

“BUILDING BIAFRANS:”
The Role of Propaganda in Creating the Biafran Nation

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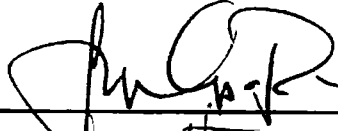

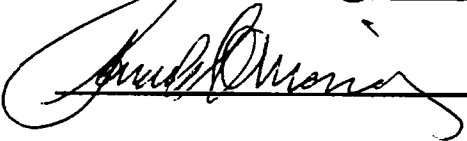
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Introduction

In the postcolonial era in Africa, new nations struggled to create national identities that were separate from those imposed on them during colonialism. This thesis examines the Nigerian Civil War in the 1960s, a deadly postcolonial conflict that pitted the young central government against a secessionist movement in the young nation's eastern region. The principal concern is with the secessionist propaganda generated by the Eastern Region of Nigeria, later known as Biafra, and how leaders used this propaganda in attempts to create a Biafran nation.

Historical Background:

There has been longstanding animosities between the groups in the north and south of present day Nigeria. Historically the region was wracked by tribal warfare and intermittent ethnic clashes. In the predominately Christian south, there were autonomous ethnic groups with no central authority, while the Muslim north had a tradition of political and religious dynasties. Even within these regions, there was a large diversity in ethnic heritage (see Map 1). The nation of Nigeria was created by British imperialists. Originally two separate British colonies, the north and south were amalgamated into the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. Under British rule Nigeria was divided into three regions (see Map 2) and ruled over unequally. Colonial rulers generally favored Northern Nigerians for positions of power and fostered competition in order to keep the native populations divided and distracted. The new competition that arose with colonialism was superimposed on old ethnic tensions and exacerbated the conflict and lack of

cohesion. The tension became so severe and the competition became so fierce that even after Nigeria gained independence in 1960 the region's differences appeared irreconcilable.¹

Regional tensions became particularly pronounced when it came to allocating political clout and dividing up the limited resources of the new nation. The National Census, used to determine regional representation, became a test of the viability of the new nation.² What began in 1911 as a routine and tedious activity eventually transformed into an arena for political power plays. The National Census was consistently plagued with inadequacies, deficiencies, and overt bias and, although the data was generally regarded by almost everyone as unreliable, unrepresentative and discriminatory, by the 1960s it was the prominent mechanism for creating the system of representation for Nigeria.³ Unfortunately, the ideas of a unified Nigeria had not yet been solidified, and regionalism prevailed. Those hoping to control the seat of power were able to use both legitimate and deceptive means in their attempts to gain dominance.⁴ Thus, rather than creating a democratic nation, as might have been intended, the nation became increasingly splintered. Rather than supporting a Nigerian identity, the "winner take all" and "win at all costs" mentality thwarted unification and supported increasing regional-centric affiliations.⁵ Lacking any strong unifying voice, the finger pointing and political struggles

¹ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

² In keeping with British tradition during the years of British colonialism Nigeria conducted several censuses during the years ending in "one." For many of the years there was no census data collected at all.

³ S.A. Aluko, "How Many Nigerians? An Analysis of Nigeria's Census Problems, 1901-63," in *Journal of Modern African Studies* 3 (October 1965), 376.

⁴ People again became increasingly sensitized to the perks associated with a higher census count. Both citizen and politicians were especially eager to find ways to record as many people counted as possible (even if it meant potentially counting them multiple times). One politician went so far as to call upon his constituents, the Ijaws, to "pick up living in any part in Western and Eastern Ijaw areas" and "come home." Informational pamphlets printed by the regional governments also encouraged people to return to their original "homes" in order to appropriately maximize their census numbers. (*Nigerian Outlook*, April 25, 1962, p.4.)

⁵ The release of the census figures was significantly delayed, providing an even greater opportunity for unrestrained rumors and speculation about attempts to doctor numbers by representatives of every region. Accusations of "false

shattered the already fragile country into areas of disparate needs, ideology, and leadership. Nigeria failed one of its first tests as a nation; rather than building a nation out of many, the use of the census to define the nation further fractionalized it and opened the doors for those who would step forward to provide a voice for the disillusioned and disenfranchised regions.

In January 1966, Nigeria hosted the Commonwealth Conference which consolidated Nigeria's reputation for moderation in African affairs. Ironically just a few days after it was lauded as one of the few post-colonial successes,⁶ a group of senior military officers (the majority of these officers were Southern Igbos) assassinated the Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and several high-ranking regional governmental officials, violently ousting the Northern-dominated government. Thus, while Nigeria presented the façade of peaceful coexistence and successful integration, the nation was plagued with numerous inflammatory issues. These issues, which ranged from corruption and struggles for political dominance to ethnic dissension, jealousy and contempt, were raging barely beneath the surface. While scholars have debated the inevitability of this "explosion" and the exact origin of the fuse, there is no question that the January events triggered a series of escalating outbursts that lasted for years.⁷

After this first coup, the Nigerian federal government quickly reorganized under the military control of General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi.⁸ General Ironsi was unable to quiet the raging voices, lessen the ethnic tensions or find a suitable constitutional compromise to appease

and inflated" census figures were levied against all regions by the Chief Federal Census Officer and against the East, specifically, by Northern officials.

⁶ John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 29.

⁷ Kirk-Greene, 1:3.

⁸ Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi was an Igbo Nigerian politician and the Chief of Staff of the Nigerian Military when the January 16, 1966 coup occurred. He did not take place in the coup and was actually the one to stop it. He served as the Head of State of Nigeria from January 16, 1966 until he was overthrown and killed in a coup d'état on July 29, 1966. As the military leader of Nigeria he sought to run the country as a cohesive unit (much like the military) but this eventually led to another coup and his death.

the disparate regions of the nation. Just six months later, in July, there was a counter-coup, led by Northern military officers, killing Ironsi and many of the other senior officers of Eastern origin. After three days of nation-wide anxiety, fear and non-government, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon emerged as Nigeria's new leader⁹ (See Image 1). This second coup, along with the heightened ethnic tension, precipitated a large-scale massacre of Southeastern Igbo people by the Northerners, triggering a mass exodus of the Igbos back to the safety of their traditional homeland in the East. Amidst the devastation and fear, a strong secessionist sentiment surfaced.

For months Nigeria's political leaders attempted to reconcile the regions but they found their endless conferences and proposals fruitless. Finally, on May 29, 1967, after lengthy attempts at international moderation and political bargaining, Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Ojukwu,¹⁰ Regional Governor for the East, claimed that Igbos were no longer safe in or desired by the federal government (See Image 2). He declared independence for Eastern Nigeria and the new "Republic of Biafra" was born. This commenced the Nigerian Civil War, a prolonged and devastating conflict that resulted in countless casualties. The death tolls were staggering not only due to the ravages of battle but also as a consequence of the omnipresent starvation caused by the North's highly successful economic blockade of the eastern regions. As the situation became desperate, the Biafran government frequently turned down relief aid claiming the food was poisoned as part of the federal governments plan to annihilate all Biafrans. As a group of people, Biafrans had developed the pervasive belief that the enemy was attempting the complete

⁹ Yakubu Gowon was a statesman and soldier and a member of the Angas people of the Northern region. Although he was high on the list of northern officers to be executed during the first coup, he became the most senior northern officer to survive the coup. The participants of the second coup made him their front man and hoped that his Christianity would appeal to the east and west and make up for being a Northerner. He remained the Nigerian leader throughout the Nigerian civil war (1967–70). (F.R. Metrowich, *Nigeria: The Biafran War* (Pretoria: Afrika-Instituut, 1969).)

¹⁰ Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, an Eastern Igbo, was military governor of the Eastern region of Nigeria (1966–67) and head of the secessionist state of Biafra (1967–70) during the Nigerian civil war.

genocide of all Biafrans. Biafran soldiers walked around with small missiles bundled on top of their head in the way that they traditionally had carried bundles of food (See Images 3 and 4). Within this context, food was of at least equal importance as the pressing need for self-defense.

Even before the first shot was fired on the battlefield. Biafra was heavily engaged in a propaganda war. Biafra not only prepared its arms: Biafra prepared its people. It was on this battleground of words and emotions. in the war within in a war, that Biafra often secured its greatest victories.¹¹ The mass starvation of Biafrans and accusations of human rights violations served as a vital element in the Biafran cry for help. Heart-wrenching scenes, captured and dispersed by extensive international media coverage and combined with a very deliberate propaganda war (both internal and international), defined public sentiment and became as critical to the viability of Biafra as the actual events of the war.

Historiography:

Despite the large collection of works on the Nigerian Civil War, most are limited in scope. They often present an overview of the war, narrate a certain region's extensive history or focus on the war's lasting impact on Nigerian politics. These works can mainly be grouped into two major categories. The first category was written by authors who were directly involved in the war. including soldiers, politicians, international sympathizers and journalists who had been stationed in one of the regions.¹² Some of these authors claim to present an argument free of bias or an objective narration of events. Other authors admit to their prejudices from the very

¹¹ Tamuno, Tekena N., *Nigeria Since Independence: The First 25 Years* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Heinemann Educational Books, 1989).

¹² Journalists were usually stationed in Biafra because the Biafran government was very welcoming to the international media. The North remained closed off to media and failed to attempt to foster relationships with the media until late in the war.

beginning. These works have the advantage of offering first hand experience. However, the author's emotions and opinions shaped their experiences, interpretations and choices about what parts of their story to tell. The second category of works is of a more scholarly nature, written by intellectuals making an effort to distance themselves from the emotions of the events. The Nigerian Civil War was, however, such an emotionally charged event that, despite their best efforts, many scholars find it almost impossible to put enough academic distance between themselves and the passions of events.

Two of the most important works related to the Nigerian Civil War are John de St. Jorre's *The Nigerian Civil War* and A.H.M. Kirk-Greene's *Sourcebook*. British journalist John De St. Jorre spent considerable time on both sides of the battlefield seeking out truth first-hand rather than relying on press releases from either side. His account provides valuable first-hand anecdotes and interviews and several photo galleries. Through personal interviews and anecdotes he strove to "cut through the choking fog of myth and propaganda that obscured the conflict" to capture the moods and passions of the war years and to emphasize what the fight meant to each side as much as what the fight actually was.¹³ In 1971 A.H.M. Kirk-Greene compiled hundreds of sources related to the Nigerian Civil War in an attempt to guard against "the inevitable erosion of time."¹⁴ In his introduction, he wrote that although history can depend on passion for immediate inspiration, history claims to remain impartial. He asserted, "Nowhere is this responsibility of the historian for objective and conscientious recording more important than during the inflamed and psychologically emotive period of a war."¹⁵ He stressed that he did not consider this a history of Nigeria's civil war, as this task "awaits the historian uncommitted in his

¹³ St Jorre, 17.

¹⁴ Kirk-Greene, 1: ix.

¹⁵ Ibid, 1: viii.

ideology and unhampered in his researches.”¹⁶ Asserting the primary purpose of his book as a sourcebook he wrote, “Evaluation, summary and interpretation can wait; the systematic retrieval of the raw data on which alone these much be based cannot... The historical record must be established before the folklore assumes its aura of authenticity.”¹⁷ Ironically, Kirk-Greene’s historical background that supplements the sources provides one of the most balanced accounts of the war.

Propaganda and the Nation:

Despite the in-depth coverage of the realities of the war, there is a paucity of commentary and analysis of the psychological aspects of the war. These individual and collective reactions are as important to our understanding of the time as the factual accounts. Lacking widespread access to televised, minute to minute, all-encompassing coverage of what was happening in Nigeria, the average Biafran’s understanding and reactions were based on what they heard, read, and saw. That left the door wide open for the leadership to spin reality, to create a story that supports its beliefs and purposes. Propaganda, by its very nature, is a mixture of rhetoric and persuasion. It is a language of emotion, not just information. It can create a “mass memory” based on how and when information is presented and the impact it has on particular individuals, at particular times, with particular beliefs and needs. All these factors played a role in how successful Biafran propaganda was at creating a shared sense of what it meant to be a Biafran.

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as “an imagined political community.”¹⁸ A national identity is neither defined nor bound by geographical proximity or arbitrary borderlines. A nation

¹⁶ Ibid, 1: viii.

¹⁷ Ibid, 1: ix.

¹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

consists of social characteristics and perceived psychological traits, of an acceptance of an underlying belief of the interconnectedness of their past and future. Italian statesman Massimo d'Azeglio brought this idea to life when he observed soon after the creation of Italy. "We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians."¹⁹ Likewise, in order to create and preserve Biafra, Ojukwu had to make Biafrans. Through rhetoric and propaganda, Ojukwu pieced together what it meant to be a Biafran. He capitalized on shared values and ideals, fear, prejudice, regionalism, stereotypes, and ever present distinction between "us" and "them" in order to fashion beliefs of a common experience, common enemy, and common destiny.

By stressing commonalities, Ojukwu also managed to create unity that was not separate from a Biafran identity. Manpower was Biafra's key instrument in the war and thus a united people, for what ever the reason, became a powerful weapon (See Image 5). Some people fought out of allegiance, some due to common goals, others out of fear, and most out of a combination of reasons.

Biafran propaganda had multiple audiences. Not everyone in Biafra was an Igbo, but Biafra was made up of many different minority groups, and even within one ethnic group members did not always share the same mindset. The international audience played a large role in the internal propaganda because world opinion often found its way back inside the border of Biafra as it influenced the external support for Biafra. Biafra sought the support of foreign nations and powerful international interest groups. Arguably, the greatest outpouring of support came as a reaction to the claims of human rights violations. International newspapers and televisions were filled with images of sad and starving children. Radio Biafra broadcasted gruesome tales of the atrocities committed against the Biafran people. Such highly emotive

¹⁹ Harry Hearder, *Cavour* (London: Longman, 1994).

propaganda highlighted the suffering of women, children, and non-combatants, promoting an image of a self-sufficient nation victimized by a barbaric government threatening complete annihilation.

Biafran propaganda was transmitted via a variety of vehicles – both spoken and written: verbal and non-verbal; internal and international. The primary source of the internal propaganda was the speeches of influential leaders. These were not only broadcast in their entirety over the radio. They often were published in newspapers and, in some cases, condensed into mass-produced pamphlets and fliers. Radio broadcasts were particularly influential, due to their wide-reach and centrality to the culture to which they were appealing. Many people would crowd together around the radio to listen to the news. Radio stations, particularly Radio Biafra, had programming that appealed to specific audiences. They often included introductions of tribal drumming and local music, and broadcasts in localized dialects. Radio Biafra became iconic, serving as a source of messages aimed at boosting the communal morale. These sounds of reassurance and comfort were the first line of communication in response to Federal attacks.²⁰ Later the radio was equally important to Gowon and the federal government as it provided an established and accepted mechanism for broadcasting an opposing point of view and transmitting their own messages into the heart of Biafra, reaching out to “Nigerian Biafrans” in their homes and on the battleground.

The written word was equally important in the communication of information. As a group, Southern Nigerians were very literate and written materials were easily accessible to

²⁰ Jensen, Don, “The Life and Death of Radio Biafra,” in *Popular Communications* (September 1987). When there was a federal attack the radio station was always moved first and its location was kept a secret to decrease the risk of a targeted attack. The federal soldiers were told to target these stations specifically demonstrating their acknowledgment of radio’s central role.

most, if not all, of the people in this region. Even those who did not read the news directly often gathered together to have it read or interpreted to them by someone within their own community. Books, though available, were more expensive and less frequently a sought-after source of information and viewpoints. Pamphlets were prominent, emphasizing words, slogans and images to promote ideas and ideals. These were often very short, usually from one to four pages, and focused on promoting beliefs rather than spreading information. They were passed out in the market, on street corners and on buses, and they were designed to be read quickly. People could absorb the message while on the bus trip and then easily leave the flier for the next passenger. They were often filled with photos and graphically-presented and highlighted key messages.

The majority of information available to Biafrans did not emanate from an independent press. There was an Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information which eventually became the Biafran Ministry of Information. As one might expect, the views presented mirrored the ideology of the prevailing leadership and was heavily controlled by Ojukwu. International news coverage eventually filtered back into Nigeria and Biafra. This provided information about outside interpretations and response but, because of sympathetic reactions to the horrific conditions and Ojukwu's close relationship with the international press, it often carried the Biafran message back to the Biafrans.

The propaganda utilized, the ideology promoted, and the results were dependent on the political, psychological, and emotional atmosphere. Each chapter focuses on the propaganda of one of four distinct time periods. Each time period represents a major shift in tactics used and message conveyed in the Biafran propaganda war. Chapter one focuses on the time period between the January coup in 1966 and the Declaration of Biafra in the summer of 1967. As

tensions among the diverse regions became more pronounced. the use of military and political means to assert one's position and authority increased. The ensuing violence threatened the existence of the Biafran people and the propaganda capitalized on the emotional reactions of the people caught up in the crossfire. During this time, Ojukwu's message reflected an escalation in threat and an increased polarization among groups. Ojukwu established himself as the voice of Biafra, managing to walk the fine line between patriotic and secessionist sentiments. Chapter two begins with the birth of Biafra. Between the Declaration of Biafra in May of 1967 and Gowon's proclaimed "Final Push" in August of the following year, Biafran propaganda vacillated between promoting an image of a strong, moral, legitimate government that could accomplish anything through mere passion and desire and an image of a vulnerable, victimized people in need of external support. Biafran secessionist propaganda not only invoked Biafrans' fear of imminent danger and fear of genocide. it villainized the federal government and morally elevated Biafrans. Also, during this time Ojukwu's power and credibility grew exponentially to the point where he became synonymous with the war. Chapter three's analysis spans from Gowon's "Final Push" in August 1968 to the Ahiara Declaration of the following year. The "Final Push" initiated an offensive by the Federal Military Government to end the war, making up for its relative late start in the propaganda war. Previously, Biafra's propaganda had gone unanswered, and often affirmed by default. But now the Federal Government was creating clear responses to Ojukwu's claims. Gowon redefined many of Ojukwu's terms and ideas advantageously. undermining the foundation of Biafran ideology, bolstering his position and reflecting efforts to strengthen Nigerian sentiments. Chapter four focuses on the last stage of the war. The Ahiara Declaration represented Ojukwu's last frantic attempt to rally his people. As the circumstances in Biafra became more ominous, increasing numbers of people fled from Biafra to escape starvation and

there were large shifts in public support for Ojukwu's decisions. Gowon pursued dual aims: to end the war and to begin reconciliation. Woven through these chapters is an analysis of the role of Ojukwu's character and his changing role within the war.

Chapter One: Walking the Line

January Coup to Declaration of Biafra

January 1966 – May 1967

During this entire period, Eastern propaganda and Ojukwu had to walk the fine line between asserting Eastern interests and remaining patriotic to Nigeria. After the pogroms in the summer of 1966 the element of fear became central to the Eastern message. These violent acts provided a strong catalyst for increasing separation between the regions and the psychological separation between groups.

Historical Background:

During the night of January 14, 1966, a coup, code-named “Operation Damisa,” commenced. By the next day most of Nigeria’s main leaders were dead or missing. The coup’s claimed aim was to cleanse the federal cabinet to make room for a strong, unified and prosperous nation, free of corruption and internal strife. Ojukwu responded in his “Away with the Old Guard”¹ speech which chronicled the trespasses of the ousted group and spoke with optimism about the opportunity for a Nigeria free of discrimination and free to prosper.² Despite the asserted goals of the January coup, the ethnic makeup of the plotters and the victims gave the impression that the coup had been primarily an Igbo Plot. Of the seven conspirators, only one was a non Igbo, a Yoruba major; the other five included four Igbo majors and one captain; the victims were predominately Northern. The question thus emerged, was coup’s aim to eliminate

¹ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “Away with the Old Guard,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969).

² A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *The Genesis of the Nigerian Civil War and the Theory of Fear* (Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1975).

corruption in the government or was it ethnically motivated?³ Although there was no clear answer, the impact of these debates was yet another increase in the ever-present ethnic tensions.

Following the coup Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi came into power as the head of Nigeria's new military government. Ironsi, an Easterner, showed little sensitivity to the Northerners, further disenfranchising them. Thus was unable to capitalize on the nonpartisan reforming momentum that immediately followed the coup. Unsure of what to do with the coup's ring leaders,⁴ he remained silent. Because of his silence and unwillingness to address the issue the North gradually resented his leadership. In May 1966 this resentment erupted in riots throughout the North during which large numbers of Easterners residing in the North were attacked and killed. On July 19, 1966 a counter-coup was staged by Northern military officers with two aims: revenge on the East and disruption of the unified governmental structure. Ironsi and many of his Eastern-born, senior officers were murdered. After three days of anarchy and anxiety, Lieutenant Colonel Gowon, the most senior officer of Northern origin, became Nigeria's new political leader. This appeared to be a poorly planned attack, driven at least partially by revenge and resulting in massive disruption in the functioning of the nation as well as the large-scale massacre of Easterners. The coup precipitated lawlessness, senseless violence and killings that rapidly spread through the North.⁵

In a radio broadcast following the first pogrom in May, Eastern Regional Governor Ojukwu attempted to calm and inform his constituents.⁶ He unemotionally assured the Eastern

³ Unfortunately all parties to the conspiracy were killed either during the counter-coup in July or the subsequent civil war and no written record has been uncovered that enlightens us as to their intents, so it is unlikely that anyone will ever know the absolute truth. Arguments back and forth ensued with little concrete data either way.

