideration. *Journal of Genocide Research*. 4(4) p526

⁶⁸ Forsyth, F. (1977). *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. P265

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Martin, J. J. (1981). *Raphael Lemkin and the Invention of 'Genocide'*. Available: http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v02/v02p-19_Martin.html. Last accessed 24th April 2014

⁷¹ Article 2 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. *Adopted by Resolution 260 (III) A of the United Nations General Assembly on December 1948.*

famine and death as a result of the war.⁷² However, other independent observers such as Stephen Lewis who was a visiting Canadian Member of Parliament were of the opinion that there was genocide during the war.⁷³ In addition, following complaints on accusations of genocide by the Biafran government, the International Committee on the Investigation of Crimes of Genocide, a quasi-official organ, headed by Doctor Mensah, a Ghanaian, found evidence of genocide and intent to commit genocide by northerners against the Igbo⁷⁴.

3.2 Impacts of the Nigerian Civil War

The war lasted for two and half years following which the Federal troops crushed the secessionists by forcing them to surrender in January 1970. The effect of war in every situation has a devastating impact on a State and as a result of it; the affected country and its people suffer physically, psychologically, economically, socially and politically. Between 1 and 3 million people were killed during this war.⁷⁵

Wars have profound effects on the economy as they drain wealth, disrupt markets and depress economic growth of participating countries. As a consequence, they fuel inflation as prices are pushed up, which invariably leads to a reduction of living standards. Wars also affect the inflow of foreign investments as the instability and the risks of investing during conflict may discourage business relationships. According to Sun Tzu, “*Where the army is, prices are high; when prices rise the wealth of the people is exhausted*”.⁷⁶ In addition, resources that could have been used by the government for the development of infrastructures in the country are diverted to

⁷² Nwadike, J. A. (2010). *A Biafran Soldier's Survival From The Jaws Of Death*. United States of America. Xlibris Corporation p.26

⁷³ Aneke, L. N. (2007). *The Untold Story Of The Nigeria-Biafra War*. New York. Triumph Publishing. p350

⁷⁴ Korieh, C. J. (2013). Biafra and the discourse on the Igbo Genocide. *Journal of Asian Studies* 0(0) p.8

⁷⁵ Akresh, R., Bhalotra, S., Leone, M., Osili, U. O. (2012) *War and Stature: Growing Up during the Nigerian Civil War*. American Economic Review: papers & Proceedings. 102(3) p273

⁷⁶ Tzu S (6 BC) *The Art of War*. Chapter 2 <http://www.stanford.edu/class/polisci211z1.1/Sun%20Tzu.pdf>

contribute towards the growing costs of the conflict. Most participating countries suffer extreme destruction of capital such as factories, cities, farms, hospitals and livestock, which further reduces the level of economic growth. Wars may lead to the internal displacement of people, due to insecurity or loss of their homes during the conflict, the breakdown of health and the spread of diseases owing to lack of medical care and medical facilities; all of these can also have a negative impact on the peoples' wellbeing and on the economy.

In Nigeria, during the civil war a number of the post-independence policies and programs came under threat as they were either abandoned or came to a temporary halt. For instance, the agricultural sector suffered as farmlands were abandoned, the marketing of fertilizer was also neglected thereby causing a drastic reduction in food production.⁷⁷

Food was in short supply in the Biafra region during the Nigerian Civil war as the federal government limited the supply of food to the Biafra region as it blockaded the ports as well as the food producing areas of Biafra.⁷⁸

In Nigeria today, several generations of women, many of whom are alive are still carrying scars of their exposure to the war.⁷⁹ The Biafra women were forced to assume the role of being the head of the family when their husbands were either occupied in the battlefield or had been casualties of the war. Some of the men who were not enlisted in the army were in constant fear of being conscripted, which meant they became dependent on their wives and daughters for their livelihood and

⁷⁷ Iwuagwu, O. (2012). Food Shortages, Survival Strategies And The Igbo Of The Southeastern Nigeria During The Nigeria Civil War. *The Journal of International Social Research*. 5 (22) p282

⁷⁸ Achebe, C. (2010). *Isbo Women in the Nigerian-Biafran War 1967 – 1970: An Interplay of Control*. *Journal of Black Studies*. 40(5) p792

⁷⁹ Akresh, R., Bhalotra, S., Leone, M., Osili, U. O. (2012) *War and Stature: Growing Up during the Nigerian Civil War*. *American Economic Review: papers & Proceedings*. 102(3) p276

survival.⁸⁰ In order to avoid starvation, many women were left with no other option but to sell their valuables such as jewelries and clothes to be able to buy food so as to sustain their family.⁸¹ One way they coped with the shortage of food was to create farmland by growing essential food crops on any available spot of land, which included their homes, refugee camps and church compounds⁸². Some other women (both married and single), in their bid to survive, indulged in prostitution as a profession.⁸³ The soldiers subjected younger girls who hawked their goods on the streets to sexual abuse.⁸⁴ Stealing was widespread during the war as children saw this as a means of coping with starvation.⁸⁵ Furthermore, children born as a result of rape by soldiers suffer from stigmatisation in their communities.⁸⁶

The war also had a profound effect on the lives of children. School activities were disrupted, as during federal air raids, schools were also included in the targeted areas⁸⁷. Children were unkempt and dressed in improvised clothes made from salt bags and polythene materials; they suffered from starvation and the spread of disease was very rampant throughout the war⁸⁸.

