A PHILOSOPHICAL EVALUATION OF GOWON'S 'NO VICTOR, NO VANQUISHED' MANTRA

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Abstract
General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's military head-of-state during the Nigeria-Biafra war (July 6, 1967- January 15, 1970), made a national broadcast on January 14, 1970, the eve of the official surrender of Biafra to the troops of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The kernel of the speech is that there is 'no victor, no vanquished' in the war. He called for the full reintegration of Igbos into Nigerian life. Yet, more than half a century later, Nigeria is more divided than even during the war. The ex-Biafrans still feel highly marginalised within the Nigerian project to the point that there are agitations for self-determination. The crisis of confidence is to the point that there is serious concern that the country will soon collapse. The paper employs an expository, analytical, comparative and reconstructive methodology in an effort to find out what the slogan achieved. Philosophical exposition and analysis are employed to explore and interrogate the import of the mantra. Its comparative and reconstructive outlooks derive from an evaluation of the mantra and what it is supposed to achieve for social reconstruction in Nigeria. The paper finds that there is fundamental ontological distortion in pairing 'victor' and 'vanquished' as equivalent concepts. This is a key factor preventing the slogan from living up to its mandate as a unifying force for Nigeria. The study, then, is interested in the correct interpretation of the slogan that reflects the order of things and how this understanding is critical to finding solution to the present crises in Nigeria.
Keywords: Philosophy, Nigeria-Biafra war, Gowon, 'No victor, no vanquished'

Introduction

On July 6, 1967, General Yakubu Gowon, the Head of state of Nigeria, declared a 'quick surgical' attack to bring back the Biafra people into the fabric of Nigerian family. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of Biafra, had on May 30, 1967 proclaimed the independence of the Republic of

Biafra from Nigeria. There were serious background issues that led to the war. Four weighty ones are particularly pertinent.

First is the January 15, 1966 coup led by a group of junior officers, mostly from Igbo extraction that killed top politicians mostly from the Northern part, including the prime minister and the Sardauna of Sokoto. Given the composition of the coup plotters it was subsequently baptised 'Igbo coup', not minding that the two people, Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi and Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, who foiled the coup were Igbos. In addition, Ezeani (2013:37) informs that the motive of the coup plotters was to forestall the 'Yoruba nation from impending attack by Brigadier Maimalari and his troops, planned to start in January 17, 1966', and 'to hand over power to a prominent Yoruba politician, Obafemi Awolowo' (Ezeani 2013:34). Yet, Achebe (2012:66-67) reports that the 'weeks following the coup saw Easterners attacked both randomly and in an organized fashion. There seemed to be a lust for revenge, which meant an excuse for Nigerians to take out their resentment on the Igbos who led the nation in virtually every sector.' This was followed by a revenge coup carried out by Northern officers in July 1966 which witnessed the horrendous massacre of the Igbos. Among the people killed was General Aguiyi Ironsi, who had emerged as Nigeria's new head of state. The pogrom continued until the Igbos were forced to return to their region, the only place they could feel safe (Soyinka 2009, Alabi-Isama 2013). Throughout these massacres, the federal government, in Soyinka's (2009:110) assessment was 'lackadaisical.' Following the massacre, Tanzania's President, Julius Nyerere, according to Achebe (2012:97), 'saw Biafra's attempts to secede through the lens of the Jews seeking a homeland following the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and elsewhere in Europe.' Ojukwu (1969:8) locates the origin of Biafran revolution in the genocide in which over 30,000 Igbo people were slaughtered in cold blood all over Nigeria and 'nobody asked questions, nobody showed regret, nobody showed remorse.'