⁴ The coup's leaders had been arrested but Ironsi did not know whether or not to elevate them to the status of heroes or send them before a court martial as mutineers and murders.

⁵ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁶ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, "May 29 Pogrom," in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 18.

people that things were being taken care, that the appropriate authorities were in control. He guaranteed his constituents that it was safe for them to go back to their normal routine. With a slight paternal air, he gave them the proverbial “pat on the head” and warned them against “careless talk and rumor-mongering.” However, as the intensity of the conflict rose, the intensity and emotionality of Ojukwu’s message to the Easterners increased, and a new urgency marked his rhetoric. A major shift occurred, as he signaled an increased level of threat to his people. No longer did he promote calm and steadfast resistance. He called for outright attack as the only means for self-preservation of both the individual and the Igbo culture. After the January coup, Ojukwu spoke of the corruption of the ousted leaders and listed their transgressions but, in general, he reported the events with an optimistic about the possibility of positive change.⁷ However, after the July coup, he used phrases such as “very grave events” and “cold premeditated murder.”⁸ When discussing the May riots, Ojukwu attempted to placate and reassure, but merely two months later his words turned inflammatory. He referred to the event as a “wanton and deliberate massacre of several people of Eastern Nigerian origin.”⁹ In May, he assured the people of their safety but by July, he charged that the Easterners were being targeted and that the Nigerian nation had turned its back on them. In his words, “The brutal and planned annihilation of officers of Eastern Nigerian origin in the last few days has again cast serious doubts as to whether the people of Nigeria, after these cruel and bloody atrocities, can ever sincerely live together as members of the same nation.”¹⁰ This was the first time Ojukwu publicly doubted the possibility of maintaining a unified Nigeria. Still, he based his skepticism in his condemnation of the pogrom and therefore managed to not appear unpatriotic.

⁷ Ojukwu, “Away with the Old Guard.”

⁸ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “July 29 Mutiny and Massacre,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. 1969), 34-6.

⁹ Ojukwu, “May 29 Pogrom.”

¹⁰ Ojukwu, “July 29 Mutiny and Massacre.”

After the multiple pogroms, Eastern Nigerians no longer merely feared of the loss of their rights, but the loss of their lives. The promotion of fear and the capitalizing on insecurities became the major element in the propaganda war. Understandably, these massacres generated significant repulsion and fear, consequently producing the ever-present images upon which the fears of genocide found throughout the rest of the war were based (See Images 6-14). The prolific use of powerful images is worthy of mention. It is one thing to read about the physical disfigurements of Eastern Nigerians during the 1966 pogroms. It is quite another to see images of gouged eyes, disemboweled women, and headless men. Psychologically, visual images are more visceral and are more likely to evoke emotional rather than cognitive responses. Additionally, vivid and disturbing imagery, especially that which evokes strong affect, are often remembered much longer. These powerful images, published in a book as part of a photographic essay on the pogroms, provided unique opportunities within propaganda by provoking similar feelings (anger, fear, vulnerability) without repetition of the message per se. These images were not simply formatted onto a page. Photos were cut decoratively, their edges are uneven, and they were intentionally arranged artistically; the accompanying text is in multiple different fonts and font sizes. These distortions of the words, the child-like text, and seemingly out of place decoration grabs the readers attention and because of the unexpectedness, vagueness and oftentimes confusing messages they are likely to have held one's attention much longer than the written word.

With constant reference to the pogroms, however, the fear and anxiety originally associated with a real and imminent danger became dissociated from the actual event. All comments about the conflict and federal atrocities did not necessarily reference the actual acts but the earlier mental images. Distinctions that previously functioned to justify rights are now

equally important in maintaining fear. The visibility of the massacres, coupled with the claims of the Eastern leadership that the North intended to kill all Easterners, made it seem not so illogical to believe that Easterners were slated for eradication.

As Ojukwu began to associate survival and safety with the need to secede, he distinguished more sharply between the people from various regions. In the context of protecting themselves from invasion and annihilation he fostered a more polarized view of “us” and “them” based on regional boundaries. Before he had made distinctions between Easterners and the rest of the Nigerians, but now he used the distinction to align people with certain motives and intentions. The shift to a more emotionally-charged, intense and personal rhetoric appears even more evident in Ojukwu’s “September 29 Pogrom” address on October 4th, 1966:

In May, thousands of *our* people, resident in Northern Nigeria, were slaughtered in cold blood like rats. This well-planned and efficiently executed massacre involved innocent civilians. This is not an occasion to stir up emotions, but it is impossible to forget that men, women and children of kith and kin were taken out of their beds and slaughtered, they were murdered in hospitals, included women in labor rooms – yes, women in pains trying to deliver children! – they were massacred in places of worship, in the streets, in marketplaces, and in vehicles trying to carry them to safety.¹¹

The killings had not occurred on a battlefield but rather in the sphere of everyday life. Whereas violence on a battlefield could have remained distant, both physically and emotionally, violence in and near people’s homes was tangible and threatening. Violence “in the streets [and] in marketplaces” violated Biafran’s comfort zone and disrupted their sense of personal safety. By pointing out that these “massacres” also occurred in beds, hospitals and places of worship, all places that have a strong link to both sanctity and safety, this speech suggested that there was no safe haven. This quote was a call to alertness. Vigilance was necessary whether in church, in labor or asleep in bed; there was never a time where one could not be vigilant; there was never a

¹¹ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “September 29 Pogrom,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 49.

time where one could risk being inattentive. People were “slaughtered in cold blood like rats.” The choice of the word “rats” conjures a dehumanized image of filth and unwelcome intruders. This suggested to Easterners that the perpetrators had dehumanized them and that they should not expect to be treated, even in death, with any element of human decency. It implied that in the eyes of the enemy they had been stripped of their human attributes and deserved no greater respect than afforded to troublesome vermin. Moreover, Ojukwu claims the pogrom was “well-planned and efficiently executed,” although he attributes no clear motive to the perpetrators. Yet Ojukwu never specifically identified the perpetrators. He kept most of the violent actions in passive voice, “were slaughtered,” “were murdered,” “were massacred.” By doing this Ojukwu kept the focus away from “the who” and “the why” and instead focused on end result. This set up the need for constant vigilance, the need to be on a constant look-out for a motiveless, faceless enemy.

What Ojukwu *did* do was increase the divide between “us” and “them.” Ojukwu began by referencing “thousands of *our* people.” By “our” he meant those who were Easterners by ethnicity and tradition. However, a large portion of these people had been living in the North for many years. He directly asserted himself as protector of all Easterners regardless of their location, seeing himself not as the Military Governor of the East but rather the Military Governor of the Easterners as defined by their backgrounds. He claimed that this is not a time to stir up emotions, yet from the very beginning of his address this is exactly what he did. By capitalizing on this dissonance Ojukwu found a way to seem patriotic while stirring up dissent among the Easterners. This left him an opening for the future so that he did not find himself boxed in by past statements. This also stressed the idea that peace without assurance, a peace at *all* costs was impossible.

Ojukwu walked a fine line between appearing overly eager to have the East secede from Nigeria and creating any impressions that he was no longer a champion and protector of his people. In diplomatic meetings, Ojukwu asserted, the “task will be that of finding solutions to the unfortunate problems which now beset a country we have all come to love so much.”¹² In one speech he boldly asserted, “I still believe that Nigeria can be saved” but then went on to stipulate “But, as I have said, no settlement will be acceptable to the Eastern Region which does not include reparation and compensation for lives and property lost by Easterners in these disturbances.”¹³ He still supported the idea of “One Nigeria,” but was no longer willing to do so at any cost. This is reflective of the mentality and style that pervaded his remarks until the end of the war. He agreed with the overall goal of unity but remained stubborn on his stipulations and costs. While appearing on the surface to promote a resolution of the conflicts, such pacifist rhetoric allowed him to place the blame on the “federal government” for failing to protect the Easterners and maintain the image of Easterners as innocent victims of massacres. Easterners still believed in unity, Ojukwu argued, but would not let themselves be sacrificed for it.

I have said before that the East will not secede unless she is forced out... Fellow countrymen, the push has started... we do not here in the East wish for, neither have we worked for, secession! If, however, circumstances place us outside what is now known as Nigeria, you may be certain then that we shall have been forced out.¹⁴

This is the rationale Ojukwu used throughout all of his speeches and maintained after the war ended and even today: the East did not leave Nigeria; Nigeria pushed the East out.

The Aburi Conference:

¹² C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “Talks on the Future of Nigeria,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 41.

¹³ Ojukwu, “September 29 Pogrom.”

¹⁴ Ibid.

In the year between the pogroms and the declaration of the Biafran state, leaders within Nigeria made countless efforts at peace and compromise. The most notable of these peace efforts was the Aburi Conference. On January 4-6 1967 members of the Supreme Military Council convened at Aburi in Ghana¹⁵ in an attempt to reconcile the feuding Nigerian regions.¹⁶ The Ghanaian Head of State, Lieutenant-General Joe Ankrah, provided a neutral venue where the members could put aside worries of safety and come to the table on equal footing, in order to develop a viable plan for reconciliation.¹⁷ Although the conference had an informal atmosphere, leaders exchanged embraces and addressed each other by their nicknames; they debated issues at the core of Nigeria's problems such as the recreation of the Supreme Military Council and ways to reestablish its authority over Nigeria. The conference agreed that force should not be used to resolve Nigeria's many problems; each region would be responsible for its own affairs with the Federal Military Government bearing the responsibility for issues affecting the entire country. Also part of the agreement was a move "back to 14 January," a reduction in the power of the Head of State, and a requirement that all military governors be present and in agreement for any major decision. In short it appeared as if Ojukwu managed to meet all his objectives.¹⁸

Following the conference, Gowon and the federal government reneged on many of the agreements from the conference. They claimed that the agreements were no longer acceptable to them. The East immediately responded, in outrage, "On Aburi We Stand." Ojukwu claimed that

¹⁵ The meeting was held at ex-President Nkrumah's weekend retreat Peduase Lodge in Aburi, just outside Accra.

¹⁶ In attendance was Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon (head of the Federal Military Government), Commodore Joseph Wey (head of the Nigerian navy), Colonel Robert Adebayo (military governor of the western region), Lieutenant-Colonel Hassan Katsina (military governor of the northern region), Lieutenant-Colonel David Ejoor (military governor of the mid-west region), Major Mobolaji Johnson (military governor of Lagos), Ojukwu (military governor of the eastern region), Kam Selem (Inspector-General of Police), and Mr. T. Omo-Bare.

¹⁷ This was the last face-to-face of Gowon and Ojukwu.

¹⁸ Cf. Schwarz wrote: "Ojukwu got his way with little effort, by being the cleverest. He was the only one who understood the real issues. Step by step the others came to acquiesce in the logic of Ojukwu's basic thesis – that to stay together at all the Regions had first to draw apart. Only Ojukwu understood that this meant, in effect, a sovereign Biafra and the end of the Federation." (quoted in Kirk-Greene)

the process of the conference was above reproach and the North's renegeing on the agreements was a show of "Bad Faith."¹⁹

The record of the summit was made publicly available almost immediately. Leaders from all of the regions held press conferences, the newspapers were full of opinions on Aburi and it appeared as if everyone embraced the "Spirit of Aburi." The Eastern government sold recordings of the meeting. This created a unique transparency in the diplomatic process. Easterners could listen to what happened without the filter of media or official government. Not only did they hear Ojukwu voicing their concerns, they heard him dominating arguments, outwitting his opponents, and using his charisma to gain allies. They understood that Ojukwu's claims matched his actions.

In addition, the widespread availability of the verbatim transcript seemed to have served another purpose, preventing other leaders from easy misrepresentations. With a closed meeting, the public would have no way to check the veracity of a leader's claim or hold them accountable to a promise or concession they made. The availability of the full transcript made it difficult for leaders to make false claims or shift from the truth. Therefore, when Gowon and the federal government renegeed on the Aburi agreements this supported Ojukwu's accusations that Gowon's word and the federal government in general were unreliable.

Among the most noticeable elements of the conference recordings is the general friendly tone. Rather than intense disputes dominating the meeting, there were spurts of laughter and lightheartedness. There was no defined leader in the meeting²⁰ and overall the process of the meeting non-controversial and above reproach. Its status as an internationally recognized peace conference added legitimacy. In a pamphlet published by the Eastern Nigerian Ministry of

¹⁹ *Struggle for Survival* (Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information, n.d., probably 1967).

²⁰ Ankrah was only present to mediate the discussions.

Information, a section explaining the events of the Aburi Conference included an image of a table representing the one at which the regional leaders sat (See Image 15). The table was full; all were represented. The table was round and therefore no one could have occupied the position of power and authority normally associated with the head of the table. Instead, here, the people are equal, looking at one another, debating in a prototypic democratic setting. Beyond ideology this democratic process assured any listener of the fairness of the process. It showed that the regional leaders were not forced into agreements or manipulated in any way. The federal government thus could not easily point to bad dealings or coercion as a reason for invalidating the agreement. They were forced to either admit they were outsmarted by Ojukwu or appear as if their words carried no weight.

After Ojukwu's speech, "On Aburi We Stand" became a slogan, signifying the East's attempts at fair proceedings, the federal government's unwillingness to work with the East and the worthlessness of Gowon's "word" (See Image 16). This one phrase implied for Easterners that the North had acted in "bad faith," paramount to forcing them out of Nigeria. In a pamphlet distributed by the Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, in a section entitled "The Blackmail and Bad Faith," it stated, "Anybody who is quite conversant with the Aburi meeting 'would be surprised that a person who calls himself a Head of State could so deliberately mislead accredited representatives of Foreign Governments by saying that the implementation of each item of the conclusions required prior detailed examination by the Administrative and Professional experts in the various field. The conclusions in Aburi were no proposals but decisions taken by the highest authority in the land.'"²¹ Even during the last years of the war, people continued to refer back to Aburi, arguing that Gowon proved himself untrustworthy.

²¹ *Struggle for Survival*.

The Aburi Conference was extremely important in the solidification of Ojukwu's role as the valued and legitimate voice of the Biafran people. Through his remarks at the conference and propaganda that followed, he promoted an image of a skillful leader who felt compelled to accept the position as spokesperson because of his personal attributes, his concern for his people and the absence of any reasonable alternative. He became "the chosen one" who had the ability, desire, and duty to lead them through the dark days ahead.

It would be difficult to find anyone who would argue that Ojukwu was not a talented and charismatic leader. His leadership skills were evident in his manner of speaking, word choices and his overall calm and assertive demeanor. He exuded confidence, calmness and control. By relying heavily on logic and debate during the conference, rather than emotional outbursts, bullying or threats of retaliation, he effectively communicated his points, while at the same time holding his ground. At a time when Biafrans needed a sense of protection, he provided a calm demeanor in the midst of chaos. His words promoted trust, reliance and a belief that both their personal safety and their needs were being protected.

Secondly, he was able to establish himself within the traditional succession of power. By associating himself with the pre-existing leadership and appealing to local chiefs and spokespersons to advise him, it was possible to emerge as the young, capable leader sanctioned by the older, wiser men. This was a critical element when faced with accusations of some outsiders that the struggle in Nigeria just had to do with a power struggle between the military governors rather than an ethnic conflict.

Finally, Ojukwu's utilized language that communicated connectedness. His speeches were filled with references to "you" and "your needs" rather than what he thought or his vision for a "new world." Even his remarks about the future, at this point, were couched in terms of

protecting what rightfully belonged to Biafrans. After the May pogrom Ojukwu appealed to the people to go back home and try and get things back to normal. After the second pogrom, he apologized for the fatal "miscalculations" and spoke openly about his "duty" to the people of Eastern Nigeria to "preserve the integrity of this Region and to protect its inhabitants from any violence, be it external or internal." The pamphlets that followed reiterated this point, "As far as Easterners are concerned, their Military Governor was only their spokesperson whose words and actions reflected accurately their entire views."²²

²² Ibid.

Chapter Two: A New Nation

May 1967 - August 1968

Declaration of Biafra to Gowon's "Final Push"

After Biafra was declared as a nation, Ojukwu was not longer constrained by attempts at unity and Nigerian patriotism. What was before the ideals and characteristics Ojukwu projected onto the Eastern Nigerians, now had a name – Biafran. Ojukwu began to use all elements and viewpoints to define Biafrans to all audiences.

Historical Background:

At two o'clock in the morning on May 30, 1967, diplomats and journalists congregated in the Eastern Nigerian State House in Enugu as Ojukwu proclaimed that "the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelf and territorial waters, shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of 'The Republic of Biafra.'"¹ The several months prior to this declaration had been exceptionally tense, as multiple attempts at diplomacy and reconciliation by the two factions failed to define a common pathway forward. For months, Nigerians had been waiting anxiously to find out what would happen to the concept of "One Nigeria." The tensions came to a head on May 27. In what Walter Schwarz called a "third coup,"² Gowon assumed full power, declared a state of emergency, and enacted Decree No. 8. This decree divided Nigeria into twelve states (See Map 3) and drastically reduced the power of the Igbo by allocating to them only one landlocked state.³ It toppled the precarious balance of power and prompted the opposition to take definitive actions toward ending the stalemate.

¹ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu. "The People's Choice: Proclamation of the Republic of Biafra." in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969). 177-196.

² Walter Schwarz as quoted in John de St. Jorre. *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).

³ "Decree No. 8." www.dawodu.com/decree8.htm.

In his “final letter,” Ojukwu explained to Gowon that he had “no alternative but to make plans for a separate existence in the interests of self-preservation.” The Eastern Consultive Assembly had just unanimously passed a resolution mandating Ojukwu to declare the sovereign state of Biafra “at an early practicable date.” On the morning of May 30 “over the building fluttered a new flag in bold horizontal bars of black, green and red backing a rising sun, its rays fanning out in an eloquent symbol of hope and a golden future. Glued to their radio sets, Nigerians heard the strains of a new national anthem composed, it later transpired, by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the ‘father’ of the country which was now divided against itself” (See Image 17).⁴

During the five weeks immediately following the declaration, there was what St. Jorre named the “phoney war” – a period marked by “a curious atmosphere of calm” during which everyone sensed the threat of war but had not yet seen its ravages. No one knew quite when or where the war would begin but the war seemed inevitable.⁵ Very few alterations in daily activities were noted and despite the sense of latent conflict, much of life went on as normal except for the imposition of curfews and an increased attentiveness to political happenings.

Even though Ojukwu promised that his people would fight to the end, federal forces bragged that the “rebellion” would be easily and swiftly crushed. Northern Military Governor, Hassas Katsina, predicted that once the war began Ojukwu “would be crushed within hours.”⁶ However, such predictions severely underestimated the strength of the opposition. Rather than lasting for only a few hours, as the federal government had promised, the civil war dragged on

⁴ John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 122.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 144.

for a year and a half. The underestimated Biafran nation surprised the world with how much they did with so few resources.⁷

Strong-Weak Dichotomy:

While at times Biafran propaganda highlighted the strengths of Biafra, at other times those controlling the propaganda found it more effective to emphasize Biafra's weakness and vulnerability. While this depiction – Biafra as simultaneously strong and weak – seems on the surface to be contradictory, the two images were in fact interconnected and mutually supportive (See Image 18). This paradoxical image was, in some cases, helpful in prompting different reactions from different “audiences.” One could argue that it is the Biafrans' rhetorical status as weaker and more vulnerable that provided the basis for establishing their moral strength.

Biafran propaganda highlighted different characteristics of the Biafran people to appeal to different audiences and evoke different emotional and behavioral reactions. Depicting one's people as strong and capable of prevailing in their cause is essential in motivating groups to maintain their resistance. Images of vulnerability and threat are critical to generating the fear necessary to take action and the external support for the righteousness of one's defensive actions. Thus, one must balance them both to keep individuals engaged and motivated.

There is also a second way in which the two images – strong and weak – work hand in hand to promote and justify the Biafran movement. In this analysis, the two ideas are not distinct and opposing but rather causally linked. One's strength might derive not from military might but the righteousness of one's cause. In other words, Biafrans' weakness and vulnerability establish them as victims. One's victim-hood, justifies self-defensive actions as well as asserts the moral superiority often associated with sacrificing one's own well-being for the safety of others and the sanctity of a greater cause. Victim-hood and its associated weakness were empowering for

⁷ Ibid, 122.