Generally speaking, combatants do not only suffer on the battlefield as many are killed or experience physical injuries but also a number of them also begin to develop various psychological problems. Civil wars continue to kill people indirectly, well

⁸⁰ Iwuagwu, O. (2012). Food Shortages, Survival Strategies And The Igbo Of The Southeastern Nigeria During The Nigeria Civil War. *The Journal of International Social Research*. 5 (22) p288

⁸¹ ⁸¹ Achebe, C. (2010). *Isbo Women in the Nigerian-Biafran War 1967 – 1970: An Interplay of Control*. *Journal of Black Studies*. 40(5) p792

⁸² *Ibi*. P795-976

⁸³ Egodi, U. (2007). *Women in Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*. Trenton, NJ. African World Press. p156

⁸⁴ *Ibid* p150

⁸⁵ Egodi, U. (2007). Recollection Of Childhood Experiences During The Nigerian Civil War. *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*. 77(3) p409

⁸⁶ Ikuomola, A. D. (2009). *The Nigeria Civil Of 1967 and the Stigmatisation of Children of Rape Victims During the Civil War in Edo State, Nigeria*. In a paper presented at the International Conference of Rape in Wartime held in France. Available:

http://www.viol-tactique-de-guerre.org/IMG/pdf/The_Nigerian_Civil_War_of_1967.pdf. Last accessed 14th April 2014

⁸⁷ Egodi, U. (2007). Recollection Of Childhood Experiences During The Nigerian Civil War. *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*. 77(3) p407

⁸⁸ *Ibid*

after the shoot stops. These new deaths (and disabilities) are overwhelmingly concentrated on the civilian population.⁸⁹ Civilians can also suffer traumatic experiences, which can result in mental injuries such as Post-Traumatic Stress disorder. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Syndrome (PTSD) first appeared in the Diagnostic and Statistical manual of Psychiatric Disorders (DSM-III) in 1980 as a result of studies of the Vietnam War, and of civilian victims of natural and man-made disasters⁹⁰. It is a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience of witnessing of a life-threatening event such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or physical or sexual assault in adult or childhood⁹¹. PTSD is said to be more severe and lasts longer especially when the traumatic event is a deliberate man-made disaster.⁹²

Research has shown that PTSD does not only affect veterans but also civilians. These groups of individuals develop this condition after being exposed to traumatic events during the war while some others suffer as a result of being in the same environment as PTSD sufferers; for example, wives of war veterans report various psychological conditions including anxiety, somatic complaints, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, confusion and loss of control, self-blame and feelings of heavy burden.⁹³ Other civilians who suffer from PTSD as a consequence of war related exposure could be as a result of witnessing the death of a loved one (either through combat or execution), witnessed starvation while in a refugee camp, was physically assaulted or was at the risk of being captured.

⁸⁹ Ghobarah, H. A. Civil wars Kill and Maim People- Long After the Shooting Stops. *African Political Science review* Vol. 97 No 2 2003 189

⁹⁰ Sher. L. (2004) recognizing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. *Q. J. Med* 97(1) p.1

⁹¹ The Nebraska Department for Veterans' Affairs. (2007) *What is PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)?* Available: <http://www.ptsd.ne.gov/what-is-ptsd.html>. Last accessed 4th July 2014.

⁹² August, L. R. & Gianola, B. A. (1987). Symptoms of War Trauma Induced Psychiatric Disorder: Southeast Asian Refugees and Vietnam Veterans. *International Migration Review*. 21 (3). Special Issue: Migration and Health. p821.

⁹³ Dekel, R., Goldbiatt, H., Keidar, M., Solomon, Zahava. & Poll, M (2005). Being a Wife of a Veteran with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *Family Relations*. 54 (1), p.24

During the conflict in Nigeria, many soldiers were, after being exposed to the war, sent home with PTSD, which was popularly called “shellshock”⁹⁴. The condition manifested in temporary deafness and displays of violence⁹⁵. Among the civilians, fear was a common destabilising emotion as the sound of gunshots and bomb blasts instilled in children. Furthermore, these psychological and physical injuries, which are common effect of war, could last throughout the lifetime of victims (both civilians and combatants) who were exposed to the Nigerian civil war.

3.3 The Aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War

After 30 months of fighting, the Nigerian civil war ended in January 1970 after the Biafran army surrendered to the Nigerian army⁹⁶. In accepting the suspension of hostility, the Head of state- Gowon declared that there would be “no victor no vanquished” and granted a general amnesty for people who had fought on the Biafran side⁹⁷. His “no victor no vanquished” policy was designed to complete the integration of the Igbos back into Nigerian society following their defeat in the war⁹⁸ as most Biafrans and some federal officers believed that the defeat of Biafra would be followed by massive reprisals against, and the executions of the Igbos⁹⁹. On the contrary, by virtue of the policy, the Biafran soldiers were neither tried nor executed for fighting against the federal army while some of the Igbo officers who served in the Biafran army were reabsorbed with loss of seniority.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ Egodi, U. (2007). Recollection Of Childhood Experiences During The Nigerian Civil War. *Africa: The Journal of the International African Institute*. 77(3) p403

⁹⁵ Ibid

⁹⁶ Aneke, L. N. (2007). *The Untold Story Of The Nigeria-Biafra War*. New York: Triumph Publishing. P595

⁹⁷ Udogu, E. I. (2005). *Nigeria in the Twenty-first Century: Strategies For Political Stability and Peaceful Coexistence*. Trenton: Africa World Press Inc. p48

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Siollun, M. (2009). *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)*. New York: Algora Publishing. p167

¹⁰⁰ Siollun, M. (2009). *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)*. New York: Algora Publishing. p167

Gowon also embarked on his 3R program of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. The main aim of the 3Rs was to create an atmosphere conducive for resettling the displaced and those who had fled their homes; to reunite families and friends; rebuild damaged physical facilities and demobilise armed forces personnel in gainful employment in civilian life¹⁰¹. In principle, the program was a laudable scheme but in practice it left much to be desired in its implementation, as he was unable to successfully implement his program¹⁰² and its impact was hardly felt within the Igbo community. There was little or no true reconciliation or rehabilitation that took place and the Igbos were perpetually reminded that they were a defeated people¹⁰³. According to Ikemefuna¹⁰⁴; *“the federal government through her policies of selective development and appointments, began marginalising and punishing the peoples from the eastern section either by omission or deliberate design nailing them against the cross of denigration, for their role in the war of succession”*.