Second, an attempt to manage the crises between the federal government of Nigeria and the Igbo people led to a summit in Aburi from January 4 to January 5, 1967 that resulted in the Aburi Accord. Among the issues discussed was how best to share power between the federal military government and the regional governments, how to take care of the Igbos displaced as a result of the pogroms in the North, and the need for a committee to work out a constitutional future for Nigeria. Back home, Gowon failed to implement any of the resolutions. The backpedalling by Gowon's military government on the Aburi Accord contributed significantly in the broad elements that set the war in motion (Achebe 2012, Gould 2012, Ezeani 2013, Soyinka 2009). They see the non-implementation of the Accord as the major push that led to secession. Achebe (2012:87) reports that Ojukwu responded to Gowon's purposeful inaction by instituting 'a systematic process

that severed all Biafran ties to Nigeria: First he froze all official communication with Lagos, and he then followed this swiftly by disconnecting the Eastern regional government's administration and revenues from those of the federal government' during March through April 1967. The civil war that followed is the clearest demonstration of the devastating consequence of backing out of vital agreement.

Third, is the division of the nation into twelve states by Gowon on May 27, 1967 in response to what he termed Ojukwu's assault on Nigeria's unity and blatant revenue appropriation. Even though the official reason of the federal government was that the new states were required to foster unity and stability in Nigeria, Achebe (2012:91-92) claims that Gowon, understanding the inter-ethnic rivalry, used it to 'weaken secessionist sentiments in the region and empower minority groups that lived in oil-producing regions to stand up to what they had already dreaded for years – the prospects of Igbo domination.' Effiong also shares this opinion. In an interview he granted Kumolu (2019) he cites the creation of the twelve states as the immediate reason for the declaration of Biafra by Ojukwu. For him the 'implication of the creation of states was that Ojukwu no longer had the authority to govern the eastern region. The voiding of Ojukwu's position was not reassuring for the Igbo because Ojukwu was the only one, who spoke for them until that point' (as cited in Kumolu 2019:18).

Fourth, underlying all the above-mentioned is the default makeup of Nigeria. The bunching together of the southern and northern protectorates into one country was seen and continues to be seen as an unworkable project, made worse by the colonial administrators' approach of protecting the existing social order in all of its variety and complexity instead of engaging in massive social engineering. Thus, inherent in the composition of the country was the seed of its destruction. The civil war, then, belongs to what in crisis management falls under the category of the 'known unknown' (Black 1989:31) or 'the python – the slow-burning' (Seymour and Moore, 2000:10). These are crises that can be predicted and forestalled if appropriate measures are put in place.

'No Victor, No Vanquished': Ontological Status

Ontology is a branch of metaphysics which deals with the ultimate nature of things. Its core mandate is to sieve out the true nature of a thing: what is a *thing-in-itself*? For instance, what is freedom? Are human beings' free? Can people who live within the confines of law exercise freedom? Is freedom and law necessary for the existence of each other? By interrogating the fundamental essence of things, ontology helps to portray their true reality.

What then is the ontological status of 'no victor, no vanquished'? According to *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* (1999) revised edition, victor is 'the

winner or winning side in a war or contest' and vanquish 'to defeat or overcome someone.' *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (2014) defines vanquish as 'to defeat someone or something completely.' To begin with, there is no blurred line between 'victor' and 'vanquish'; no ontological vagueness. What is there is clear-cut opposite; well-defined law of contradiction – it is either A or B; not A and B, not A or/and B; a well-honed conceptualisation *of what is* and *what is not*. This is so because 'war is the most terrible human activity by far' (Creveld 2009:169). Given the awesomeness of the stakes involved, to get into war is to go in with a complete resolve to win; or *suffer* defeat. In war practically every method can be employed to ensure victory. Nigeria employed the 'starve them into submission policy' to crush Biafra. Scholars (Achebe 2012, Forsyth in Michael Gould 2012, Byrne 1997) put the death caused by this policy in millions, mostly children. The starvation and death was so horrible that in faraway America, a young college student, Bruce Mayrock, set himself on fire to protest the killing of 'innocent Biafran babies' and to call attention to what he believed was genocide in Biafra (Chaput-Rolland 1970; Schwab 2008). He died from the injuries.