Biafrans. Furthermore, it could be argued that it is from the very fact that Biafrans were both victims *and* victorious that they were able to prove strength of character and gain confidence. By prevailing against the odds, they prove moral superiority and received a greater sense of control, resilience and inner strength. Ironically, the aspects once defined as weakness were then intermingled with feelings of hope and perceptions of control.

Being seen as strong allows one to maintain motivation and feel empowered. Without such assurances, one is at risk of becoming demoralized and disillusioned. Being seen as weak solicits support from others and empowers one's actions. If a group is seen only as strong and not vulnerable, one's external support must come from their proven righteousness of their cause rather than the humanitarian desire to aid those less able to protect themselves. One runs the risk of being seen as dominating, bullying, and expansionistic. On a personal level, a certain level of vulnerability and risk is necessary to the anxiety and fear necessary to engage the "fight" response and take action against the perceived threat. Therefore, Ojukwu's challenge was to find balance between the two. He had to a way to use his influence to depict Biafra as strong, thus capable and righteous, and weak, therefore needing to defend and take action.

Internal Propaganda:

Biafrans faced stiff odds. Therefore the Biafran government needed to find a way to motivate its troops and citizens so that they would not view Biafra as a lost cause. Biafrans were in a state of "fight or flight," so the Biafran government's message was intended to give people the confidence to fight. Ideas and rhetoric related to Biafrans' exceptional mental and physical capabilities are found in almost every piece of Biafran propaganda. This propaganda focused on the strengths of the individual Biafran and the power in a united Biafra. In "Gowon's March 31 Deadline" Ojukwu said, "We have survived to this day because we are united." Unity was

essential for the military force as well as a means for discouraging dissension. Posters such as “Together We Fight” illustrated the power found in “togetherness” (See Image 19). At the top of the poster a mass of people represent the tribes of Biafra all basically indistinguishable from one another. By depicting a diversity of ethnic groups and by giving the illusion of a mass of people, with no boundaries between them, the poster stressed that it was not just an Igbo cause. In fact, all of the placards are equal in size which implied that there was no dominant group within Biafra. Here each of the tribes had the same power and the same presence. In the foreground there was a much larger drawing of a man with “North” written on his stole. Although the image of the North is much larger than the people that represent the parts of Biafra, the North, in a running stance with his hands up in the air, looks frightened and intimidated by the mass of people. Thus while the North was more powerful than the individual elements within Biafra, together, and only together, they could overpower the North. In three different fonts, decreasing in size, was written, “Together... We Fight... This is Your Region, Be Vigilant.” The font for “together” is both tall and closely spaced, physically mirroring its own definition. The last line reinforced once again the idea that it was a regional fight and all Easterners were the protectors of *their* region.

Ojukwu’s speeches, and other propagandists, focused on Biafra’s successes, real or imaginary. “Victory over the enemy is assured though not yet complete”... “Our advances and successes have been steady and consistent... the enemy is being starved to death.”⁸ At the beginning of the war the Biafran government launched a relatively successful offensive. Biafrans stormed the Mid-West in an assortment of private cars, “mammy wagons,” cattle and vegetable trucks. Around 1,000 men, in civilian clothes, poorly trained and barely armed, took the Mid-

⁸ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu. “The Vision of Biafra,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 221.

West towns without even token resistance from the citizens. As a result of the Biafran invasion of the Western region, full-fledged fighting ensued (See Map 4). Although many of the Mid-West towns were occupied by the federal forces soon after the Biafrans had “liberated” them, Biafrans were fortified by the successful experience in Benin (the main Mid-Western city).⁹

Some posters and pamphlets encouraged violence, depicting Biafran men *and women* as powerfully dominating over their Northern opponents (See Image 20). Image twenty, “Paratroopers,” is full of images of violence. The words “stake,” “jaws of death,” “bash” and “stab” are all intense, violent words. The cartoon was meant to inform Biafrans what they should do in case of a federal attack, here specifically an attack from the sky. First and foremost, it asserted that they needed to be attentive and prepared at all times to defend their territory. In box two the cartoonist drew two proud faces continuously scanning the skies. This cartoon said, “Fight with every weapon...leave the skull bashing to women...stab them to death.” In the cartoon as the Northern paratroopers float down defenselessly, rests a tiger on the ground ready to pounce. In the fourth box a federal soldier is being attacked by a jungle animal and in the sixth box by a woman. There she is exhibiting her same primal survival instinct as she bashes a man’s head in. Just as the cartoon explicitly juxtaposed images of the jungle predator and the Biafran predator, it implicitly compared the Nigerian paratrooper to jungle prey. Because the paratroopers were defenseless, faceless, and stripped of human attributes and depicted as mere prey it allowed Biafrans to hunt them like wild animals. Overall, this cartoon sent a message of a strong and capable Biafra. Northern soldiers could be taken down by Biafran women.

Paratroopers were taken down through Biafrans vigilance and preparedness in staking the fields.

Biafran vigilance, dominance and passion would ensure their victory over the North.

⁹ “On 20th September, Major Okonwo solemnly announced on the radio the birth of the ‘independent and sovereign Republic of Benin.’ It was the world’s shortest-lived republic. By one o’clock on the same day the Nigerians were shelling the city and within a couple of hours they had occupied it.” (St. Jorre, 162.)

Depictions of a strong and capable nation also created a positive vision of the future. In the December 24th broadcast “The Vision of Biafra” Ojukwu illustrated his vision of what Biafra could and would become:

Proud and courageous Biafrans, I see the birth of a new Biafran society out of the carnage and wreckage of the war. I see a new breed of men and women, with new moral and spiritual values, building a new society – a renascent and strong Biafra. I see the realization of all our cherished dreams and aspirations in a revolution which will not only guarantee our basic freedom but usher in an era of equal opportunity and prosperity of all. I see the evolution of a new democracy in Biafra as we advance as partners in our country’s onward march to her destiny. When I look into the future, I see Biafra transformed into **a fully industrialized nation, wastelands and slums giving way to throbbing industrial centers and cities.** I see agriculture mechanized by **science and technology**, which have already made their mark in the present war. I see a Republic knit with **arteries of roads and highways**; a nation of free men and women dedicated to the noble attributes of justice and liberty for which our youth have shed their blood; a people with an art and literature rich and unrivaled.¹⁰

On the most basic level, Ojukwu presented a world of freedom. However, he moved beyond “basic freedoms” to a description of a Biafran utopia. This utopia was a distinct type of utopia. It was congruent with the 1960s African postcolonial idea of modernity and progress. It stressed infrastructure as the way towards progress. Ojukwu envisioned the government responsible for providing this “right to progress” and that any government that failed to ensure this right, as he claimed the federal government had, was illegitimate. This idea also held that it was the government’s duty to provide this “right to progress” and any government that failed to do so was as inadequate as a government as the government who failed to ensure its people’s “right to free speech.” In the early 1960s, most of the arguments between the regions revolved around the issue of resource allocation. Here, Ojukwu’s vision involved a Biafra free to invest in its own infrastructure, unhindered by regional political or fears of regional domination. He claimed this ideal world would be brought about by Biafran strength of character expressed in terms of a

¹⁰ Ojukwu, “The Vision of Biafra,” 221-229.

unified nation. Ideas about a future Biafra appear in all types of Biafran propaganda. Even during the most brutal and desperate war times, the propaganda pushed for perseverance with a hope of a better future. Ojukwu often referred to this future ideal as the “promised land,” inviting Biafrans to follow him.

In contrast, Biafrans used the vision of their victimization and the idea of the infallibility of victims to justify their diplomatic and military actions. When referring to the regime’s secession, Biafran propaganda claimed that it was “pushed out,” despite all of their best attempts to keep Nigeria unified. Ojukwu’s speeches and the pamphlets printed by his Ministry of Information blamed Gowon and his government for failing to provide Biafrans most basic need – survival. Biafra’s secession was thus justified as a means of “saving themselves.” Throughout the war, the Biafrans claimed that they were fighting a war of self-defense. According to Ojukwu, “Since we are fighting in self-defense, we shall have no reason to continue the war if Nigeria agrees to stop its war of aggression and genocide, and leaves us alone.”¹¹ Ojukwu stressed that there would be no war if Nigeria left Biafra alone. As the infallible victim Biafra’s strategies and war tactics became honorable; the full blame for wartime atrocities was shifted to the federal government. Ojukwu also acknowledged “the anger and the urge for revenge,” but pointed out that Biafrans’ respect for “God and all humanity” kept them from acting out any motives but self-defense. Revenge involves a certain amount of power and often transforms people from pure victims to vengeful sufferers. Some societies condone revenge and associate it with honor. Other societies, notably Christian societies such as that of Biafra, explicitly condemn revenge. Ojukwu sought to remain in a sympathetic position to international societies so that

¹¹ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “Gowon’s March 31 Deadline,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 247.

these societies might be enticed to provide support for the Biafra cause. Ojukwu simply avoided the issue of the morality of revenge by always claiming self-defense.

International Propaganda:

Along with military success Biafra desperately needed official international recognition. They needed powerful outsiders to sanction their actions, support their causes and acknowledge the legitimacy of their claims of existence as a newly declared independent nation. The impressions they broadcast were critical and the reality of their suffering became a mechanism for generating support. Around the beginning of 1968, the civil war began to generate more international attention. In early 1967, well before Biafra declared independence, the federal government had already set up a blockade on Biafra. By January 1968, the effects were increasingly pronounced. The international press was bombarded with images of starving women and children. News stations around the world aired news clips of Biafrans near death with emaciated bodies, sunken stomachs or those bloated by inadequate nutrition. Ojukwu invited journalists and their crews to witness first hand the deprivation and desperation among the innocents. The contrasts (North-South, strong-weak) would be made apparent to a public beyond Nigeria.

Biafra desperately needed to prove to the world that it was a viable nation. Many countries had expressed their sympathy or had privately assisted Biafra without formal recognition but Biafra needed open support. In March 1968, Biafra's Ministry of Information published the pamphlet "Biafra deserves open world support."¹² The pamphlet first assured the world of Biafra's self-sufficiency and capabilities as a nation. "Above all, Biafra has achieved the original purpose of her accession to a separate political existence. She has provided safety and security for her citizens and has, with much success, stemmed a war of aggression and

¹² *Biafra deserves open world support*. (Republic of Biafra: Ministry of Information, n.d., probably 1968).

genocide directed against Biafrans by Nigerians.”¹³ It argued that Biafra deserved “**OPEN SUPPORT**” because of the “maturity” and strength with which Biafrans have faced their problems and their ability to contain them. Secondly, it presented a case for Biafra’s need for a separate country and the justness of their actions. The pamphlet referred to the pogroms against the Eastern Igbos in 1966, arguing, “By this breach of faith Nigeria forfeited the allegiance of Biafrans.” It pushed the argument further and claimed that after being “pushed out” Biafrans should be free to save themselves.¹⁴ Lastly, it suggested the potential contributions to the international community that Biafra could make only as a separate nation. The federal government’s stance, evident in Enahoro’s press conference, was that Biafra’s independence would break up the already fragile countries in Africa.¹⁵ That it would cause a “chain reaction.” Biafra’s stance was that Biafra’s independence would bring about peace and stability, eliminating the atrocities committed against them by the Nigerians.¹⁶ Biafra claimed it could still contribute to Africa’s scientific and physical improvements, perhaps even better now because it no longer hindered by an oppressive federal government. “Nor should the nations of Africa fear, as Biafra’s detractors have insinuated that **OPEN SUPPORT** for Biafra might lead to the break-up of their own countries. On the contrary, **OPEN SUPPORT** for Biafra will promote the unity in Africa.”¹⁷ Biafra asserted that by breaking away from Nigeria it would not only be solving an international human rights dilemma but provide resources that a unified Nigeria could not.

Biafra’s international propaganda presented a myriad of horrifying images of the civil war’s atrocities to people around the world, images that assured Biafrans they could not be

¹³ Ibid, 5.

¹⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵ Enahoro’s First Press Conference in London (as Nigeria’s spokesperson) after the war began in 1967. www.dawodu.com/enahoro.htm.

¹⁶ *Biafra deserves open world support*, 1.

¹⁷ Ibid, 7.

ignored. What people saw violated basic moral standards and sense of justice (See Image 21). Consequently, whether out of empathy or a need for comfort and control, people protested against the violence, provided support for the relief organizations, and pressured governments for support and intervention. This message then went out to other international communities and often made it back to Biafra. Outrage from the industrialized Western world filtered back into Nigeria, adding credibility to Ojukwu's claims.

Villainization of Northerners:

Much of the early propaganda highlighted the grim reality. Ojukwu talked about terrifying events—“they are killing our families”...“children are starving”... “our lives and our property are at risk of destruction. Eventually, he turned to less truthful characterizations. Ojukwu declared, “His [Gowon's] officers have organized the mass abduction of women and children from their homes to concentration camps outside this Republic.”¹⁸ In fact, this claim was far from the truth. In another speech Ojukwu said, “We have been fighting a hard and bitter war in defense of our lives and property and the future of our children against Nigeria's calculated war of destruction and genocide.”¹⁹ His highly emotive statement was intended to arouse fear and alluded to the pogroms of the previous year, but beyond calling the war “calculated” he did not explicitly attribute intentions to the soldiers. In another speech he did exactly the opposite by explicitly attributing thoughts and characteristics to the Nigerian leaders but never mentioning an actual event. He called Nigerian leaders “hateful, greedy, and bloodthirsty rulers totally unhappy about the prospects of our freedom and sovereignty.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ojukwu, “Gowon's March 31 Deadline,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches*.

¹⁹ C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “The Zero Hour,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969).

²⁰ Ojukwu, “The Vision of Biafra.”

There was a shift in Biafran propaganda from the specific to the general – from talking about killing and destructive behavior to hateful and bloodthirsty individuals. In addition to reducing the burden of identifying and referencing actual events to support one’s accusations, the reference to character traits rather than actions made it much easier to create stereotypical images that group individuals together not based on behavior but on the group to which one belongs. It would be an easy transition then to exaggerate the differences between groups and capitalize on those attributed differences. It is likely that one would react differently to reports of fellow citizens being killed than to images of a Northern force that wantonly and willingly desires to inflict harm and who is acting deliberately to destroy one’s culture and extinguish one’s existence. By depersonalizing parts of the conflict and transferring fear onto an entire group of people, it is likely that the fear response could be as easily evoked by references to the “evil other” as had previously been associated with the actual horrendous events. The enemy was no longer just a group of threatening soldiers, human beings just like Biafrans. Their “Northernness” became the predominant image, and this was associated with “killing machines” and “corruptness.” No longer were Biafrans simply battling to save their life and property from the fallout of war: they were being called into battle against “wickedness” and “corruption.” It was a situation of “us” versus “them” and the stereotyped “them” had very few human characteristics.

It is far from an exaggeration to say that Biafrans were repeatedly exposed to frightening and threatening events, whether through actual experience or through someone else’s stories. Ojukwu constantly presented Biafrans with images of past atrocities and spoke of the negative personality traits of Northerners. There is only a little difference between the words “they are killing our children” and the words “they want to kill our children” but the impact is profound. The first statement implies only action while the second directly attributes motive and

intention.²¹ By attributing motive and intention to the federal soldiers and solidifying the association of Nigeria with wickedness Ojukwu was relieved of the burden of always having to provide a concrete example of Northern brutality. As long as Biafrans believed his message and bought into his character assassinations, Ojukwu would no longer need to support every allegation he made but could instead use the supposedly inherent evil nature of Northerners as proof enough.

Moral Superiority:

Just as Biafran propaganda created negative stereotypes for Northern Nigerians, it portrayed Biafrans positively. In all of his speeches Ojukwu proclaimed Biafran's honorable character attributes – “brave,” “gallant,” “heroic.” He also contrasted Biafran sense of legal and moral propriety with Nigerian lawlessness saying, “As a young nation we have respected international law and conventions.”²² Nigeria, in contrast, repeatedly violated the Independence Constitution of Nigeria and, on a larger scale “flouted international conventions”²³ - such as the UN's Declaration on Human Rights and Convention on Genocide.²⁴ He not only asserted Biafra's moral superiority within a legal and moral context, he also claimed religious superiority. In a Christmas Eve broadcast Ojukwu drew the parallel between the current situation in Nigeria and that of the Jews under Herod:

Like the Jews of old, we saw in the birth of our young Republic the gateway to freedom and survival of our people. We saw in it the birth of a society of justice, brotherhood, and peace among our people. But like Herod, Nigeria under its hateful, greedy, and bloodthirsty rulers was totally unhappy about the prospects of our freedom and sovereignty. Like Herod, Nigeria embarked upon an adventure of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction in order to kill the new nation and

²¹ H. Tajfel and J.C. Turner, “The social identity theory of intergroup behavior,” in *Political Psychology* (2004).

²² Ojukwu, “The Zero Hour,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches*, 203-205.

²³ *Ibid*, 203.

²⁴ *Biafra Deserves Open Support*.

frustrate all the hope and promises ushered in by its birth. And like Herod, Nigeria has failed.²⁵

This analogy held particular weight with Biafrans because Christianity was a large part of their life and value system. As “the Jews” in Nigeria’s story Biafrans were attributed God’s blessing and protection, high moral standing and an air of martyrdom. They were the ones on their way to the “promised land” and the ones God had deemed worthy. Nigeria, the north of which is predominately Islamic, depicted here as “Herod,” was considered a villain that terrorized God’s chosen people. Just as God saved the Jews from the powerful Herod, Ojukwu claimed that God would intervene for them and ensure a Biafran victory against all odds. In fact most speeches and pamphlets ended with some version of what is found at the end of this cartoon pamphlet, “Biafrans – God is on our side. We shall vanquish!”²⁶

Ojukwu as a Trusted Prototype:

Ojukwu himself became synonymous with Biafra, associated with the positive qualities and ideals of the Biafran Revolution.²⁷ By establishing himself as a prototype for a group, he gained the power to direct the group as a whole as well as allowance for deviation while remaining credible.²⁸ In addition to being the “ideal Biafran,” he carried a distinct aura of sophisticated power and grandeur (See Image 22).²⁹ Due to his sharp mind, extensive education and an Oxford accent,³⁰ Ojukwu was a celebrated orator who exuded confidence, captivating his

²⁵ Ojukwu, “The Vision of Biafra,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches*.

²⁶ St. Jorre, “Paratroopers” cartoon.

²⁷ Journalists and politicians begin to use “Ojukwu” and “Biafra” interchangeably. Examples: Colonel Ojukwu was on the cover of TIME magazine on August 23, 1968. On June 22, 1969 New York Times Magazine printed a story by Lloyd Garrison entitled, “Odumegwu Ojukwu Is Biafra.”

²⁸ Tajfel and Turner.

²⁹ St. Jorre, 131.

³⁰ The Igbo culture places high value on education. In some cases tribes would pool together their money to send one child to college with the expectation that the child would later give money to help another child receive an education. This was one way of improving the tribe as a whole. The Oxbridge Club, a fraternity based at Oxford and Cambridge University, had active circles in Nigeria. These men were considered special and highly respectable. Therefore, Ojukwu’s education and membership in the Oxbridge Club would have been a source of pride for Biafrans. Instead of being bitter or resentful in case they did not have similar opportunities they were proud that their leader fit the Igbo ideal.

audience with his marathon speeches as well as with his imposing military presence. In addition, St. Jorre suggests that the war might have lowered the Biafrans' threshold of credibility thus affording Ojukwu an even greater benefit of the doubt:

War, especially civil war, generates a very special kind of human electricity. This is even more true where the mass is already traumatized by a disaster which, to them, has neither rhyme nor reason. The result is that their credibility threshold, never very high, sinks to new depths. They believe virtually all they hear, partly because it tends to fit the pattern of their own personal suffering but even more so because the propagandists themselves...are deeply revered due to their status in the community and their word is accepted unquestioningly, especially in periods of crisis.³¹

While the degree to which Biafran propaganda was accepted "unquestioningly" is debatable, it remains likely that their traumatic experience lowered many people's credibility level. Ojukwu was elevated to the status of a folk hero, an "ideal Biafran," no doubt increasing trust in his leadership.