Firstly, before the war, many Igbo people owned properties in different parts of the country but had to abandon them when they sought safety and fled to their villages in the East. However, when they returned to their homes particularly in Port Harcourt in Rivers state after the war, they found that their properties had been claim by the people of Port Harcourt on the grounds that they had been declared as “abandoned properties” since Gowon had approved and pursued the policy of abandoned property of the Igbos therefore, the “new owners” refused to return the properties to their rightful owners¹⁰⁵. The consequences of the abandoned property policy have remained

¹⁰¹ Ojeleye, O. (2010) *The Politics of Post-War Demobilisation and reintegration in Nigeria*. Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Limited. p76

¹⁰² Shillington, K (2005). *Encyclopaedia of African History Volumes 1-3*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group. p1114

¹⁰³ Nwadike, J. A. (2010). *A Biafran Soldier's Survival From The Jaws Of Death*. United States of America. Xlibris Corporation p.82

¹⁰⁴ Eluma, I. S (2007). *Terrorism: A Global Scourge*. United States of America; Author House. p79

¹⁰⁵ Nwadike, J. A. (2010). *A Biafran Soldier's Survival From The Jaws Of Death*. United States of America. Xlibris Corporation p.82

an issue of Nigerian politics and a matter of intense emotions for the Igbo people till date¹⁰⁶.

Secondly, during the period of the civil war, Biafra had a currency of their own but when the war ended, through a banking regulation, the federal government voided the currency and made it illegal tender¹⁰⁷. The people of Biafra were advised to bring their Biafran currency in exchange for Nigerian currency but regardless of the amount they brought, the regulation paid them just £20¹⁰⁸. The action pauperized the Igbo middle class¹⁰⁹ as the Biafran currency had become an illegal tender and in order to survive, they had no other option but to exchange their money thereby rendering them poor as surviving on the paltry sum would have quite difficult.

Thirdly, with the 3R policy came the enactment and implementation of the Nigerian Enterprise Promotion Decree also referred to as the Indigenization Decree. The decree compelled some foreign business organizations to share ownership of some of their business interest with other Nigerians¹¹⁰. The primary objectives of the policy were to create opportunity for Nigerian indigenous businessmen; to maximize local retention of profit; and to raise the level of intermediate capital and goods production.¹¹¹ Many observers thought that it was politically ill conceived and economically unsalutary as all Nigerians should have been given the opportunity to participate in the rewards of the indigenization process¹¹². This policy came at the time when most of the Igbo people were at a disadvantage as they did not have adequate funding to invest. Till

¹⁰⁶ Udogu, E. I. (2005). *Nigeria in the Twenty-first Century: Strategies For Political Stability and Peaceful Coexistence*. Trenton: Africa World Press Inc. p49

¹⁰⁷ Okafor, D. (1998). *The Dance of Death: Nigerian History and Christopher Okigbo's Poetry*. Trenton: Africa World Press p.38

¹⁰⁸ Udogu, E. I. (2005). *Nigeria in the Twenty-first Century: Strategies For Political Stability and Peaceful Coexistence*. Trenton: Africa World Press Inc. p49. Also, the Nigerian pound was the currency used at the time, which was later changed to Naira in 1973

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Mathews, M. P. (2002). *Nigeria: Current Issues and Historical Background*. New York; Nova Science Publishers, Inc. p73

¹¹¹ Ogbuagu, C. S. A. (1983) The Nigerian Indeginization Policy: Nationalism or Pragmatism. *African Affairs* 82(327) p241

¹¹² Nwachuku, L. A & Uzoigwe, G. N. (2004). *Troubled Journey: Nigeria Since the Civil War*. United Stats of America: University Press of America. Inc. p114

date, the Igbo people believe that the policy was formulated at the time when the Yoruba people were best placed to take advantage of the new policy and to avail themselves of the opportunity to assume prominent roles in commanding the sectors of the economy¹¹³.

Furthermore, the 3R policy came at a time when the country was enjoying an “oil boom” as this was the period when oil prices spiralled and reached unprecedented heights, which brought an influx of revenue to the federal government that was bigger than expected¹¹⁴. Although the country became wealthy as a result of the oil boom, revenues were not distributed to all parts of the country as the people of Biafra were still suffering in poverty¹¹⁵. This is due to the fact that the federal government was able to monopolize control of the oil industry because it was located entirely in the former eastern region of Biafra or in other Christian minority areas close to the country’s southern coast¹¹⁶. While the country was going through a rapid development and undergoing various reconstruction projects, the reconstruction in the Biafran region was far from becoming a reality. Many private and community buildings had been destroyed during the war and the government had advised the people to assess and submit their losses to the relevant official quarters, when this was done, nothing meaningful was done by the government¹¹⁷ therefore, the people had to embark on reconstructing their property by themselves¹¹⁸.

In 1999, the then president of Nigeria began a campaign of reforms by inaugurating a Human Rights Violation Investigation Commission (also known as the Oputa Panel).

¹¹³ Ejiogu, E. C (2011). *The Roots of Political Instability in Nigeria: Political Evolution and Development in the Niger Basin*. Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing Limited. p12

¹¹⁴ Siollun, M. (2009). *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)*. New York: Algora Publishing. p168

¹¹⁵ Okafor, D. (1998). *The Dance of Death: Nigerian History and Christopher Okigbo’s Poetry*. Trenton: Africa World Press p.39

¹¹⁶ Siollun, M. (2009). *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)*. New York: Algora Publishing. p168

¹¹⁷ Rev. Fr. Ejike, A. (2010) *Nigeria-Biafran War: Social and Economic Effects on The Nigeria Igbos*. Oasis Journal 1 (1). p90

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

The mandate of the commission was to establish the causes, nature and extent of human rights violation dating back to January 1966 with the aim of identifying the perpetrators, determine the role of the state in the violations and to recommend means to pursue justice and to prevent future abuses¹¹⁹. The commission produced and handed over an eight volumes report on human right abuses, which were committed during the military era to the Government in June 2002¹²⁰. In the report, Commission made several recommendations for further redress of the human rights violations and proposed compensation and reparations to the victims¹²¹. Unfortunately, the government did not publish the report and none of the recommendations made was implemented as in January 2003, the government annulled the Commission on the grounds that it was unconstitutional¹²².

¹¹⁹ United States Institute of Peace. *Truth Commission: Nigeria*. Available: <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-nigeria>. Last accessed 14th June 2014.

¹²⁰ Guaker, E. (2009) *A Study of the Nigerian Truth Commission and Why it Failed*. Bergen Open Research Archive Part 2. p1.

¹²¹ Ibid. p2

¹²² Ibid

Chapter 4:

Victims' Perceptions on the Asaba Massacres

4.1 The Asaba Massacre

Asaba was part of the old Midwestern region of Nigeria, which was carved out of Western Nigeria in 1963. It is a town on the west bank of the river Niger in the southeast of Nigeria, which was once the seat of the Royal Nigeria Company¹²³. Although Major Nzeogwu¹²⁴ hailed from this region, Asaba was not part of the Igbo-dominated Biafra, the people from Asaba are ethnically Igbo but consider themselves distinct from those in the Eastern region, preferring the identity of “Anioma”¹²⁵. It was also a quiet and peaceful town that produced people of high levels of education and high-ranking members of the civil service.¹²⁶

In August 1967, the Biafran Army invaded and took control of the Midwest.¹²⁷ The invasion was with the view to gain the practical support of sympathisers, particularly the Ibos¹²⁸ of the Midwest¹²⁹ and to draw the advancing federal troops away from Biafra's capital at Enugu and to undermine the image of the Nigerian military supremacy.¹³⁰ However, the Biafran occupation of the Midwest did not last long as by the beginning of September 1967, the federal forces regained major parts of the Midwestern state¹³¹ and pushed the Biafrans all the way back to Asaba.¹³²

¹²³ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p4

¹²⁴ The Leader of the 1966 Coup

¹²⁵ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p4

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Aneke, L. N. (2007). *The Untold Story Of The Nigeria-Biafra War*. New York. Triumph Publishing. P142

¹²⁸ Ibo is an older variant of the modern way of spelling Igbo

¹²⁹ Orobator, S. E. (1987). The Biafran Crisis and the Midwest. *African Affairs*. 86 (344), p371

¹³⁰ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p5

¹³¹ Aneke, L. N. (2007). *The Untold Story Of The Nigeria-Biafra War*. New York. Triumph Publishing. P161

¹³² Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p5

As the Federal troops took control of Asaba, about 500 Igbo officers were killed¹³³ they went from house to house looting, raping and rounding up boys and men accused of being Biafran sympathizers.¹³⁴ Some of the men and boys were either killed on the spot or taken to the police station where they were later executed.¹³⁵ The people of Asaba became concerned with the violence and in an attempt to bring it to an end decided to show solidarity to the federal troops and offer a pledge of loyalty to “One Nigeria”¹³⁶ by welcoming them to the town.¹³⁷

In October 1967, in a show of solidarity, residents of Asaba were ordered by the Nigerian soldiers to attend a public dance in the town square.¹³⁸ About 4000 unarmed residents along with their community leader took part in this activity chanting “One Nigeria”.¹³⁹ Unfortunately, this peaceful show of solidarity was turned into a tragedy as during the procession, the Nigeria soldiers separated the men from the women and executed the men. This resulted in the deaths of up to one thousand male members of the town¹⁴⁰ who were then buried en masse in shallow graves.¹⁴¹

The stories of the Asaba massacre were not recorded in the official history of the Nigerian civil war. This may be due to fact during the war; they went unreported in the press or were deliberately hidden from public knowledge.¹⁴² The massacre has had a long term effect on the community as many families suffered the loss of the majority of their male members- children were left with no fathers, women had to

¹³³ Nwadike, J. A. (2010). *A Biafran Soldier's Survival From The Jaws Of Death*. United States of America. Xlibris Corporation p.25

¹³⁴ Ibid p4

¹³⁵ Ibid

¹³⁶ The slogan; “Go On With One Nigeria” was a war time slogan created from the alphabets in GOWON (the name of the Nigeria Head State at the time of the war).

¹³⁷ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p9

¹³⁸ Nwadike, J. A. (2010). *A Biafran Soldier's Survival From The Jaws Of Death*. United States of America. Xlibris Corporation p.25

¹³⁹ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3),

p10

¹⁴⁰ Ibid p.2

¹⁴¹ Nwadike, J. A. (2010). *A Biafran Soldier's Survival From The Jaws Of Death*. United States of America. Xlibris Corporation p.25

¹⁴² I do not have any documentary evidence from my research to back up this argument.

bear the burden of widowhood or suffered the loss of their son or brothers. Decades after the events Asaba still displays many scars of the massacre, which are visible in the derelict buildings that have remained unrestored and on the bodies of those who survived the massacre.¹⁴³

4.2 Empirical Research Approach and Methodology

The setting of the study is Asaba, the capital of Delta state with the main focus on the indigenes in the town of Asaba (also called the Asabans). According to the national census of 2006, it has a population of 150,032¹⁴⁴. The research will investigate the views and perceptions of the victims of the massacre with regards to their victimization, the response of the Asaba community in particular and country in general. In addition, it will try to decipher whether these responses are connected to the ethno-religious conflicts the country is experiencing and whether it also led to the feelings of animosity and lack of trust towards the government. It will also try and investigate what recommendations can be implemented towards easing tension within the country.

The chosen method for this research paper is the qualitative research design. The study investigates opinions of 23 respondents comprising 12 victims of the Asaba massacre (2 members of this category are indirect victims), and 11 non-victims from various professions. The approach used in the research consisted of the use of semi-structured and open-ended questions during an in-depth face-to-face interview with

¹⁴³ Bird, S. E & Ottanelli, F. (2011). The History and Legacy of the Asaba, Nigeria Massacres. *African studies review*, 54 (3), p20

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.population.gov.ng/images/Vol%2003%20Table%20DSx%20LGAPop%20by%20SDistrict-PDF.pdf> Accessed on 27th April 2014. Asaba is located in Oshimili South Local Government Area in Delta State

the respondents. The interview contained closed and open-ended questions, which were used to investigate the respondents' perceptions of the Nigerian civil war in general and the Asaba massacre in particular.

4.2.1 Qualitative Sample:

The sampling method used was to visit locations where respondents (direct victims) were likely to converge (Asaba Men's Association, Asaba Women's Association and Asaba Falcons' Club) with the possibility of meeting interested participants; non-victims were approached through networking and having open discussions about the civil war thereby being able to meet with individuals who volunteered to be interviewed while other respondents were recommended by volunteer participants.