Just as Ojukwu eventually became synonymous with Biafra and commanded the same moral authority as the principles of the revolution, Ojukwu often used "Gowon" and "Nigeria" interchangeably, consequently villainizing both leader and nation. In Biafran propaganda Gowon was the ultimate blood-thirsty barbarian, never to be trusted. Although Gowon's actions (relief efforts, military code of conduct) often did not match this image, when a dissonance occurred between Ojukwu's depiction and Gowon's deed, Ojukwu asserted that it was part of a federal trick (See Image 23). Image 23, a poster published by the Biafran Ministry of Information, claims in large letters at the top of the poster – "Gowon Hates You!" The image of the maimed Biafran, as well as the message "He loves nobody, Gowon spares nobody, He destroys all," served as a reminder of Ojukwu's assertion that Gowon was the enemy. Because he "loves nobody," he had no heart or conscience and therefore, deception and trickery were to be expected. Biafran and Federal posters like this were put up in buildings and on trees in villages as a

³¹ St. Jorre, 351.

constant reminder to citizens and troops alike (See Images 24 and 25). Ojukwu regularly reminded Biafrans that he was their leader and protector and that Gowon was only out to destroy them. “Fellow countrymen and women, we have arrived at the zero hour. Gowon is determined to come into our homes and destroy us in order to carry away what belongs to us. His psychological warfare of lying propaganda, calculated to create alarm, frighten our people, and cause dissension among us, has failed completely.”³²

Later in the war, when circumstances in Biafra became dire, Ojukwu’s message no longer matched the truth that could be seen. However, there is no evidence that people stopped believing Ojukwu’s claims. There are no accounts of open rebellions or large groups of people fleeing from Biafra. There was nothing to indicate that Biafrans had bought into Gowon’s message or had changed their mind. It would appear that Ojukwu’s message had taken root despite the realities of the situation. Gowon’s words remained “lies,” to them even when Gowon’s claims matched the truth they saw with their own eyes, and when Ojukwu’s truth became more elaborate and contrived. This phenomenon became increasingly important later in the war and will be examined in later chapters.

³² Ojukwu, “The Zero Hour.”

Chapter Three: Mirror Images

Gowon's "Final Push" to Ahiara Declaration (August 1968 – June 1969)

Beginning in August 1968 Gowon challenged the idea of a Biafran identity. By mirroring Ojukwu's methods and tactics Gowon attempted to realign Biafrans' allegiance with Nigeria. Although Ojukwu managed to identify new, creative modes of persuasion, this marked the beginning of the downward spiral for Biafran propaganda.

Historical Background:

Throughout the war Gowon set various deadlines for the end of the war. Ironically, as projected dates were passed, Biafrans were given encouragement. By the summer of 1968, Gowon had trouble maintaining the interest and involvement of Nigerians; he needed something to boost their morale. He hoped that a final push would end the war. In an August 24, 1968 interview with the B.B.C. Gowon announced his "final push," what he also called "the last lap,"¹ to commence immediately on all fronts.

Gowon's "final push" did not apply exclusively to military battles. Until August 1968, one could argue that the federal government had been losing the propaganda war, but with the "final push" the federal government stepped up its propaganda as well as its military efforts. Since the federal propaganda machine was slow to get into gear, Gowon and his Ministry of Information had been forced onto the defensive. It appeared initially that the Federal Government failed to understand the importance of the international opinion and international press's role in forming that opinion. Therefore they made the mistake of remaining inaccessible

¹ Yakubu Gowon, "The Last Leap" National Broadcast on August 31, 1968, in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 2:317-23.

to and uncooperative with the foreign press. While Gowon and his government remained wary of the press, people at the Ministry of Information in Biafra welcomed foreign visitors, giving them tours of exactly what they wanted them to see. Ojukwu frequently extended an open invitation to the international press: “We shall as always welcome any interested representatives of the world press to come to Biafra and see things for themselves.”² For the first time the federal government consciously attempted to respond to Biafran arguments, forcing the Biafran Ministry of Information to the defensive. Gowon responded with tactics that both mirrored and undermined Ojukwu’s argument.

Contrasting Images:

One of the strategies Gowon used in his new effort in the “war of words” was to counter Biafran claims with images that contrasted and appropriated meanings produced by the Biafran propaganda machine. Gowon manipulated the words and images Ojukwu had used to discredit and villainize the Federal Government. According to Federal propaganda, Gowon and the Federal Government were the actual safe havens; Nigeria was Biafran’s real home, and Biafra’s true savoir was not Ojukwu but rather Gowon.

Similarly, Gowon relocated Biafra’s “safe haven.” By the fall of 1968, the Federal Government controlled several key radio stations throughout Nigeria. With a country roughly the size of Alaska, the federal government had no difficulty broadcasting to Biafrans and their soldiers from stations on federal soil. They frequently broadcasted messages directly to groups of Biafran soldiers. One announcement declared:

This is a public service announcement to the Biafran soldiers. Don’t be dead when peace returns...It will be too late if you are dead... You will be quite safe. You may not be released as yet, being a captured person, but you are not really a prisoner of war. You will get three meals a day. You will see a doctor

² C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, “Gowon’s March 31 Deadline,” in *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts with Diaries of Events* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 246.

any time you need one. You will rest and sleep soundly at night. You will gradually be more comfortable. Anyhow, you are better alive than dead...³

This message put a positive and noble spin on surrendering. It glossed over some terminology claiming “you are *not really* a prisoner of war” and “you will *gradually* be more comfortable” but that was barely noticeable amongst the many promises the federal government made. The message countered the image that the government wanted to kill all Easterners once the war was over by. Biafran soldiers were frequently told that they must fight to the end in order to save their lives but here the message undercut such a polarized view of the situation. It promised things that most Biafran soldiers had not seen since the war broke out - consistent food, medical care, real sleep. In Ojukwu’s speech following the September pogrom in 1966, he claimed that Easterners could not find safety in the North and urged them to flee to the East. He pointed to the massacre of Easterners in hospitals, churches and even at home, asleep in their beds. By contrast, Federal radio broadcasts claimed that safety in beds and hospitals were exactly what the Federal Government had to offer. The announcement promised “three meal a day, “a doctor any time,” and “rest and sleep.” Rather than “certain death,” as Ojukwu had been claiming since the inauguration of the war, this announcement claimed that death was only certain if the war was prolonged and the Biafrans did not surrender to the federal side. The announcement thus reversed one of Ojukwu’s fundamental tenets and reversed the risk attached to the soldiers’ decisions. In this message death was certain on the Biafran side and there was a chance for survival within federal Nigeria.

Also as part of the “Final Push” in August 1968, the Federal Government dropped millions of multilingual “Safe Conduct” passes over rebel held areas (See Image 26), invitations to Biafrans to leave the East, assuring them of safety and prosperity on returning “home.” In

³ September 18, 1968. Broadcast from Radio Enugu. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971). 74.

large letters on the front was “I want to return to my home!” For the past two years, Ojukwu emphasized that Biafra was Biafrans’ true home, where they ultimately belonged, but this reminded them of the home they had to flee. This other place was potentially a home in which they spent countless years, a home full of memories and “normal life.” Ojukwu had defined home as something inextricably linked with ethnicity and tradition. Gowon attempted to redefine “home” more generally as Nigeria rather than as a specific region. Gowon struggled to divorce ethnic roots from the idea of “home” and instead define “home” as a location within Nigeria rather than part of one’s heritage. The pass had another powerful component, a collection of photos. Photographs showed happy Igbos who had left Biafra to return “home.” Although Ojukwu countered with accusations of falsified photographs and a larger federal plot against Biafrans, the photos provided tangible evidence to those rebels who did not have direct contact with the other side. The pictures served as their trip across the line to see the truth for themselves.

Finally, Gowon reassigned the role of Biafra’s “true savior.” Gowon asserted the image of the federal government as the ironic savior of the Igbos despite the fact that Biafran propaganda had depicted the federal government as their predator and thus enemy for the past several years. In doing so, Gowon attempted to gain the trust of Biafrans. He strove to accomplish this in two ways: by tarnishing Ojukwu’s reputation and proving that he was no longer looking out for the best interests of Biafrans and by illustrating the superior conditions available on the federal side.

By aligning himself with the safety of the Biafrans, Gowon thus disassociated Ojukwu from the role of the Biafran protector and shifted responsibility for the deaths and sufferings of the Biafran people to Ojukwu. A federal cartoon from this time epitomized the message Gowon

was trying to send (See Image 27). At the top of the cartoon was written "SAVE BIAFRA" and underneath it was a drawing of an emaciated child. At first glance this looks like a piece of Biafran propaganda. However, underneath the child is written "From Ojukwu." In past Biafran propaganda the last line might have read "From: Ojukwu." By omitting the colon, the federal government made it clear that the cartoon was no longer a message from Ojukwu to the world but rather a message that Biafrans needed to be saved *from* Ojukwu. Gowon implied that Ojukwu was following his own agenda, having deviated from the Biafrans' best interest. This message was also picked up in the international press.⁴ Critics began to suspect that Biafra of exploiting the starvation of its people to evoke sympathy. In the London *Sunday Times*, one journalist observed, "The expensive public relations campaign had now become an unashamed exploitation of human suffering."⁵

Gowon also used every possible medium to communicate that the conditions within the federal-held regions of Nigeria were superior to those found behind the battle lines in Biafra. Gowon used radio broadcasts, printed periodicals, photographs, pamphlets and actions to convey the message that the Federal Government was the true savior and a safe haven could only be found by leaving Biafra. For example, there was a vast bill-board on the federal side that read, "'WELCOME TO NIGERIA WHERE BABIES ARE HEALTHY AND HAPPY' over a Michelintyre black baby, its ecstatic smile wrapped around a spoonful of protein-packed baby food."⁶ Here the well-fed baby directly contrasted with the image of the emaciated baby prevalent in all Biafran propaganda. Due to the economic blockade, Biafrans experienced severe

⁴ Stanley Meisler. "Biafra: War of Images," *The Nation*, (March 10, 1969), 301-4. Stanley Meisler was working as the African correspondent for the Los Angeles Times.

⁵ As quoted in Stanley Meisler, "Biafra: War of Images."

⁶ John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972). 258.

protein deficiency.⁷ This deficiency, kwashiorkor, was especially detrimental to children; this “protein-packed baby food” was exactly what was needed to save the Biafran children.

Discredit Ojukwu:

Biafrans were out to win a war at all costs while the federal government saw this as something more akin to “quelling a rebellion.” Therefore the Federal Government approached the war differently. Biafrans could attack any element of Northern Nigerian beliefs, culture or behavior. Federal propaganda had to attack Biafran actions, misconceptions, logic and leadership but refrain from attacking the Igbo as a people. The Federal Government’s images and speeches frequently attacked Ojukwu’s character, questioned his motives, and went to great lengths to discredit Ojukwu as a leader.

In his “Last Leap” speech, Gowon frequently attacked Ojukwu’s leadership. Gowon claimed that “Ojukwu’s ambition for *personal power* was insatiable,” and that “the sufferings of *the innocent civilians* in these places are apparently only to be *exploited* by Ojukwu for propaganda and international maneuvers for recognition.” Here Gowon used words and techniques that were similar to those Ojukwu previously used to discredit Gowon. In Gowon’s speech, however, it was Ojukwu who exploited the innocent and sought out personal power. He also claimed that “it was Ojukwu himself who launched the attack on Federal Government troops in July 1967 and began the war.”⁸ This issue of punctuation, who initiated the conflict, became addressed by Ojukwu at the outbreak of the war when he claimed the federal forces fired the first

⁷ Biafra was relatively self-sufficient (at least at the beginning) with the exception of protein. They had no major source of protein and relied on importing from other regions. During the later years of the war, more Biafrans died from kwashiorkor, a specific type of starvation caused by lack of protein, than by direct warfare. Kwashiorkor was especially devastating for children, and as many as 30,000 Biafrans were dying weekly of starvation. (Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2004), 258.)

⁸ Gowon, “Last Leap.”

shot. Punctuation became crucial because it served as the foundation of escalation and enabled one party to claim that it was acting self-defense.⁹

In addition to shifting the blame to Ojukwu for the mass starvation of Biafrans, Gowon took it further and blamed Ojukwu for the entire war (especially the continuation of the war). Gowon claimed that all diplomatic options were exhausted, a point on which Ojukwu would agree, but he went further to say that the reason for the failure for the diplomatic route was the East's unwillingness to compromise and Ojukwu's stubborn desire for power. During this period of war diplomatic discussions were once again at the center of attention as the two sides attempted to agree on safeguards and guarantees for Igbo safety and plans for Igbo reintegration. Gowon attacked Ojukwu's sincerity. He pointed out that while Biafrans claimed the main reason for secession was fear for their safety, at the peace table they now insisted on discussions relating to everything - immediate cease fire, withdrawal of federal troops to prewar boundaries - except Biafran safety.

Propaganda of Deed:

Words and printed images were not the only forms of propaganda. Propaganda of deed, affirming or denying claims by one's actions, became increasingly important later in the war. Gowon and Ojukwu were sending out opposite messages about the conditions of Biafra and the intentions of Nigeria. In a statement released in August of 1968, Lagos defined its stance on relief supplies and "rejected the suggestion that any individual or organisation or country can be more concerned about the events in Nigeria and sufferings of civilians than itself."¹⁰ Officials explained the allowances that were made for relief efforts, but emphasized that relief supplies

⁹ Dean G. Pruitt and Sung Hee Kim, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate, and Settlement* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004).

¹⁰ "Lagos Announces New Policy on Relief Supplies." in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 408-410. The statement was issued in Lagos on July 11, 1969.

needed to be checked for military supplies. Ojukwu rejected the allowances made for relief supplies claiming that they were unsatisfactory. However, Gowon asserted that, "It is clear that in order to support the false propaganda on genocide and their campaign for separate existence they wish to avoid any evidence that the Federal Government is helping to expedite relief supplies to civilians in rebel-held areas."¹¹ Relief from the federal government would undermine the image Ojukwu promoted of a federal government out to eliminate Biafrans, a government that considered Biafrans second rate. Direct contact with aid from the federal government would go to the heart of the Biafran propaganda, as Gowon claimed it would (See Image 28). Ojukwu's only counter argument to Gowon's humanitarian response was to tell his people that although the federal government was providing food, it had poisoned it as part of its overall plan to exterminate the Igbos.

International Messengers:

With increased investment in propaganda, the federal government scored points not only domestically but also internationally. Dame Margery Perham, an authority on Nigerian affairs, was one of Biafra's most adamant and passionate supporters abroad. As a sympathizer, usually uncritical of the Biafran cause, she was a tireless supporter of the Biafra and usually quite tiresome to Lagos. However, while in Nigeria she, on her own accord, requested to broadcast a message from Lagos to Ojukwu and the Biafran people. Her message to Ojukwu and the Biafrans was clear:¹² Biafran defeat was imminent and, therefore, the Biafran leadership should not prolong a hopeless battle and increase death tolls and suffering. She went on to say that the people who had been emotionally stirred to the Biafran side through sympathy and human rights

¹¹ Gowon, "Last Leap."

¹² "Margery Perham's Broadcast to Ojukwu," in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971). 326-327. This speech was broadcast on September 7, 1968 over Lagos Radio.

appeals would condemn Ojukwu for not putting an end to the suffering. It is not much of an exaggeration to say Dame Perham's public conversion had a considerable effect on public opinion both domestically and internationally. She explained that "the world which is watching would condemn you if they now believed that you were using your leadership to prolong a hopeless struggle at their expense: there would be not only sorrow, but indignation against you." She echoed the same message being sent by countless others: "I do not believe that your people would be in danger of massacre or revenge." Although she simply reiterated much of Gowon's message, she served as a more credible messenger.

Ojukwu's Response:

Gowon's new behavior did not go unanswered by Ojukwu. He put more energy into his propaganda efforts and began to turn to more extreme methods. During the 1966 pogrom an Easterner was killed in the north as he was getting onto a train. His body arrived in the east, disemboweled and decapitated. This image symbolizes the struggles of the Easterners and the atrocities of the Northerners. During this time this image was powerful and ever-present to the point that it was even on the Biafran stamp (See Image 30). Throughout Biafra, as a means of entertainment, groups of locals would perform small plays and skits. One popular skit that St. Jorre remembers watching is one where the performers act out the gruesome acts of the pogroms in order to incite an emotional outcry in the audience (See Image 29).

Chapter Four: The Unraveling

Ojukwu's Ahiara Declaration to Biafran Surrender

(June 1969 to January 1970)

The deadly situation *within* Biafra coupled with Gowon's attempts to challenge Ojukwu's declared truths brought about the unraveling of the nation. Ojukwu's words and threats were no longer enough to motivate Biafrans and Biafra surrender in January of 1970.

The Ahiara Declaration:

In June of 1969, from the small village of Ahiara, Ojukwu presented his blue-print for a Biafran Revolution. Two years into a gruesome civil war, Biafra was still managing to hold off federal troops, but the condition of the Biafran state was gradually worsening. The Biafran people were disillusioned and starving; they were merely surviving on hope and feeding off of wartime energy. Just as the actual state was shrinking with each new federal onslaught, the people were gradually shrinking in hope, in passion and in size (See Map 5). This declaration became Ojukwu's last major attempt to boost the morale of his people. He relied on every mechanism of persuasion he had used previously, increasing the intensity of the appeals in a desperate attempt to keep Biafrans engaged in the struggle.

Around the time of the declaration, the Biafran soldiers had managed, despite their drastic military, political and financial disadvantages, to secure a few key victories. At the same time, however, the country was a mere fraction of the size it had been two years previously. Despite an intense, short-lived offensive, Biafra's land mass began shrinking again with every federal attack (see Map 6). The army was rapidly retreating from the involuting battle lines and running out of ammunition and other essential supplies. The blockade by the Federal

Government had been in place for slightly over two years, resulting in a state of desperate need and near starvation of the bulk of the Biafran people. Despite all of this, the Biafran soldiers successfully managed to bring the war to a military and political stalemate that lasted until almost the end of the year. Ojukwu concluded his declaration by stating, "We have forced a stalemate on the enemy, if we fail, it can only be because of certain inner weaknesses in our being. It is in order to avoid these pitfalls that I have proclaimed the principles of the Biafran Revolution." Ojukwu insisted that the discrepancies between the ideals within his speeches and the actuality of Biafran society could precipitate the ultimate downfall of Biafra, because it was this higher moral standard that set them apart from the rest of the world. He recognized that Biafra would need to struggle to avoid the same problems - corruption, political favoritism, war profiteering, and a growing black market – that he had repeatedly saw the Federal Government being plagued with.

This declaration fell drastically short of a truthful depiction of wartime reality. It was characterized by extreme language, gross exaggerations, false statements, fallacies of logic, mutually exclusive claims, and other inconsistencies.¹ Although the manifesto was subtitled "The Principles of the Biafran Revolution," only half of the pages were devoted to promoting the philosophy of the Biafran Revolution and Ojukwu's ideal of a "Utopian, vaguely socialist, strongly Christian society."² The other half was devoted to relating Ojukwu's perspective on the current political and military situation. In these pages, he addressed such diverse topics as the evil influences of white imperialism, Bolshevism, Russia, "Nigerianism" and Islamic jihad and, in some instances, went so far as to ascribe blame for these evils in ways that are mutually

¹ John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 29.

² *Ibid*, 385.

exclusively from one another.³ Ojukwu did not find any new group at which to point his finger, he just pointed a little more dramatically. He did not discover any new heartstrings to tug: he just tugged a little more firmly. He did not exploit any new stereotypes, emotional tensions or fears, he just did so a little less discreetly. Biafra was entering desperate times and this declaration was one of the last opportunities for Ojukwu to rally the people for another fight and rather than creating new propagandistic angles he chose to combine and amplify them all.

The Ahiara Declaration ultimately fell short of success with regard to motivating Biafrans to continue their fight. His words lacked the power to convince the Biafrans that the prospect of a Biafran victory was worth the ultimate sacrifice. Any rally that followed the declaration was relatively insignificant and short-lived. Increasing numbers of Biafrans crossed over the battle lines, risking death at the hands of the federal troops in order to escape certain death by starvation. The Ahiara Declaration's true importance, therefore, is not in its impact on military strategies or on subsequent events. The significance of this manifesto rests in the insight it provided into Biafran society during the war period and in its compilation of propagandistic themes into one last, desperate attempt to boost the morale of a country that was dying – emotionally and literally. It is important to explore each of these prevailing themes separately to gain a more comprehensive appreciation of the issues and sensitivities that Ojukwu attempted to address.

"Nigerianism" and Government Corruption:

Ojukwu frequently equated Nigerianism with government corruption. Although he noted that these problems also existed in Biafra, he attempted to divorce the Biafran character from them by explaining that these were merely left over elements of "Nigerianism." He believed that

it was critical for Biafrans to identify these remnants of “Nigerianism” and subsequently “shake off every particle”⁴ in order to free themselves from their destructive power. In his words.

We say that Nigerians take bribes, but here in our country we have among us some members of police and judiciary who are corrupt and who “eat” bribes...we have members of the armed forces who carry on “attack” trade instead of fighting the enemy. We have traders who hoard essential goods and inflate prices, thereby increasing the people’s hardships. We have some civil servants who think of themselves as masters rather than servants of the people. We see doctors who stay idle in their villages while their countrymen and women suffer and die.⁵

The “Biafran Revolution” was above these pitfalls. Following the values and ideals of the revolution meant that these problems would be shaken off along with the “Nigerian oppressors.” Ojukwu detached such problems from the revolution, painting them as just one other enemy to be battled in order for the just people of Biafra to reach a more ideal society.

Comments regarding Nigeria’s political corruption are found throughout the entire declaration, but Ojukwu specifically devoted entire sections to this topic. He stated: “Bribery, corruption and nepotism were so widespread that people began to wonder openly whether any country in the world could compare with Nigeria is corruption and abuse of power.”⁶ He continued with potent anecdotes and other strong accusations. He went beyond highlighting Nigeria’s pitfalls to claiming that “her everything” was corrupt – it wasn’t that there was bad in the society, it was that the *entire society* was bad. Allowing any elements of Nigerianism to remain would allow the corruption to seep into what he described as a stronger society.

Defenseless but Superior:

Ojukwu consistently vacillated in his depictions of the nature and needs of the Biafrans. Internal and international press described Biafra alternately as self-sufficient and strong versus vulnerable, defenseless victims. It was not that the press changed its mind daily but rather that

⁴ Emeka Ojukwu, “The Ahiara Declaration: The Principles of the Biafran Revolution,” www.biafraland.com/Ahiara_declaration_1969.htm, 24.

⁵ *Ibid*, 25.

⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

Biafra chose to be seen as both or, more accurately, one or the other depending on the situation. At moments when Biafra's self-sufficiency was in question, Biafrans became heroes who were absolutely committed to a greater cause, to higher moral objectives and the creation of their own nation. While assuring the world of Biafra's capability to function as a country, Ojukwu was also reiterating to his people that they were strong enough to finish the fight. He constantly emphasized their abilities, passions and moral strengths and, whenever possible, he created images of their promising future:

I am confident. With the initiative in war now in our own hands, we have turned the last bend in our race to self-realisation and are now set on the home straight in this struggle. We must not flag. The tape is in sight. What we need now is a final burst of speed to breast the tape and secure the victory which will ensure for us, for all time, glory and honour, peace and progress.⁷

Other times Biafrans were seen as "defenseless people" faced with "total destruction" at the hands of "monsters who have vowed to devour" them.⁸ Here an image of a small starving child, his ribs visible and easily counted, his hopeless eyes staring out of the page, is what the Biafrans chose to show. Usually Ojukwu described Biafrans as weak and needy when he was criticizing another country's unwillingness to intervene. Confronting others with such images supported his plea for international sanction and support and supported his assertion that those who viewed the inhumane treatment of the Biafrans and did nothing were, at minimum, cold hearted, or more negatively, driven by racism.

The most powerful tool of persuasion the southeastern government held was the continual threat of annihilation at the hands of the enemy.⁹ Using metaphors, loaded vocabulary and frighteningly gruesome analogies, Ojukwu referred to the attempted annihilations and claims of

⁷ Ojukwu, "Ahiara Declaration," 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

successful genocides about once a page during his Ahiara Declaration. He equated the North to “monsters,” the Ottoman Empire over a century ago, and a “wicked, diabolical enemy” living in a “corrupt, decadent and putrefying society.”¹⁰ He also shifted most of the attention and blame to the British by focusing on the Anglo-Saxon’s bad humanitarian record. After listing many of Britain’s past atrocities against non-Western peoples – ranging from the American Indians to the Maoris of New Zealand – he went on to say, “Today they are engaged in committing genocide against us. The unprejudiced observer is forced in consternation to wonder whether genocide is not a way of life of the Anglo-Saxon British.”¹¹ Ojukwu still contended that British support of the federal government equated to support for acts of genocide by the British. The prevailing message was that those who chose not to intervene were themselves responsible for the horrific results of their passive acceptance of the status quo.

Racism/White Colonialism:

One of the other themes that became most pronounced during the declaration was that of racial prejudice and white colonialism. Whether Ojukwu was referencing race and rights or race and ideology, almost every argument pitted whites against blacks. Ojukwu raised questions regarding the humanity of the black man, the inferiority of the black man and the self-sufficiency of the black man. His words left little doubt to his accusations.

For 18 white men, Europe is aroused. What have they said about our millions?
18 white men assisting in the crime of genocide! What does Europe say about
our murdered innocents?...How many black dead make one missing white?
Mathematicians, please answer me. Is it infinity?¹²

¹⁰ Ojukwu, “Ahiara Declaration,” 2.

¹¹ Ibid, 18.

¹² Ibid, 6.

He not only linked colonialism with racial prejudice, but suggested that colonialism was intertwined with the exploitation of the land, the people and the economy.¹³

Ojukwu ended his declaration by claiming the Biafran cause was just and divine and that Biafrans would benefit from pursuing their God-given right for self-determination. As Christians, Ojukwu asserted, God was on the Biafran side, watching over and assisting us in our fight against the Muslim infidels.¹⁴ “We believe that God, humanity and history are on our side... Oh God, not my will, but Thine forever.”¹⁵ Ojukwu professed his belief that “Arab-Muslim expansionism had menaced and ravaged the African continent for twelve centuries.”¹⁶ Because his Biafran ancestors remained “immune from the Islamic contagion,” Biafra had become a “non-Muslim island in a raging Islamic sea.”¹⁷ Ojukwu contended that this island was under siege by the northerners trying to convert them by force (or extinguish them while trying). Thus, a fight against the north was a fight for what was right and was a fight in the name of God.

Ojukwu’s themes are so intertwined that it would be difficult to think that one could critically evaluate any one part of Ojukwu’s argument without first accepting or rejecting his main premises. Ojukwu claimed that those who did not support the independence of Biafra did not support basic human rights for black peoples around the world because they did not believe that black people were real men who deserve the right to self-determination. His argument did not allow for a country to have another reason for their decision. He connected these ideas together so concretely that a group or country had to risk looking like all of the negative images

¹³ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Christianity was established in southeastern Nigeria during the middle of the 19th century and by this point the land of Biafra consisted of a predominantly Christian people. Northern Nigeria had a relatively well-established Muslim population and its history is strongly connected to the history of the Islamic kingdoms.

¹⁵ Ojukwu, “Ahiara Declaration,” 52.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

Ojukwu suggested if it chose to support the federal side or even abstain from supporting either side.

Despite Ojukwu's desperate emotional appeals, his passionate reassurances, his lofty idealisms failed to rally his people or to change the course of the war. Biafrans had fought with passion, against odds, and with conviction, but their strength was rapidly deteriorating. The situation for the common Biafran was one of desperation and hopelessness. "With the fall of Owerri on 16 September 'the token Republic of Biafra' was reduced to a rectangle of mere 60 x 30 miles wide containing by one town, Umuahia, and two impoverished airstrips."¹⁸

International interest reached an all-time high and multiple organizations requested permission to assess the human rights situation. While Ojukwu clung to his argument that the fall of Biafra would mean the destruction of the Igbo people, the Igbo people confronted increasing amounts of propaganda countering Ojukwu's arguments. Ever since Gowon's announcement of the "Final Push" in August of 1968, the federal government had been intentionally investing in its own propaganda. By the summer of 1969, the federal government began to secure victory after victory on Biafra's most successful front – propaganda - and with these victories, Biafra and its propaganda crumbled (See Map 7).

As the power of Ojukwu's words decreased, the impact of the words of other prominent leaders became more pronounced. One such leader was Nnamdi Azikiwe, often simply referred to as "Zik." Zik was the ceremonial president of Nigeria before the coup in January 1966. Before his presidency, he made a name for himself as a statesman and an adamant supporter of "One Nigeria." He founded the N.C.N.C.¹⁹ in 1944, served as the Prime Minister of the

¹⁸ Kirk-Greene, 60.

¹⁹ Political Party N.C.N.C – National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons; 1944-66. The NCNC was actually a coalition of nationalistic parties, cultural associations, and labor movements. Often accused of focusing almost exclusively on the interests of the Igbo population.

federation. Premier of the Eastern Region, and later the Governor-General, developing a large group of adamant followers.²⁰ As president he was strongly associated with Pan-Africanism, anti-colonialism, and independence sentiments. Although born in the North, he was an Igbo born to parents from the East and thus considered an Easterner. He had experienced discrimination as an Igbo in politics and professed sensitivity to the plight of the Igbo. Despite his history of advocating a unified Nigeria for a unified Africa, Zik originally supported Ojukwu and the Republic of Biafra, while attempting to reconcile the groups to re-create his "One Nigeria" that was safe and secure for all groups.

Zik was considered the most famous, politically versatile and internationally known Igbo and so his public conversion to the federal side, conveniently just before the annual OAU²¹ summit meeting in Addis Ababa, was a major victory for the federal government.²² Because of his background and reputation his statements held more weight. As the voice of anti-colonialism and independence, he was not a puppet of the British. As a fellow Igbo, was not out to help the federal government annihilate the Igbos in Biafra but rather he was someone who people respected. When he came back to Nigeria on a fact-finding mission and, as a result, switched his position on the war, one would have expected his influence to be profound. His old magnetism and style strengthened the message to the crowds of people he addressed but in fact much of what he said lacked credibility because of his political acrobatics.

Azikiwe originally favored a united Nigeria. However, after the massacres and after hearing Ojukwu's claims of genocide, he became a Biafran sympathizer and advisor to

²⁰ The Zikist Movement was a movement that formed around the ideals and person of Azikiwe. It promoted the idea of "One Nigeria."

²¹ O.A.U. = the Organisation of African Unity. The intended purpose of this organization was to solidarity of the African States and serve as a collective voice for the continent. It was dedicated to the eradication of colonialism and provided assistance to independence movements.

²² St. Jorre, 363-4.

Ojukwu.²³ On August 28, 1969, during his fact-finding mission Azikiwe released a text in which he outlined his new position:

I would resist to the limit of my mental and physical abilities any concerted attempt to exterminate any linguistic group, whether Igbo, or non-Igbo, for any reason... there is no concerted plot to exterminate them or any of their leaders. I want them to believe me when I say that the world has taken cognisance of their fortitude in the face of extreme suffering in addition to the valour and gallantry of their soldiers. There can no doubt that they fought and died in the conscientious belief that they and their people were slated to be exterminated.²⁴

He reminded the listeners of his loyalty to all Nigerians and his pure intentions. He dispelled the core piece of propaganda for the Biafrans by affirming the safety and security of the Igbo and non-Igbo people who now lived in the Federal Territory of Lagos as well as those who resided outside of what is now left of former Eastern Nigeria.” He then called for the end of the civil war. Furthermore, he attacked Ojukwu and his “false propaganda.” By acknowledging stating that Biafrans had fought nobly, he allowed for honor and dignity in surrender. However, he called them victims of a hoax, a “cock-and-bull fairy tale,” a horrible “April Fools.” His recommendations were made quite clear: “Blood has flowed freely because of this false propaganda. The killing should stop now. now. Enough is enough.”²⁵ He had no reluctance to place blame. He removed the blame from the Nigerian people and placed it on the “false propaganda” and those who created it. He blamed Ojukwu for “bamboozling” the people and for prolonging the suffering. He directly called upon Ojukwu to end the war so that he would not “disfigure the pages of Nigerian history as another political imposter and petty tyrant.”²⁶

²³ Although Azikiwe often offered his advise Ojukwu seldom listened and this eventually caused a rift between the men. Whenever Azikiwe did counsel him it almost always was pro-compromise and peace.

²⁴ Azikiwe, “Azikiwe on Ojukwu’s ‘April Fool,’” August 28, 1969 in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

On October 8, 1969, upon return from his trip to Nigeria²⁷ Azikiwe once again appealed to his “fellow-Easterners.” In this address, he attempted to summarize the main concerns, lessen the fears, dispel the rumors, and argue for a unified “One Nigeria.” He acknowledged the 1966 massacres and did not attempt to downplay the tragedy. He did, however, attempt to dispel the rumors regarding ethnic genocide, calling the false propaganda inflammatory, a tactic solely to gain the support of a group of fearful, destitute people. While he spoke openly of fears of potential annihilation, Azikiwe also reassured the people of the provisions made for the reintegration of the Igbos. He told his “fellow-Easterners” of the widespread, strongly-supported desire for new and progressive Nigeria, highlighting all of the things that the government would do to enhance their lives when they returned. He assured the people that there would be “no victors, no vanquished,” no allowances for claims of victimization or for humiliation and no penalties.

I have been strengthened in my faith in ‘One Nigeria’ – an expression I believed I coined in the halcyon days before the attainment of our independence as a sovereign state. I believed then, as I believe now, in one Nigeria, which is indivisible, indestructible and perpetual, provided adequate security is ensured to all its citizens and inhabitants in their persons and property.²⁸

These words are strikingly similar to those initially used by Ojukwu prior to the Biafran secession. However, much had transpired between the two remarks. Azikiwe appealed to the Biafrans to see “the truth” and argued that if they could clear their eyes and emotions of the propaganda that had been laid before them, they would understand that it was time to end the dissention and return to one Nigeria.

²⁷ This was his first trip back to war-time Nigeria.

²⁸ Azikiwe, “Azikiwe Appeals to his Fellow-Easterners,” October 8, 1969, in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

During the last months of the conflict, Gowon found himself in a peculiar situation. Although the war was not over, he had already begun plans and discussions about the reintegration of the Igbos into a unified Nigeria. Thus, he needed to push Nigerians to successfully finish out the war but also open the door for peace. He had to call upon the Nigerian nationals to temper their emotions and not give the world any reason to doubt his promises regarding Igbo future safety. On October 1, 1969, the ninth anniversary of Nigerian independence, Gowon addressed the nation, and drawing on the unifying sentiments surrounding the event. Nine years prior, the disparate groups had put aside their differences momentarily to work together for a common goal – Nigerian independence. Gowon attempted to regenerate the shared memory of this successful moment to recreate unity among the divided country. Gowon also emphasized the dual motives of the federal government, “We are quelling a rebellion, not fighting an external enemy. We have conducted operations of the war in a very deliberate fashion so that we can achieve national reconciliation on the cessation of hostilities.”²⁹ In the “spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation,” he released from prison all persons that had been detained during the crisis. In the “spirit of conciliation” Gowon announced himself “ready and prepared” for negotiations and willing to compromise for the greater good of Nigeria and Africa.³⁰

Gowon called upon all Nigerians on the federal side to put aside differences and invest all of their energies into winning the war rather than fighting among themselves. “I must remind all the citizens of this country that this is not the time for partisan political activities at the local or national level. We must all strive to subdue personal ambition or sectional interests in the overall

²⁹ Gowon, “Gowon Speak on Independence Day,” October 1, 1969, in A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³⁰ Ibid.

interest of the nation. Our legacy to future generations of Nigerians should be a united and stable country.”³¹

One of the most notable characteristics of Gowon’s Independence Day address, especially in juxtaposition with a speech from Ojukwu, was the relative lack of emotion. By this point in the war, people were emotionally overstretched. Gowon relied on reasoned argument. Ojukwu’s greatest tool was emotional appeal, more notably fear, and in the waning days of the war he desperately attempted to stimulate the emotional sensitivities of Biafrans. It is hard to say whether Gowon’s rationality won out over Ojukwu’s emotionality. What does seem clear is that Ojukwu never openly wavered in his beliefs about the righteousness of the Biafran cause.

Even as Ojukwu fled the country after the war,³² he made no gestures toward reconciliation. Amidst messages of health and happiness being passed over the radio waves, and evidence of humanitarian aid from the north, he continued to fan the flames of dissent. In his prerecorded speech³³ which aired without his presence, he reminded the Biafrans, “You suffered unmentionable privations at the hands of the enemy that has used every conceivable weapon, particularly the weapon of starvation, against an innocent people whose only crime is that they choose to live in peace and security according to their own beliefs and away from a country that had condemned and rejected them.” The battle may have been lost, but the cause persisted.

On January 12, 1970 Ojukwu recorded his farewell address and fled the country. The next day, Lieutenant Colonel Effiong officially declared Biafra’s surrender (See Image 31).

Today Chief Emeka Ojukwu is an elder Nigerian statesman living in the former Biafran capital of Enugu. He was forgiven by the Nigerian authorities in the early 1980s but he openly

³¹ Around this time there were multiple riots in the West.

³² Ojukwu calls his flight a “short absence” necessary for a mission to “secure peace and security for [his] people”; looking for friends and allies in the international community.

³³ Ojukwu, “Ojukwu’s Message as He Flees Biafra.” Prerecorded and broadcast over Biafran radio at 6:00am on January 11, 1970.

admits no remorse for the events of the civil war. In a January 13, 2000 interview with B.B.C.'s Nigeria correspondent Barnaby Philips Ojukwu commented: "At 33 I reacted as a brilliant 33 year old; at 66 I don't feel responsible at all. I did the best I could. It is my hope that if I had to face this I should also confront it as a brilliant 66 year old."³⁴ Additionally, he pointed out that the causes of the Biafran war are as relevant now as ever: "None of the problems that led to the war have been solved yet. They are still here. We have a situation creeping towards the type of situation that saw the beginning of the war."³⁵

Thirty years ago Ojukwu sought to build a nation – physically and mentally. On January 12, 1970, Biafra surrendered as a physical nation but not all people surrendered their Biafran identity. Through his rhetoric and example Ojukwu built the idea of what it meant to be a Biafran and those ideas were not and are not reliant on national borders. Today the Biafran non-violent, grassroots movement (MASSOB: Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra) is gaining steam: Radio Biafra is back on the air;³⁶ there are shirts, hats and bumper stickers for sale with the Biafran flag and slogans on them. People are opening referring to themselves as a Biafran.³⁷ In a national address following the fall of Biafra Gowon declared, "the so-called rising sun of Biafra is set forever." It appears that this is not so. Appropriately, Ojukwu's final words as the leader of Biafra were:

"Proud and courageous Biafrans, noble Biafrans, Biafra shall live."³⁸

³⁴ Ojukwu quoted in Barnaby Philips, "Biafra: Thirty years on," in *B.B.C. News – Online*, (January 13, 2000).

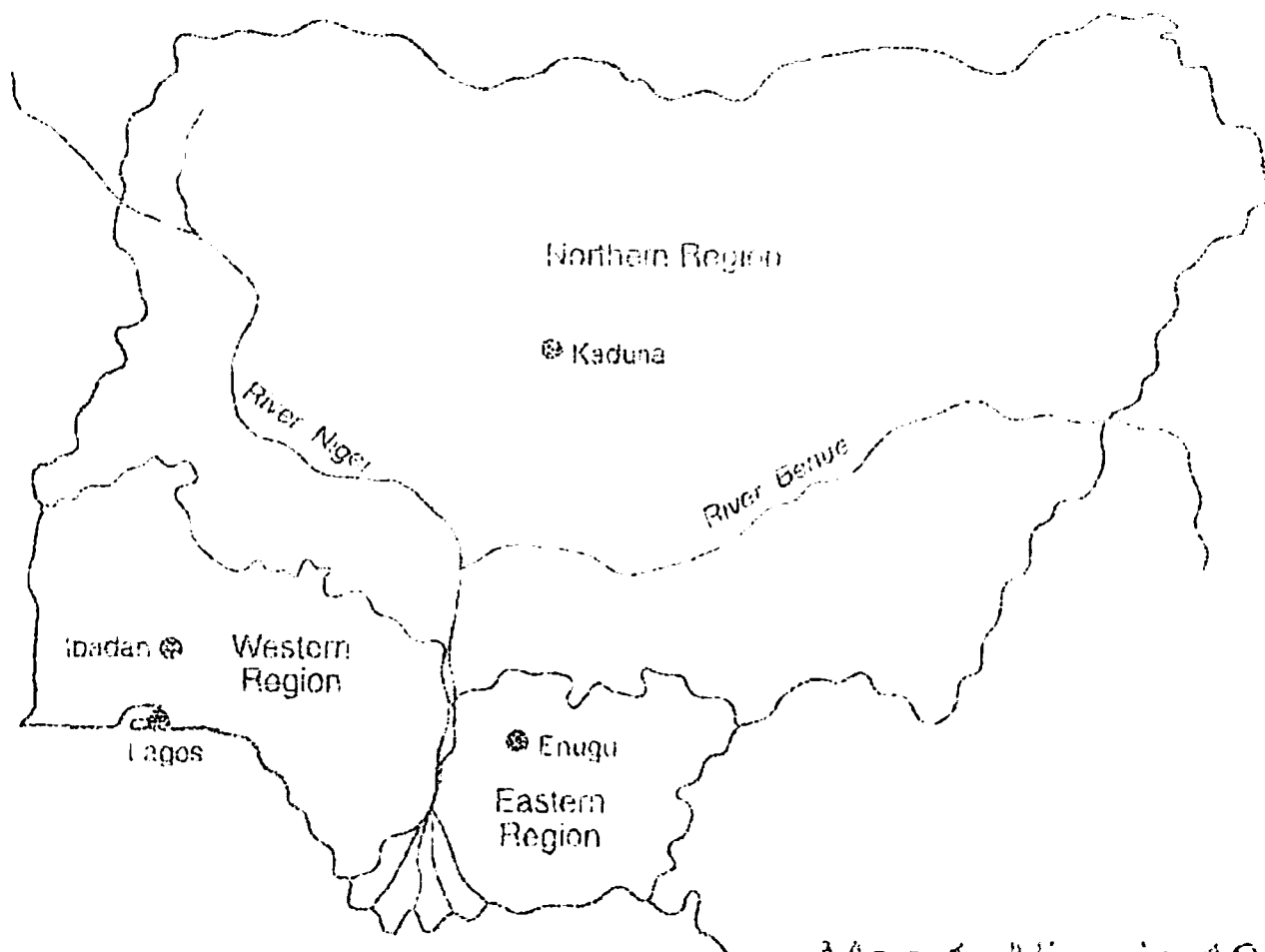
³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ "Igbo Kwenu! This Is Radio Biafra!" on www.elandestineradio.com/crw/news.php?id=12&stn=143&news=76, (August 20, 1998); Tokunbo Awoshakin, "The 'Rebirth' of Biafra," in *Life Abroad*, (2001).