4.2.2 Qualitative procedure

The qualitative approach consisted of several open interview questions that were designed in order to gain more insight about the perceptions of their victimization during the war. My focus was to learn more about the Asaba massacre, which occurred during the civil war and the personal experiences of those exposed to the events by collecting as much data as possible so as to enable me compare the interpretations of the events and the victimization of different respondents. The interview began with basic questions about age and knowledge of the Nigerian civil war and the Asaba massacre. Once confirmation was made that the respondent had some knowledge about the topics in question, questions were asked in order to aid the interpretation of the perception of the massacre. These questions were if they knew anything about the Asaba massacre and their understanding of the event. Secondly, questions were asked with regards to any personal experiences of the event. These were followed by questions regarding their points of view regarding the victimization and the lack of redress for the victims of the massacre.

4.2.3 Qualitative measures

Due to the limited time and in ensuring that the research would be successful, interpretations of the interviews were done in such a manner that only parts of the interviews which were that were considered as being important were preserved and irrelevant materials were put aside. The qualitative data were gathered into a number of themes in a table. This table is composed of several themes such as “the perception of the massacre”, “personal experience of the massacre” and “victimhood”; victims’ “expectations and needs”; views on the lack of redress and empathy. For each theme, relevant quotes from our respondents were selected for this study as it enabled me compare different interviews simultaneously.

4.3 Ethical issues

In order to adhere to the ethical norms, the aims and objectives of the research and the voluntary nature of participation were first explained therefore, none of the respondents were under any compulsion to participate. Secondly, being under an obligation to respect the rights and beliefs of the respondent, it was therefore important to ensure that all respondents were informed of the confidentiality and their anonymity when analysing their answers. In addition, with regards to the interviews, respondents’ permission to record was sought before the interview began and they were given the assurance the recordings will only be used during the analysis.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, there was a possibility that some of the interview questions may evoke some emotional reaction. It was therefore pertinent that the participants felt safe and had trust in the researcher throughout the duration of the interview. Some of the respondents (victims) chose to be interviewed in the

presence of some of their family and friends while some opted to be interviewed alone in the comfort their homes.

4.4 Results

In abiding by the anonymity rules, the respondents will not be referred to by their names. They will therefore be referred to using the following codes: RV1 – RV12, for the 12 respondents who were victims of the war and RN1 – RN11, for the 11 non-victim respondents.

4.4.1 Respondents' Characteristics

For the duration of the research, a total of 23 individuals all based in Nigeria were contacted and interviewed. They were willing to share their experience, knowledge and perceptions of the Nigerian civil war. Based on the fact that the male members of Asaba were the target of the massacre, which resulted in widowhood and the loss of father figures and/or male relatives within families, it was important to avoid any gender gap in the results so as to decipher whether points of view would differ between genders. The victim respondents in this research consisted of five females and 7 males. In order to gain a proper insight on the characteristics of their victimization, victim respondents were willing to divulge details of their experience while non-victim respondents were also willing to discuss their perceptions of the victimization.

Majority of the victim respondents were born before the Nigerian civil war and ranged between the ages of 50 – 70 years. Two of the youngest respondents (age RV1-45years and RV2-46years) are indirect victims as they are children of victims and were born during the war while the oldest victim respondent – RV12 is 70 years.

The entire non-victim respondents were born before the war started with their ages ranging from 47 – 68 years. The shortest interviews conducted were with RV1 and RN7. The fact that they are neither direct victims nor victims may be the contributory factor as they did not have much to say about the civil war. The longest interviews were with RV10 and RV12. RV10 is a male respondent who incidentally was one of the participants in the ill-fated dance that led to the Asaba massacre while RV12 is a female whose husband was killed by a member of the Nigerian army. They both took time to discuss their victimization and how it has impacted on them. Every victim respondent is from Asaba however, in order to avoid any bias in the finding, only four out of the non-victim respondents are from Asaba while the rest are from other parts of Nigeria. Majority of the victim respondents (RV5, RV6, RV7, RV8, RV9, RV10 and RV12) had relocated with their families from the northern part of Nigeria to Asaba after the anti-Igbo pogroms that took place in 1966. This movement is illustrated by RV10, who stated: *“When we realised that the killing of Igbo people would continue and that the government was doing nothing about it, many Igbo people decided that it was better to go back to our home towns where we will be safe and be amongst our own people.”* The non-victims respondents (RN1 – RN11) did not reside in Asaba during the war and majority of them (with the exclusion of RN8) did not become aware of the Asaba massacre until decades after it occurred. According to RN9, *“When the war ended in 1970, many of my friends who had moved back to their home towns returned to Lagos and I got to hear about what had happened in the Eastern region but I only got to hear about the Asaba massacre in year 2000 when the Truth and Reconciliation Committee was set up.”* On the other hand, RN8 said, *“I got to hear about the Asaba Massacre in January 1968 when one of my neighbour’s cousins came to Lagos from Asaba and told us stories of what had happened there.”*

4.4.2 Perceptions of the Massacre

During the interview, all respondents were asked to discuss their perceptions of the Asaba massacre. Majority of the victim respondents were of the opinion that the massacre was a military operation aimed at trying to weaken the Biafran army. However, they also believed that the federal troops should have taken necessary steps to find out if the Asaba people in general had indeed been sympathetic towards the Biafran cause and should have punished only those who were found to be in support of Biafra instead of giving a blanket punishment to the entire town. One of the respondents, RV10, stated that even though the Biafran soldiers had come in to Asaba to recruit soldiers, majority of the Asaba people were against the idea of dividing the country. According to him, *“many of us returned to Asaba because of the killings in the north but we just wanted the war to end so that we could all go back to our lives; we did not support the division of the country so when the federal troops came and killed many of us, it was like they were punishing us just because we were Igbo people.”* Another respondent, RN 7 was of the opinion that the federal troops should have engaged in military intelligence so as to ascertain whether the Asaba people were supporting Biafra and if that was the case, the supporters should have been arrested, tried in court and then sentenced. In comparison, one of the non-victim respondents (RN3) stated that though the incident in Asaba is an unfortunate event, it was collateral damage. He argued that although he was not in Asaba during the civil war, he is of the opinion that what happened in Asaba was a necessity to restore peace in the country. He said, *“If there is a threat to national security, the government is under an obligation to deal decisively with the threat and it does not matter if innocent lives are lost during the process, so long as threat is eliminated, the end justifies the means.”* Another respondent, RN4 who is a retired soldier was also in

agreement that the event was collateral damage but in addition he stated that although he was not posted to the Eastern region Asaba during the war, a soldier is under an obligation to carry out an order given by a senior ranking officer. His reason was that *“Soldiers do not take laws into their hands, if they were ordered to kill the men in Asaba because they were traitors, then it had to be done.”*