³⁷ www.dawodu.com and www.biafraland.com.

³⁸ Ojukwu, "Ojukwu's Message as He Flees Biafra."

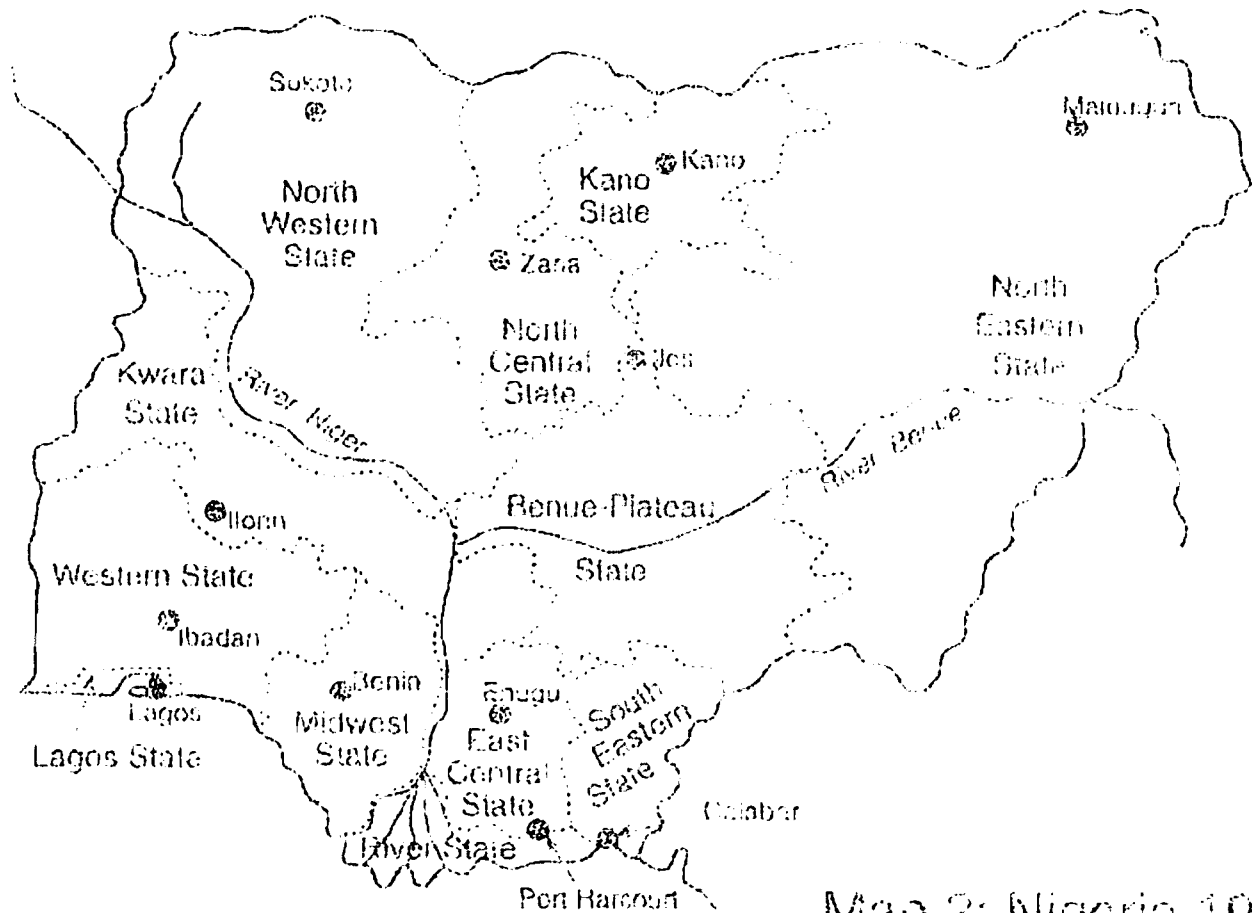
**Map 2:
An Historical Map of Nigeria Showing Three Federal Regions
Created by British Colonial Rule (1954)**



Map 1: Nigeria 1954

An Historical Map of Nigeria Showing Three Federal Regions Created by British Colonial Rule (1954): (from *Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue, Wilberforce Conference on Nigerian Federalism – 1997*, http://www.waado.org/nigerian_scholars/archive/pubs/wilberl_map1.html)

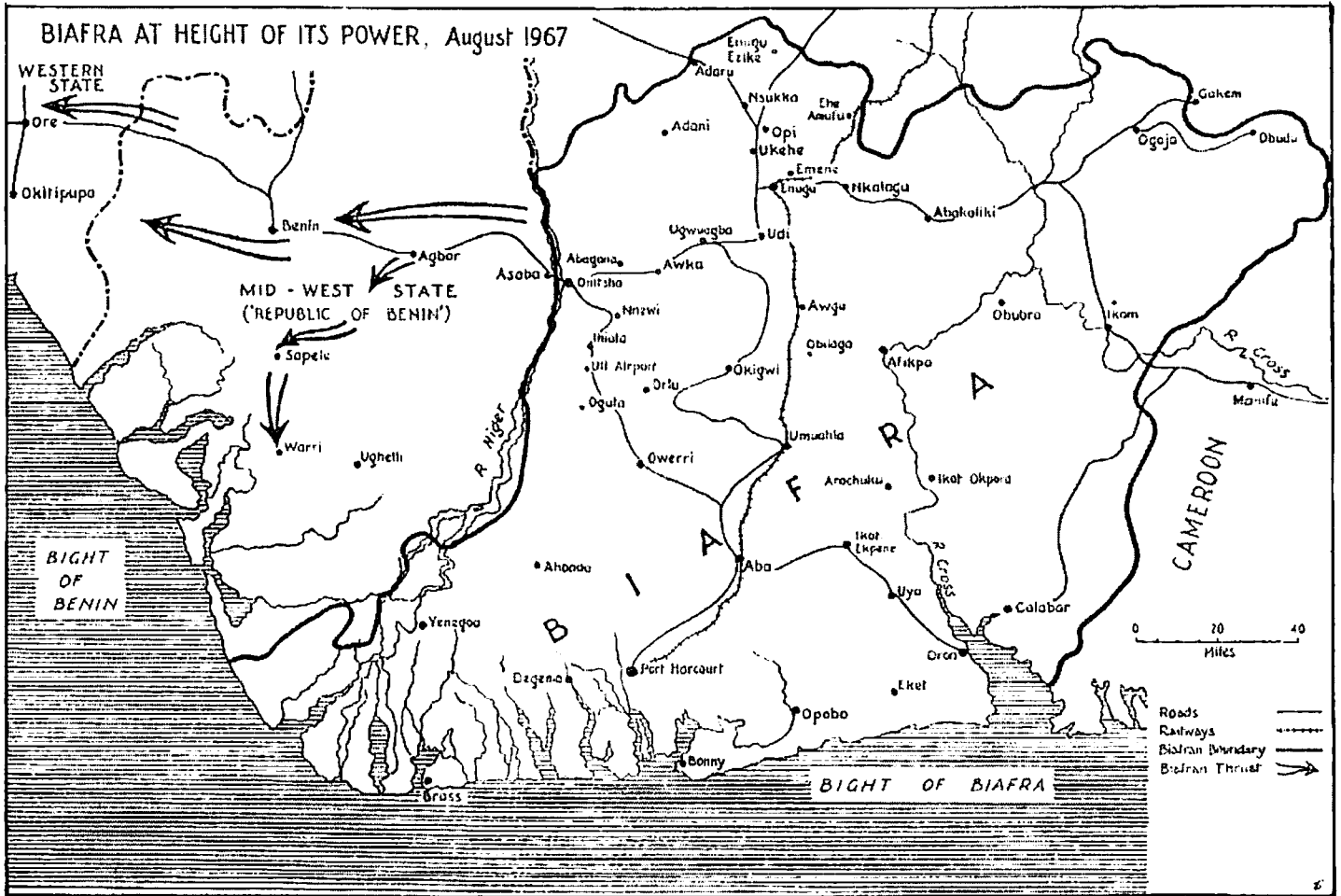
Map 3: An Historical Map of Nigeria Showing Twelve Federal States Created by Federal Military Government on the Eve of Civil War (1967)



Map 2: Nigeria 1967

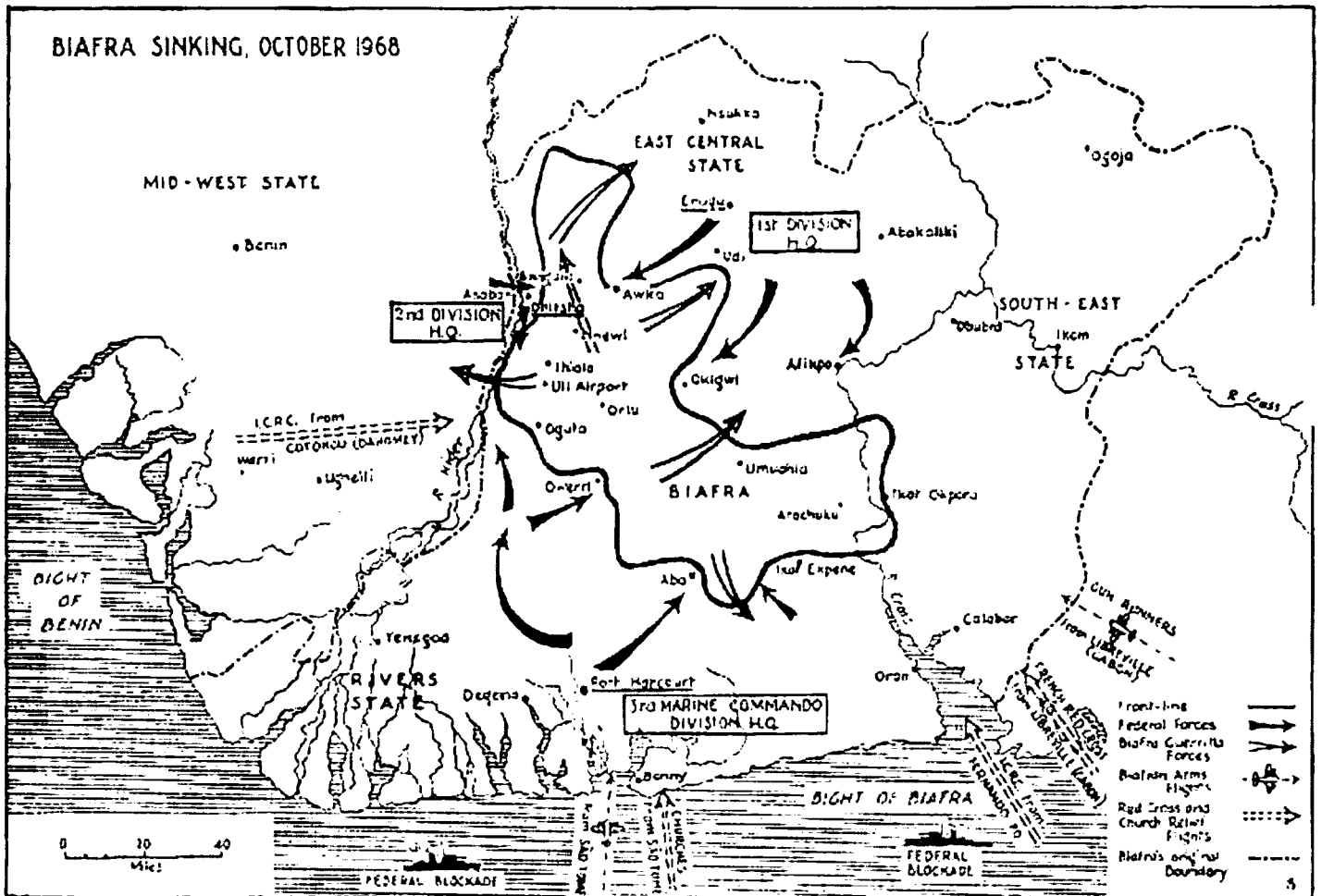
An Historical Map of Nigeria Showing Twelve Federal States Created by Federal Military Government on the Eve of Civil War (1967): (from *Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue, Wilberforce Conference on Nigerian Federalism – 1997*, http://www.waado.org/nigerian_scholars/archive/pubs/wilber1_map2.html)

Map 4: Biafra at Height of Its Power, August 1967



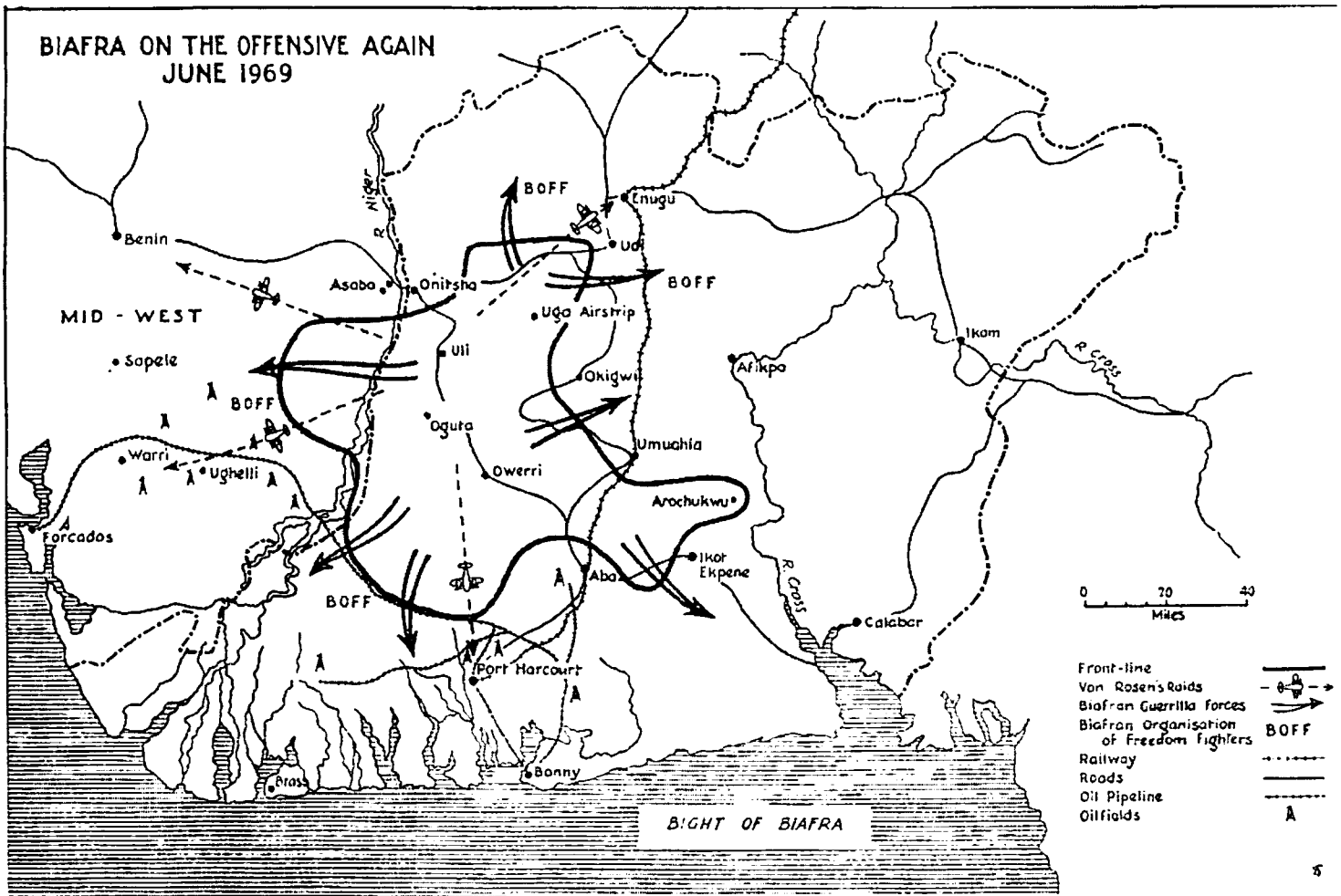
"Biafra at Height of Its Power, August 1967": (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 155.)

Map 5: "Biafra Sinking, October 1968."



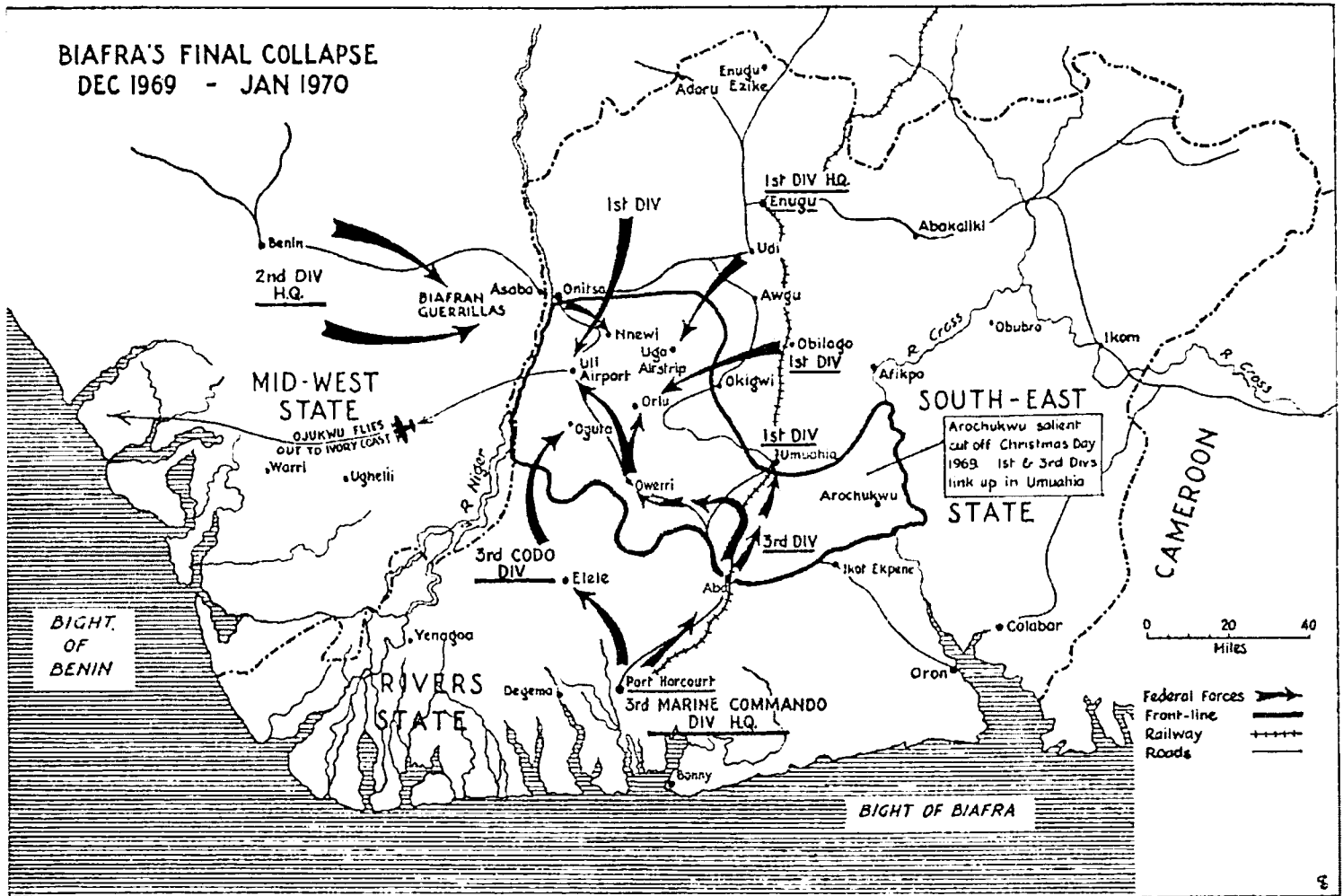
"Biafra Sinking, October 1968": (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972). 221.)

Map 6: "Biafra On the Offensive Again, June 1969."



"Biafra On the Offensive Again, June 1969": (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 362.)

Map 7: "Biafra's Final Collapse, December 1969-January 1970."



"Biafra's Final Collapse, December 1969-January 1970": (from John de St. Jorre. *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972). 394.)

Image 1: Colonel Yakubu Gowon



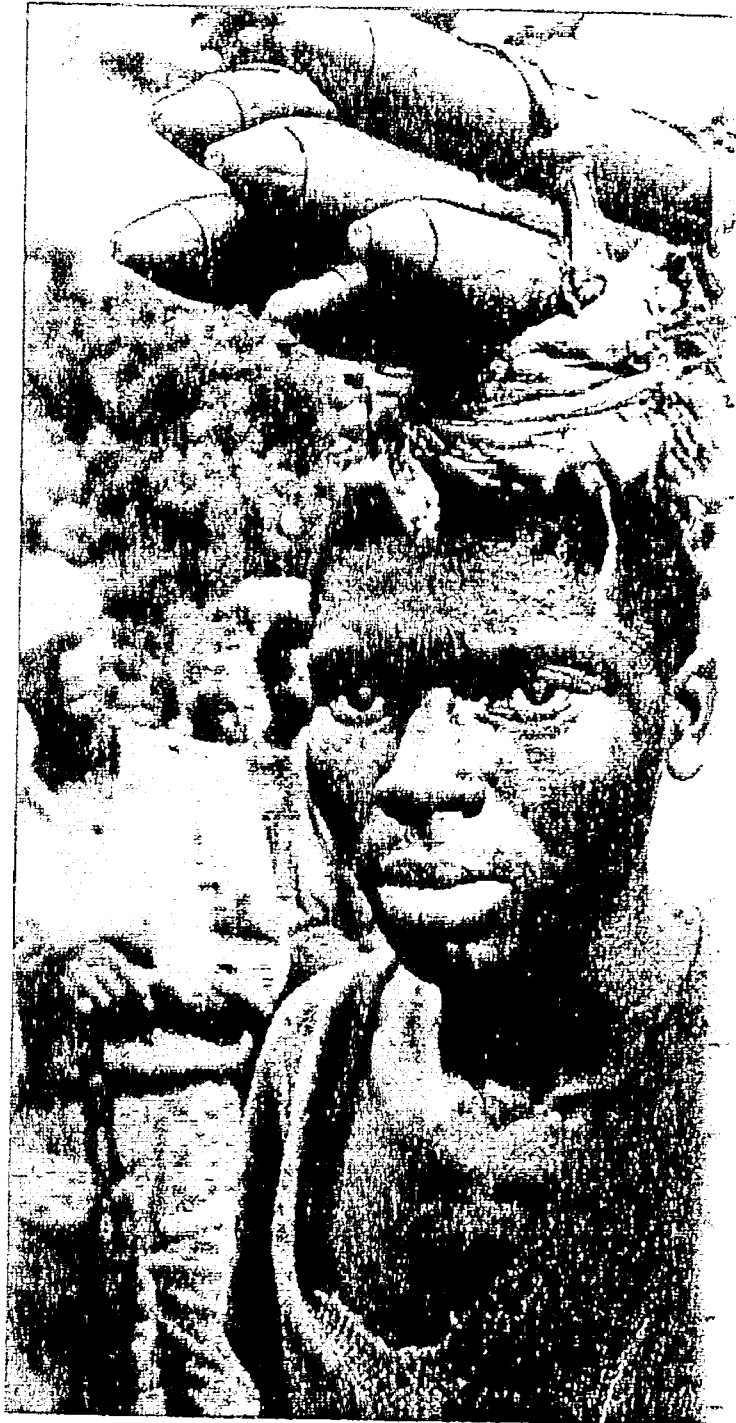
Colonel Yakubu Gowon: Leader of Federal Nigeria. (from Peter Schwab. *Facts on File: Biafra* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1971).)

Image 2: Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu



Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. (from www.kwenu.com/images/ojukwu66.jpg)

Image 3: Missiles on the Head



Biafran soldier in 1968

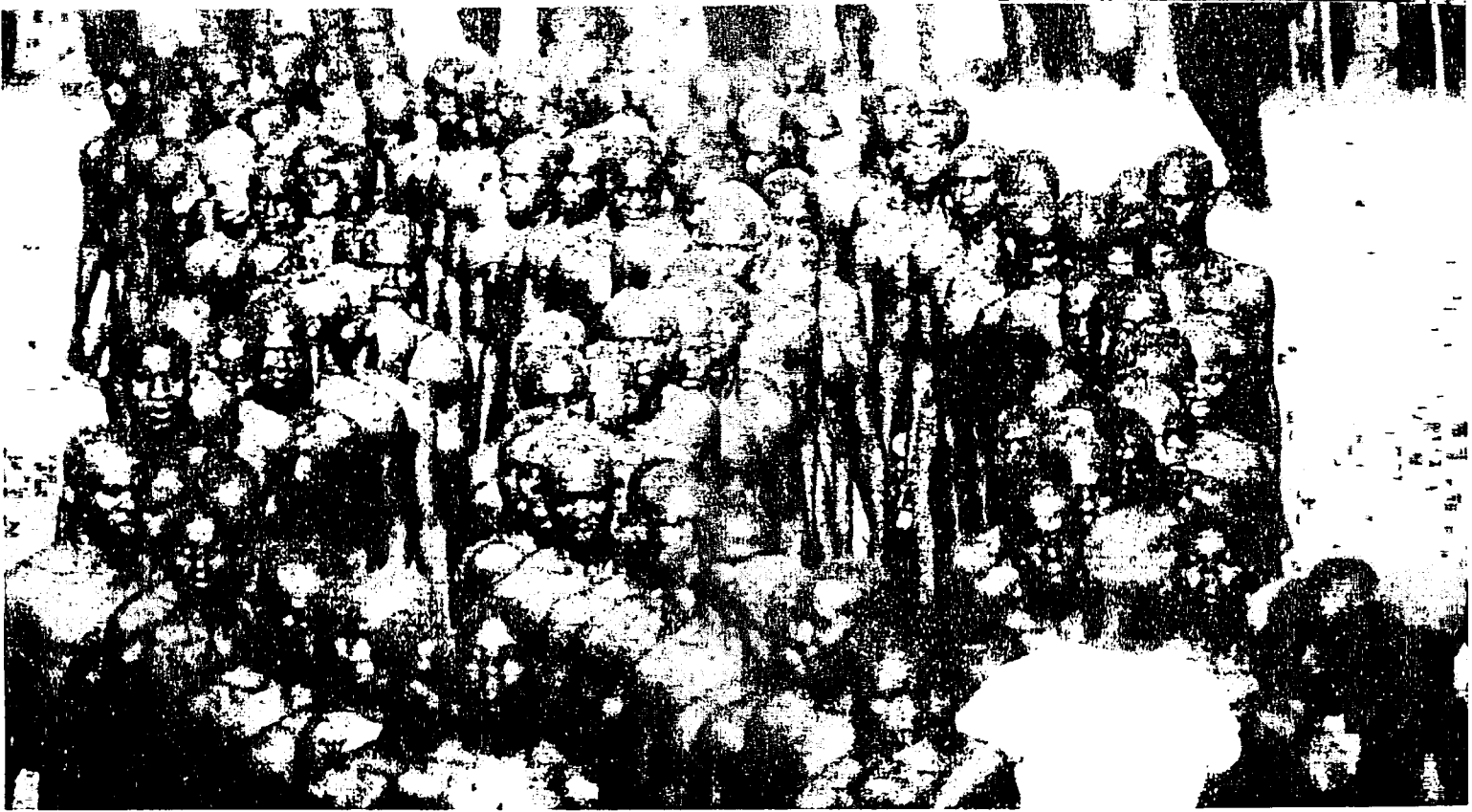
Missiles on the Head: This soldier carries around his missiles in the way that he would have traditionally carried around food or other items. (from Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year that Rocked the World*, (New York: Ballantine, 2004), 258.)

Image 4: Old Meets New



Old Meets New: (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 5: Biafran Recruits



Biafran Recruits: Young Biafran boys line up to join the Biafran army. Manpower was Biafra's most powerful weapon in the war. (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 6: Refugees Arrive By Road

THE
REFUGEES
ARRIVED

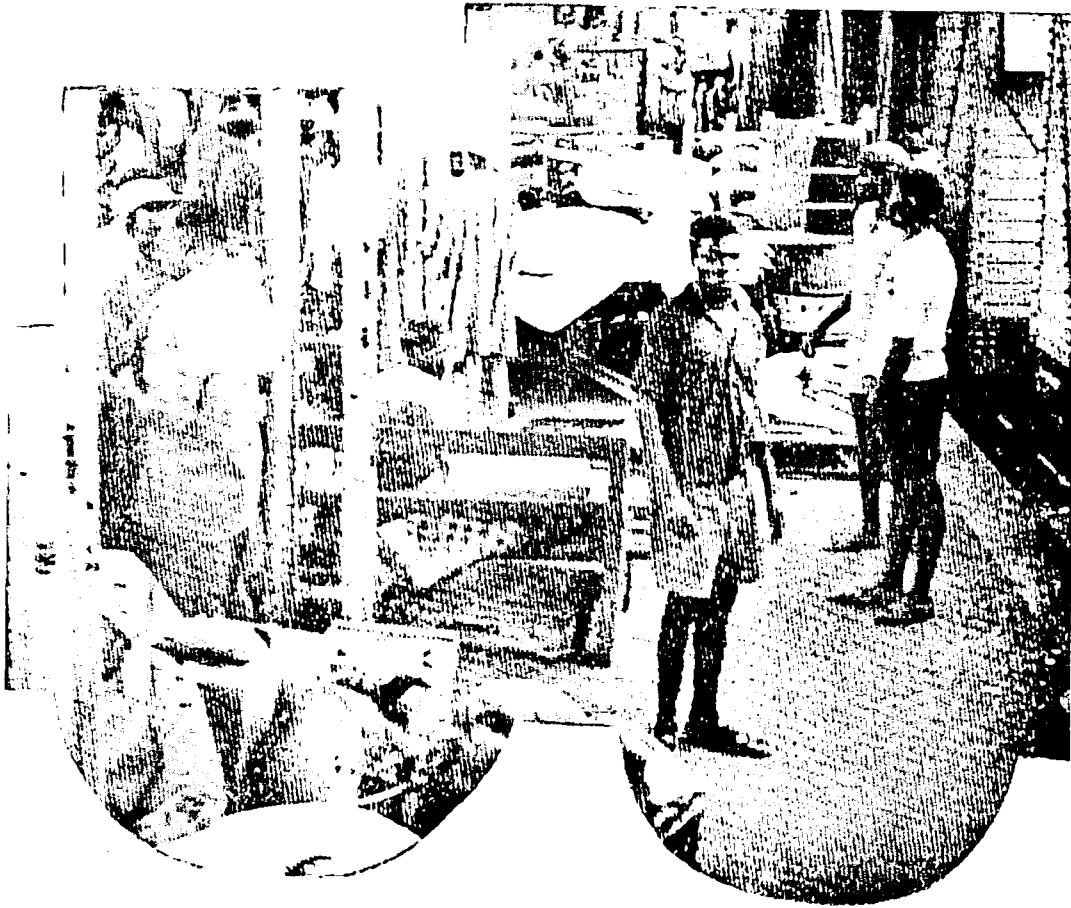
BY ROAD...



Refugees Arrive By Road: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 7: Refugees Arrive By Rail

BY RAIL...



Refugees Arrive By Rail: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information. n.d.).)

Image 8: Refugees Arrive By Air

BY AIR...



Refugees Arrive By Air: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 9: Refugees Arrive On Foot

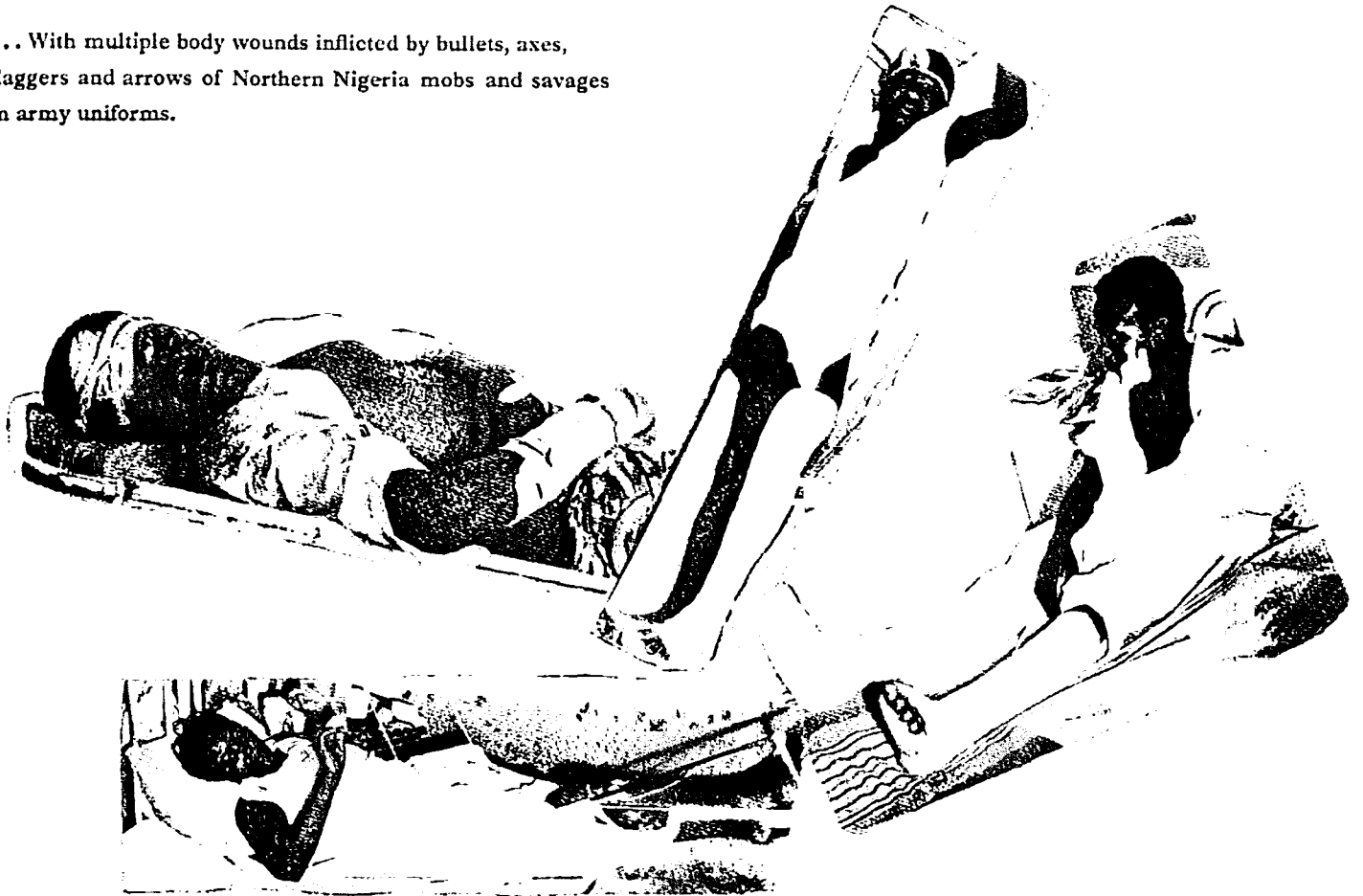


...AND ON FOOT

Refugees Arrive On Foot: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 10: Arranged Leg Casts

. . . With multiple body wounds inflicted by bullets, axes, daggers and arrows of Northern Nigeria mobs and savages in army uniforms.



Arranged Leg Casts: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 11: Destroyed Arm



DESTROYED. Eye gouged with sticks.
Matchet cuts across the face and body.
Arm and bones broken with rifle ^{and} butts by
Northern soldiers drunk with hemp.
A body and soul sustained only by
Christian faith, will power
and a determination to live.

Destroyed Arm: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information. n.d.).)

Image 12: Savagery



SAVAGERY . . .

A dagger was thrust into the mouth to slash it open from ear to ear. It happened at Jos.

Savagery: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 13: Orphaned

... ORPHANED

In tears and pains. Where is Mama? Where is Papa?



Orphaned: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 14: Mangled and Maimed



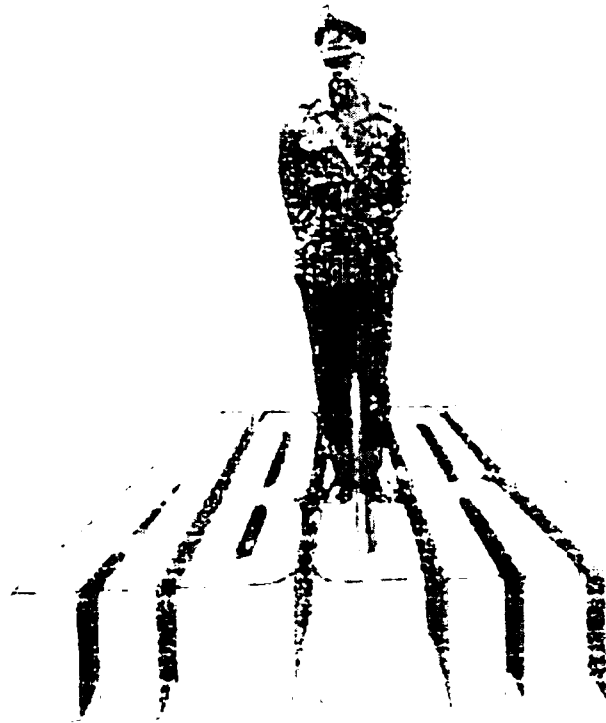
Mangled and Maimed: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 15: Round Table



Round Table: Illustration in a pamphlet printed by the Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information that depicts the talks of the Aburi Conference. (from Struggle for Survival (Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information. n.d., probably 1967).)

Image 16: “On Aburi We Stand”



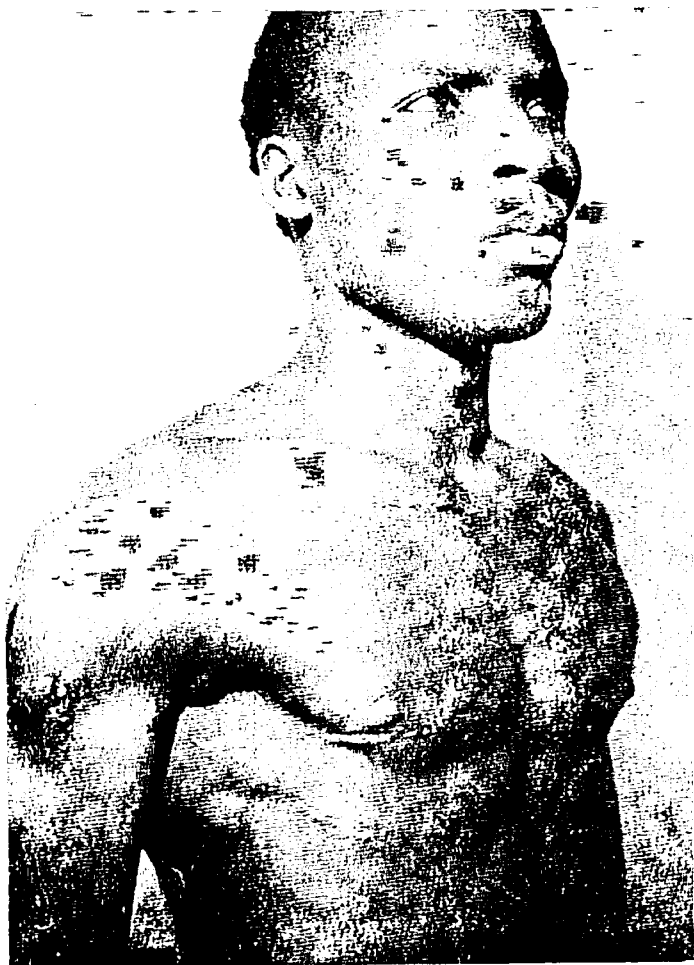
“On Aburi We Stand”: This is an image from a pamphlet printed by the Biafran Ministry of Information. This illustration is the depiction of the slogan used by Eastern Nigerians, and later Biafrans, to point out Northern deception and the East’s unconditional stipulations. (from Struggle for Survival (Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information, n.d., probably 1967).)