In addition, two of the respondents, RV10 and RN9 were of the opinion that the people were eliminated not because the federal government had any proof connecting them to Biafra but as a result of their tribe, therefore the incident was genocide. According to RN9, *“I appreciate that it is difficult to give a solid definition of genocide, but going by the definition, the massacre was genocide as the people were killed based on their tribe. The people of Asaba were targeted not because they had joined in the Biafran cause but the mere fact that the war was in summary between the Igbos and the rest of the country, they had to be punished simply because they are Igbo people.”*

4.4.3 Personal Experience and Victimhood.

The two victim respondent, one male RV1 and one female, RV2 are indirect victims as they were born after the massacre and therefore did not witness the event. Their experience was more about growing up and their recollection of events after the war in addition to the fact that senior members of their families told them stories about the war. RV2 stated that she heard storied about the massacre from her mother whenever she spoke about her late father and other members of her family who lost their lives during the war. She recounted how her mother was very protective of them (she and her siblings) and how her mother emphasised the need for them to be on the lookout for each other at all times. She said, *“Looking back now, maybe my mother’s over*

protectiveness and paranoia were as a result of her war experience.” RV1, recollects how his mother constantly told him never to trust a non-Igbo woman to such an extent that according to him, *“Even as an adult, my mother kept on advising me not to marry a woman who does not come from Asaba or a non-Igbo woman.”* The remaining female victim respondents, RV4, RV6, RV7, and RV12 had similar experiences in the sense that they lost either their fathers, husbands or brothers on the day of or leading to the massacre. Many families in Asaba were left without a heads of their families as a lot of the males who were of age to carter for their families had been killed. According to RV12, the day before the massacre, her husband, his two brothers and father were killed by the federal troops. She said, *“After the massacre, we became a family without a head, the men had been killed, leaving young widows. We had to hide our teenage sons in the ceiling just in case the federal troops raided our house looking for males to kill. We were all helpless; I was pregnant and scared for my life and those of the remaining family.”* The male victim respondents recounted similar experiences of their being forced to hide in various places at home to avoid getting killed by the federal troops or how they lost a close relation during the war. However, in addition RV5 and RV10 were willing to shed more light into their victimization. RV5 narrated how he got injured when he escaped from his home on the day the federal troops raided it. Unfortunately for his family, his father was also among the crowd that took part in the parade but was killed on that day. According to RV10 who was involved in the parade, *“I was among the people who joined in welcoming the federal troops to Asaba, we were all chanting “One Nigeria!” The next thing I heard was one of the officers giving the orders in Hausa language to begin the killing. My senior brother was holding my hands and when the soldiers started selecting the males, he pushed me into the crowd. I watched as they shot my brother! I lost my*

father and my brother in one day. In fact I do not know the whereabouts of my other brother up till now.”

Majority of the victim respondent believe that they their victimization has resulted in their ability to cope in whatever circumstances they find themselves in. RV11 stated emphatically, *“Even if the world looks at us as victims, we are indeed survivors. They tried to wipe us out of existence and we survived. Though we remember the events sometimes with bitterness, our experiences have made us stronger people. We have become a force to be reckoned with and having gone through such a traumatic event, there is no other kind of unfortunate event that can dehumanise us again.”*

Generally speaking, majority of the victim respondents attributed their ability to cope with the trauma mainly because of their religion as Christians and the fact that the community response to the traumatic events afforded majority of the victims various mechanism through which many of them were able to recover. According to RV9, *“After my father was killed, I remember people used to bring food to our house, my mother was constantly surrounded by other woman and we were never left on our own as there were people who came to pray with us or kept us company. I believe many of the people had also suffered one loss or the other so when people share such loss in common, they are able to console each other in dealing with the loss.”*

In summarising the impact of the war, RV10 stated that the Asaba women had suffered the most in the sense that they had lost the majority of the able-bodied males in their family (their husbands, brothers, uncles, fathers or sons). According to him, many of the females had been raped by members of the federal troops or had been in relationships with the soldier and as a consequence, giving birth to children who could not name their fathers. He said, *“Many of the women had to deal with the*

shame of having children and not being able to say who the father was. The other women could not find Asaba men to marry them and had to go out of the town to look for husbands.”

4.4.4 Expectations

Majority of the respondents in the two categories were of the view that the government did not do much to meet the expectations of the people who were affected by the war. One of the victim respondents (RV7) stated that many home were destroyed during the war and the owners did not have the capital to rebuild their properties. She said, *“After the war, Gowon made a declaration to rebuild the country, but we did not get any help from the government. Many homes were destroyed; schools, offices and hospitals were not spared. Many of us could not rebuild our homes because we did not have the money to do so. Up till now there are still houses that were destroyed during the war that have not been rebuilt.”* Another victim respondent (RV11) stated that the war resulted in many Asaba children being illiterate as a result of the massacre because many families had lost the heads of their homes and were now living in poverty, which made paying for education a difficult task. Furthermore, as schools were destroyed therefore; there were no adequate facilities to educate the children. He believed that the government should have granted children – especially those who had lost their fathers in the massacre- full scholarship. According to him, *“If the government believed that there was no victor, no vanquished, and wanted to rebuild the country, they should have demonstrated this in many ways. They should have concentrated on educating the children who had been left fatherless through the massacre because by putting the children in schools, the government would have helped in decreasing the amount of hardship the families were facing.”*