Image 17: Ojukwu with Biafran Flag



Ojukwu with Biafran Flag: Ojukwu, in his civilian attire, is seated in front of the new Biafran flag. (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 18: “New Horizon”

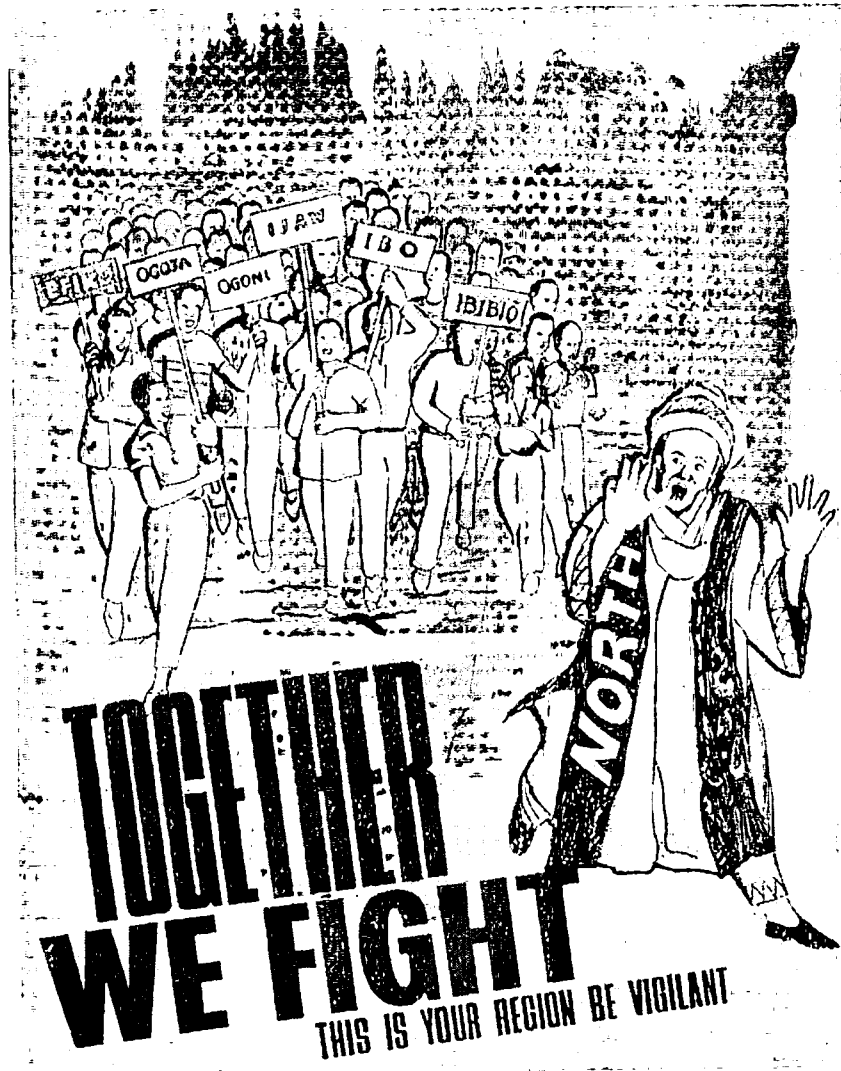


LOOKING AT A NEW HORIZON :

Resolute. Confident. Bitter. Unconquered.
His skin was torn by the horse whips of Northern
mobs. He, and other young men and women of
his generation will lay down their lives to protect
the territorial integrity of Eastern Nigeria.

“New Horizon”: An image from the photographic essay in a book about the 1966 Pogroms printed by the Eastern Ministry of Information. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

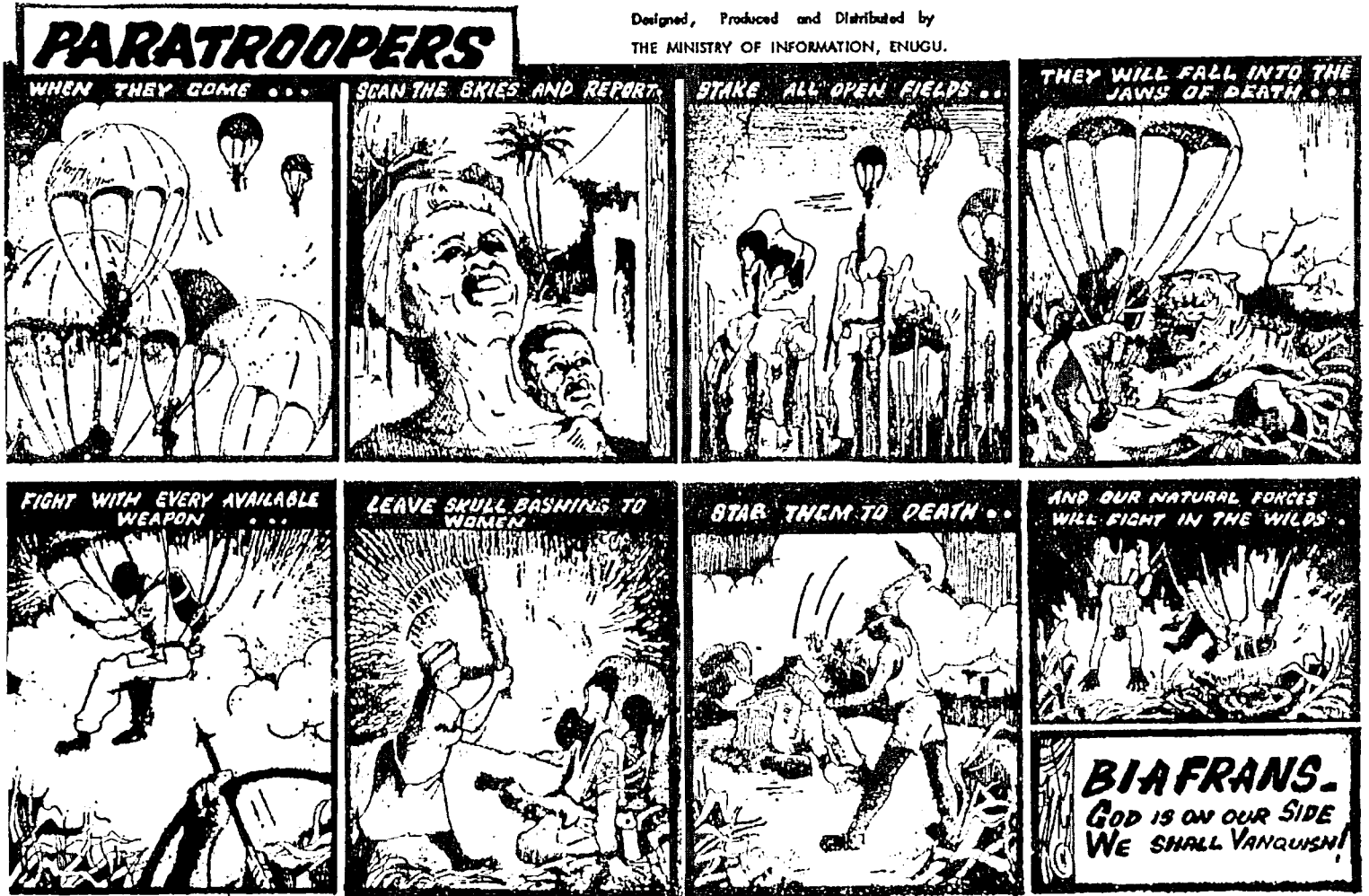
Image 19: "Together We Fight"



Eastern Ministry of Information poster

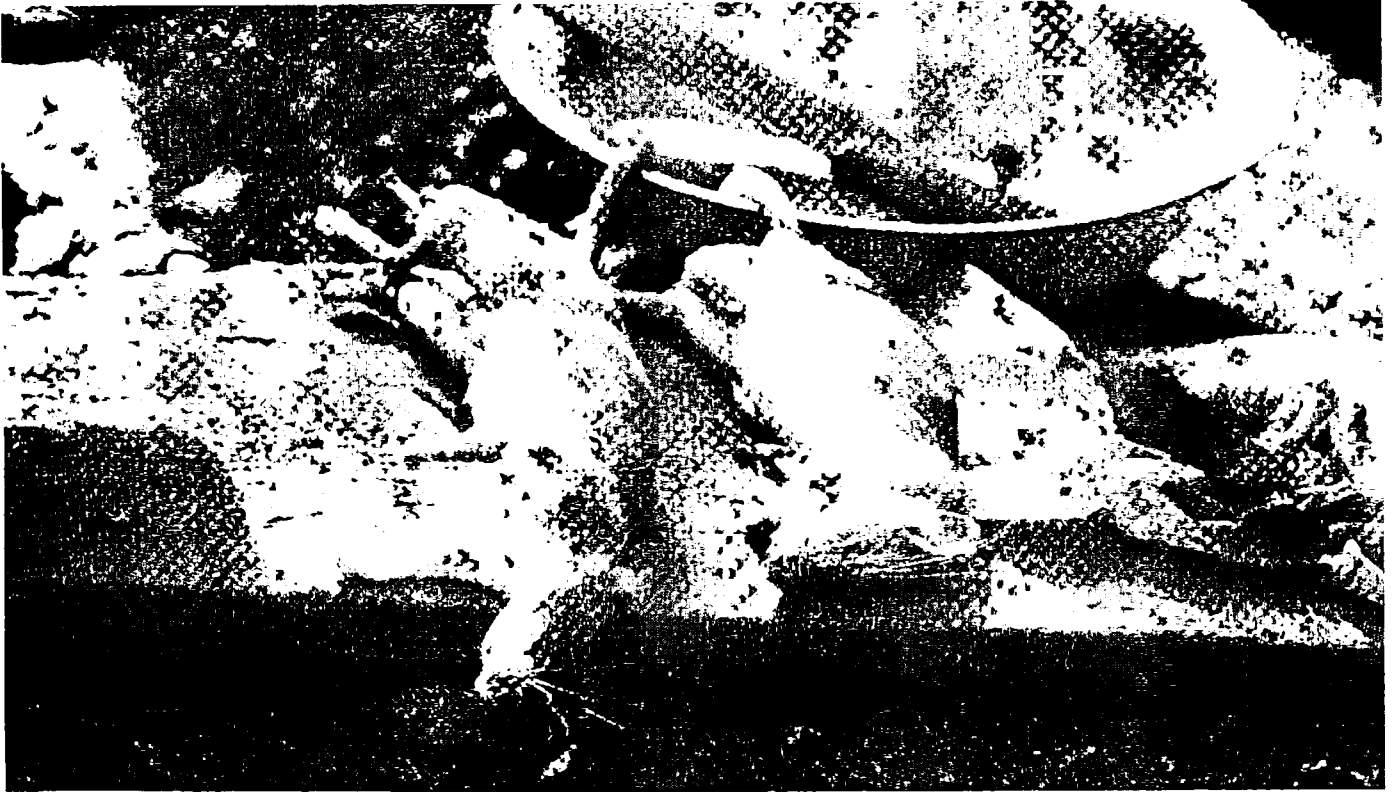
"Together We Fight": An Eastern Ministry of Information Poster. (from A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).)

Image 20: "Paratroopers"



"Paratroopers": A cartoon printed and distributed by the Biafran Ministry of Information. (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 21: Rats for Sale



Rats for Sale. These rats were for sale in the Biafran Market. The shortage of food was drastic and rats became an important source of nutrients. Images like these were sent out through Biafra's PR firm, Markpress, to conjure up international sympathy. (from F.R. Metrowich, *Nigeria: The Biafran War* (Pretoria: Afrika-Instituut, 1969).)

Image 22: TIME Magazine Cover



TIME Magazine Cover: Colonel Ojukwu on the cover of TIME magazine. The articles within the issue dealt with the human rights issues pertaining to the starvation in Biafra and Ojukwu's centrality to the Biafran cause (from TIME magazine website archive. <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0.16641.19680823.00.html>)

Image 23: "Gowon Hates You"



"Gowon Hates You": An Eastern Ministry of Information Poster. (from A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).)

Image 24: Federal Poster on Wall



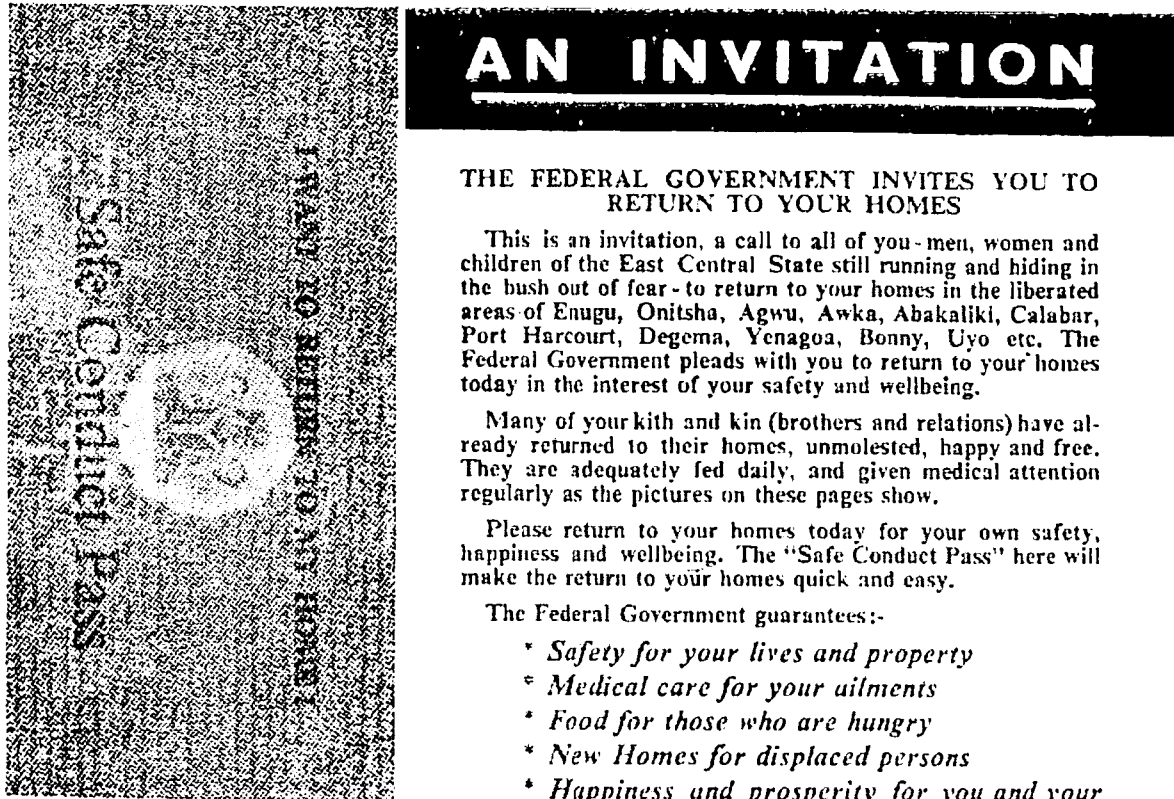
Federal Poster on Wall: (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 25: Federal Poster on the Tree



Federal Poster on the Tree: Posters were tacked up on every possible surface. Here Gowon, with his finger wagging, reminds civilians and soldiers alike of their mission: "To Keep Nigeria One Is A Task That Must Be Done." (from John de St. Jorre. *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 26: Safe Conduct Pass



Multilingual 'Safe Conduct' pass dropped by the Federal Government over rebel-held areas as part of the 'final push' of August 1968

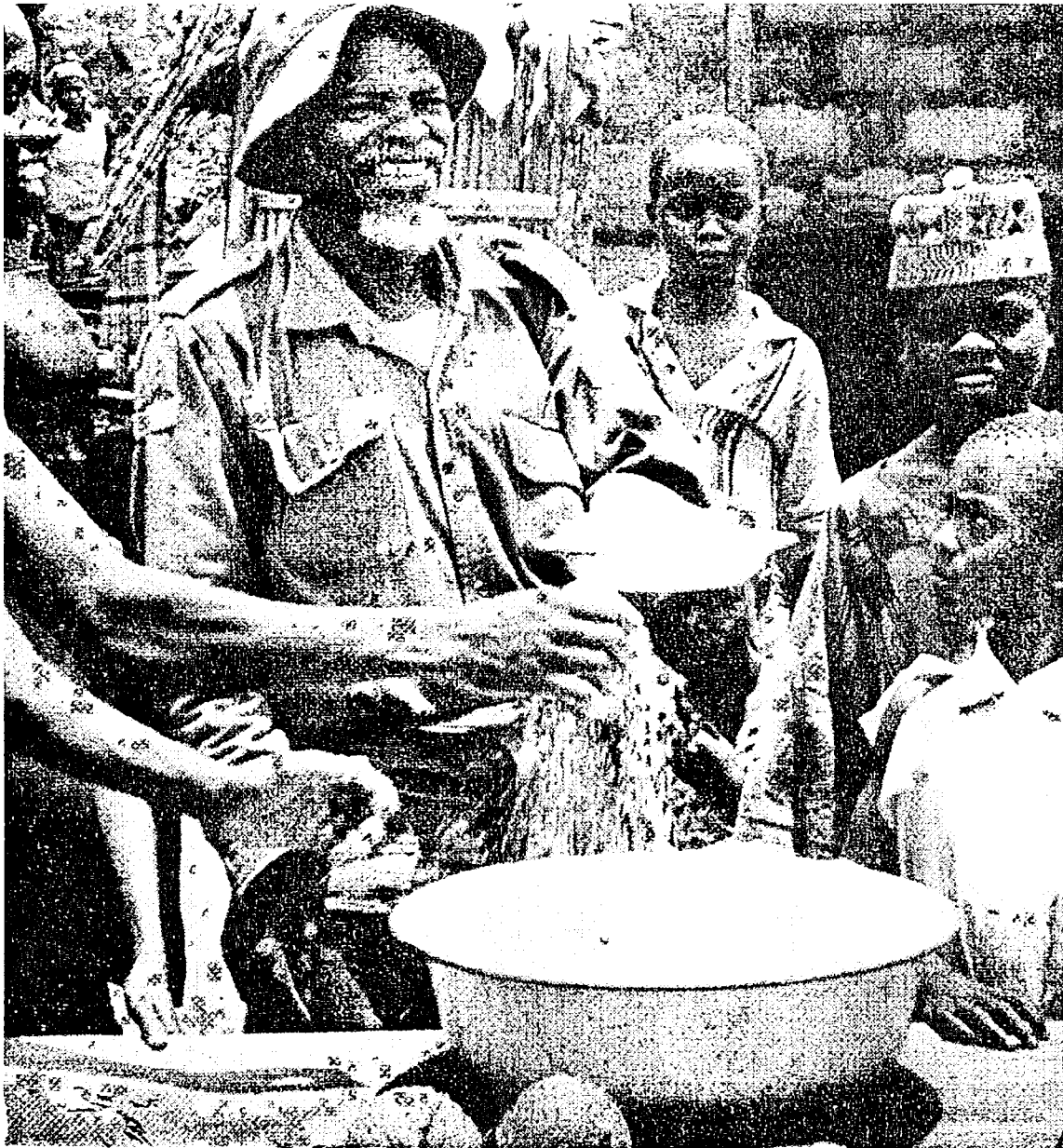
Safe Conduct Pass: These passes were dropped in mass over the remaining parts of Biafra in August 1968. It invited people to come "home," assured them of their safety and included photos of fellow Easterners returning home safely. (from A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 72.)

Image 27: Save Biafra Cartoon



Save Biafra Cartoon: Stanley Meisler, "Biafra: War of Images," *The Nation*, (March 10, 1969), 301-4. Stanley Meisler was working as the African correspondent for the Los Angeles Times.

Image 28: Nigerian Federal Soldier Feeding Biafrans



Nigerian Federal Soldier Feeding Biafrans: John de St. Jorre. *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).

Image 29: The Headless Man



HORROR OF SAVAGERY

Head chopped off with an axe. Stomach ripped open and intestines flowing out. Six-foot Onwuanaibe Anyaegbu was travelling by train from Pankshin, near Jos and met his tragic end at the Oturkpo Railway Station in Northern Nigeria where he was beheaded by Northern savages and his body put back in the train travelling to Enugu in the East. Many more men, women and children were beheaded in other Northern towns. The picture summarizes the grief of Eastern Nigeria.

The Headless Man: This image become iconic – suffering etc, was even made into a stamp for Biafra. (from *Nigerian Pogrom: the organized massacre of Eastern Nigerians* (Nigeria: Eastern Nigerian Ministry of Information, n.d.).)

Image 30: Biafran Entertainment



Biafran Entertainment: This photograph of Biafrans putting on skits. Often they would even act out elaborate plays about the Northern atrocities and went into great detail about the bloody massacres. This reminded people of the pogroms and reinforced their sentiments towards Nigeria. (from John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

Image 31: "Biafra Is Dead"



"Biafra is Dead" Nigerians celebrate Biafra's surrender and the end of the long war. (from John de St. Jorre. *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).)

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