4.4.5 Views on the Lack of Redress

When they were questioned on their perception on the lack of redress, the views of the majority of the victim respondents were similar in the sense that they were of the belief that the lack of redress has contributed towards conflicts amongst different tribes in the country. However, majority of the non-victim respondents had different views. According to RN3, seeking redress after all this time is what is contributing to the conflicts in the country. According to him, *“the Igbo people feel that they suffered more than other tribes during the war, therefore they are special and should be given special treatment. This is wrong and if the Igbo people should stop asking for redress, it would create a more conducive atmosphere in which resolutions on how to move the country forward will be achieved.”* In contrast, according to RV12, *“The Hausas and Yorubas victimized the Ibo people and nothing was done about this. Until something positive is done, there will be no trust amongst the people and there will be no peace in the country.”* RV10 stated that in the year 2000, he was among the selection of victims invited to give an account of the Asaba massacre before the Truth Commission set up by the government to record human right violations dating back to the 1966 coups. However, after giving his account of the victimization of the Asaba massacre, nothing has been done by the commission in response to the event till date. In contrast, RN5 was of the view that although it was necessary to revisit the events, it important to note that it may not have been possible to implement an effective form of redress right after the war as the government was more focussed on achieving peace in the country. However, he also stated that an effective form of redress such as intensifying efforts towards rebuilding and rehabilitating the people, who were badly affected by the war, may have resulted in achieving true reconciliation and many of the problems the country is currently experiencing as a result of the war could have

been eliminated. In contrast, RN4 was of the view that there is no need for a redress since the country was a war at the time and a redress after the war would have led to another period of conflict. According to him, *“War is a necessary evil because innocent people will suffer but so long as the purpose is achieved, no one should be punished especially when peace has been restored.”* Another contrasting opinion was from RN11 who stated that the conflicts in Nigeria is as a result of the 1914 Amalgamation that led to the creation of Nigeria. According to him, *“I believe the conflicts in Nigeria dates back to 1914. The British government are the cause of the conflicts in Nigeria because they should not have joined the north to the south and force us to live together as one nation. We were different in many ways back then and are still very different up till now.”*

4.4.6 Victims’ Needs

Majority of the victim respondents were of the opinion that there was need to revisit the events of the war. However, they had different approaches: RV1, RV2, RV5 and RV8 believed that victims of the massacre should be given financial compensation. Whereas RV3, RV4, RV7, RV9, RV10, RV11 were of the view that by revisiting the massacre, the government should demonstrate goodwill by doing more in developing the town like rebuilding desolate properties. RV10 also stated that people who were unable to find the bodies of their loved ones after the massacre should be informed of where the bodies were buried. He stated that the whereabouts of many people after the massacre remain unknown and if they were killed and buried by the federal troops, it would give the families closure after many years of uncertainty if they are given the opportunity to locate the bodies of their loved ones. Two of the respondents, RV6 and RV12 believed that by revisiting the events, if those involved the incident were to acknowledge and take responsibility for what had happened, they as victims will be

satisfied. According to RV12, *“No amount of money can wipe away the pain and suffering but if the people responsible for killing my husband were to come to me and apologise for what he did, I will forgive him and then let go.”*

In contrast to the majority, some of the non-victim respondents were of the view that since the war ended over forty years ago, there was no need to open up old wounds of the past but to focus on the present with the aim of achieving peace and growth in the country so as to avoid a reoccurrence of similar victimizations. One of them (RN3) stated that it was important to understand that when the war ended, the government did not want any more conflict and therefore did not punish warring factor. He further stated that by trying to hold to the past would be detrimental to the growth of the country. According to him, *“If everyone who suffered during the war should come and start asking for one form of compensation or the other, the country will not move forward. The war has ended so people should learn to accept their losses and move on. Let sleeping dogs lie!”* The other respondent (RN4) stated that as a soldier, he had no regrets of his activities during the war and even though he was not part of the federal troops in Asaba, he believes that those who were involved in the event should not be held accountable for their actions as they were working towards unity and peace in the country. He said, *“As soldiers fighting for our country, we had to do whatever it took to end the war even if it meant a small fraction of people were going to be killed.”*

4.4.7 Empathy

Non-victim respondents were asked if they shared or recognised the experiences of the victims of the massacre. Majority of them were more sympathetic towards the experiences of the victims than empathetic. Majority of them stated that they “felt sorry” for the victims of the massacre however; a few of them added that they could understand and share in the victims feeling wronged. According to RN6, she worked as a volunteer during the civil war and was exposed to the pain and suffering of victims during the war. She stated that it is quite easy to understand the victimizations that occurred during the war and why victims may be feeling wronged. According to her, *“I saw how people were dying of starvation and diseases. If I am still having nightmares about this experience, I can imagine what the victims are going through.”* She also stated that she does not know how the victims can get over their experience however; she believes that the government should implement policies, which would ensure that such unfortunate experiences associated with war do not occur again.

Chapter 5:

Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted as an attempt to learn more about the victimizations that occurred during the civil war and the consequences of the lack of redress for the victims. Investigation in this study indicates that the victims of the Asaba massacre still carry the scars of their experiences during the war. Though various literatures have established a connection between the civil war and the contemporary conflict the country is facing in terms of the causes and effects, very little empirical studies have been done with regards to the lack of redress. In this study, it was hypothesized that the lack of redress for victims a factor that is connected to the contemporary ethnic rivalry in Nigeria and that there is a need to revisit these past victimizations. This was particularly evident in the notion of the perception of the massacre, redress for victims and empathy. Furthermore, virtually no research has been conducted with the view to making a comparison between the perceptions of victims and non-victims of the Nigerian civil war. It was important to do this in this study so as to ascertain whether perspectives on victimization would differ between the two groups. The elaboration below will further discuss the empirical findings before providing a general conclusion for the study.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

During the empirical research, it was expected that when considering the fact that though both groups of respondents had knowledge of the Asaba massacre, the victim respondents were directly affected by the event, which therefore implied that the perceptions of the lack of redress for the victims of massacre might differ between the two groups. However, the major difference was that whilst one group (the victims)

believed that the lack of redress contributed to the contemporary conflicts in the country, the other (non-victims) were of the opinion that it is not the lack of redress, but seeking redress for victims long after the war ended is the contributory factor. Although it sounds logical for the non-victim respondents to make such distinction, the hypothesis in this research did not take that into consideration.

There was no significant difference in perceptions of the massacre between the groups. However, the only finding that differed in perception was that the non-victim respondents had less empathy for victims of the massacre, which can most probably explained in the fact that a fraction of them believed there was no need for the events of the war to be revisited.

Another major finding that differed was the forms of redress. Some victim respondents desired financial compensation while others suggested that other forms of reparation mechanisms through which the healing process for victims would begin.

In theory, this may either suggest that the lack of redress for victims of the Asaba massacre is a contributory factor to the contemporary conflict in the country and there is a need to revisit the event or that the lack of redress is not the issue but holding on the victimhood and seeking redress is root of the conflicts. In order to gain a more appropriate perspective on redressing past victimization, further elaborate study would be required such as an investigation in which a larger sampling of people who have had similar experiences of the civil war is undertaken and juxtaposing victims' evaluations with those of non-victims.

5.3 Methodological Limitations

It was realised from the beginning of this research that considering the fact that Asaba does not form a significant fraction of the very populous country, suggesting a link between lack of redress for victims of the massacre and the contemporary conflict in the country may not be appreciated by non-victims of the civil war. The topic was therefore a sensitive one that needed to be approached with care during the interviews. Although no discernment was passed with regards to victims or non-victims, the interview did contain some questions that may have been considered as being suggestive. For example when asked about the perceptions on the lack of redress and its connections to the contemporary conflicts in the country, this question was inadvertently misconstrued to be the opinion of the interviewer by a number of the respondents, which resulted in some of them exhibiting various emotions and reactions. Some respondents especially the non-victims became irritated by the suggestive question, causing them to be nonchalant in their responses. Another possibility would be that the question unintentionally set the respondents in a particular direction as it was more effortless to agree with a statement rather than to challenge it. A more straightforward solution may have been to ask two separate questions e.g. “what is your perception on the lack of redress for victims of the massacre?” and “what are your perceptions of the contributory factors of the contemporary conflicts in the country?”

Issues relating to the sampling of respondents included the relatively small sample size of respondents. Although the differences in the size of the two groups of respondents were almost the same, a significant difference in the result may have

been achieved in a situation where the experience had involved a larger number of participants.

5.4 Conclusion

According to this study, the victim respondents shared common views with regards to their perceptions of the massacre, expectations, needs and lack of redress. However, their views of the non-victim respondent varied with only a small fraction of them sharing common views with the victim respondents.

Participants' views on revisiting the victimizations of the war differed as majority of the non-victim respondents were of the opinion that such exercise would only lead to more conflicts in the country. The study also showed that the victim respondents acknowledged that the event occurred over four decades ago and the damage done is immense and irreparable as not only did they lost their loved ones; the massacre has had a longstanding impact on their lives. Furthermore, they were not particularly interested in punishing the perpetrators but they believed that by revisiting the event, the focus should be on the victims rather than the perpetrators.

The study also indicated that compensation would not necessarily lead to victim satisfaction but other reparative approaches such as acknowledging victimhood and initiating measures to achieve redress for the victims as the healing process for the victim will begin, which may also lead to reconciliation and in the furthering of peace between communities in the country.

Overall, the cause of the civil war was due to the ethnic conflict in country. Even though the outcome at the end of the war was that Nigeria remained a single entity, the country still bridled with ethno-religious rivalries. It is almost impossible to have

a comprehensive consensus on how to implement policies that will effectively bring about equal distribution of wealth and power among ethnic groups in the country, as there are distinct classifications of groups of people within the country, which invariably means that such policies may result in some groups being contented while others may not.

This study shows another significant root of the conflicts in Nigeria is connected to allegations of a failure by the Nigerian government (both past and present) to address the issue of the past victimization of the civil war, which could lead to partial or total healing and reconciliation of victims and that victims of the war have proclivities with regards to how their needs should be met and how the society should respond to when faced with matters concerning violation of human rights.

The study also shows that despite the fact that Nigeria has had a lasting history of conflicts, the number and rate will continue to emerge in the country for as long as the past victimization of the 1967 civil war are not properly addressed and these conflicts will also continue to have a profound impact on the socio-economic development of the country.

As conflicts continue to rankle throughout the country, a victimological approach may be an effective mechanism through which gaining a better understanding of the effects and impacts of the war is achieved. Furthermore, it is also important to state that, in making an effort towards restoring peace and rebuilding society torn apart by conflicts, other mechanisms such as establishing truth commissions, which focus on acknowledging the experiences of the victims and establishing the truth with regards to their victimizations, should be implemented.

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Appendices

Appendix (A)

Interview Questions - Victim Respondents:

Personal Characteristics:

Were you born before or during the war?

Can you tell me your age?

Perception of the Massacre:

Where were you during the war?

Do you have any experience of the Asaba massacre?

Personal Experience and Victimhood:

What was your experience?

How did you cope?

Based on your experience of the massacre, how did it impact on you?

Victim Expectations:

As a victim, did you have any expectations from the government after the war?

If so, what were your expectations?

Were your expectations met?

Views on Lack of Redress for victims of the Massacre:

Do you feel that the victimizations and the lack of redress connected to the conflicts in the country today?

Victims' Need:

As a victim of the massacre, is there a need to revisit the past victimizations of the war?

What is the reason for your answer?

If yes, what kinds of needs do you suggest?

Appendix (B)

Interview Questions - Non-Victim Respondents:

Personal Characteristics:

Were you born before or during the war?

Can you tell me your age?

Perception of the Massacre:

Where were you during the war?

Have you heard about the Asaba massacre that took place during the war?

If so, how did you hear about it?

What are your perceptions of the massacre and victimization?

Victim Expectations:

Did you have any expectations for the victims of the massacre?

What is the reason for your answer?

If yes, what were your expectations?

Do you feel the expectations were met?

Views on Lack of Redress for victims of the Massacre:

Do you feel that the victimizations and the lack of redress connected to the conflicts in the country today?

Victims' Need:

Do you feel that the victims have any needs?

What is the reason for your answer?

If yes, what do you feel needs to be done for the victims?

Empathy:

Do you share or recognise the experiences of the victims of the massacre?

What is the reason for your answer?