What then is the ontological status of 'no victor, no vanquished'? What does it exactly mean for a war that lasted for thirty-months, claimed lives in millions, left thousands mentally and/or physically scarred for life, destroyed countless properties, and at the end Biafra surrendered to Nigeria to be said to end on 'no victor, no vanquished' note? Both a literal and deeper interpretation of the slogan leads to intriguing conclusions. Literally, it means that no side won and no side lost the war; they are either both winners, or they are both losers. This is, perhaps, the worst form of eloquence without substance; an absurd nonsense; an elevation of sickly humour to the highest point of absurdity. On a deeper interpretation, it, most probably, means that I won but I am magnanimous enough to share the victory; to let bygones be bygones; I am so good I do not wish to rub it in. This is at best an unnecessary romantic eulogy that obscures core concerns. In a very real sense, such patronising utterance cheapens a very tragic event. To attempt to dismiss everything by placing them on the same ontological parlance allows the painful conclusion that the brutality and horrors of the war are meaningless, a joke between brothers and as such justified and forgivable.The slogan is not useful for Biafra to be reintegrated into Nigerian life. The missing piece here, the one that is relevant if the driving force behind the war is to keep Nigeria as one, is the view that the vanquished must be made to feel a *full* citizen of Nigeria. This is not so much a *right* but a *duty* the federal government owes the people of Biafra. Except for a carefully calculated show to win the approval of the international community and, perhaps, lull the vanquished to a sense of deceptive wellbeing there is no logic or stern social necessity for the slogan.

Evaluating the Concept of 'No Victor, No Vanquished'

The purpose of evaluation is to find out how useful or successful something is. This cannot take place in factual vacuum. How useful or successful is the slogan 'no victor, no vanquished in reintegrating the Igbos into the fabric of Nigerian life? Is there a credibility gap between the slogan and reality? Some facts will help to evaluate the seriousness of what the slogan has been able to achieve in the fifty-plus years of its existence. A first indicator of seriousness is to restore to the vanquished whatever was taken from them during the conflict and ensure their full reintegration into the nation. To begin with, according to Alabi-Isama (2013:619), who fought on the Nigeria side with the 3 Marine Commando Division of the Nigerian Army (3MCDO), with 'no–victor-no-vanquished statement of General Yakubu Gowon, all Biafran officers that surrendered to 3MCDO were sent to Port Harcourt prison. Their families were not allowed to see them.' In Gould's (2012:206) view for the slogan to be meaningful it should secure the position of the Igbo's as a major contributor of the Nigerian Republic. The reality to him speaks to the contrary. He maintains that evaluating the 'three main areas relevant to a country's successful development and sustainability, politics, education and economics it would seem that restrictions have been imposed on the Igbo people, in all these areas.' Speaking with Aliu (2020:19) Ikponmwen observes that 'after these number of decades (after the war), the Igbo man still cannot feel that he is an integral part of Nigeria as to be trusted to occupy the centre of the stage – the presidency of this country.' Achebe (2012:234) is of the opinion that the policies adopted by the federal government 'soon after the war could be seen not as conciliatory but as outright hostile', and helped to heighten the effect of Biafra's defeat. He gave, at least, six reasons to support this position. First, the Igbo's whose properties were confiscated by the federal government in what has been termed 'abandoned property' did not regain ownership. Alabi-Isama (2013:601) notes that 'those affected were the vanquished.' For Ezeani (2013) the real intention behind the abandoned property policy was to set the Igbos against themselves and transform the Igbo-land into an Amphitheatre of hatred. Second, Achebe points to the banking policy which nullified any bank account which had been operated during the war by Biafrans. Instead 'a flat sum of twenty pounds was approved for each Igbo depositor of the Nigerian currency, regardless of the amount of deposit' (Achebe 2012:234). This had 'the immediate result of pauperizing the Igbo middle class and earning a profit of £4 million for the Federal Government Treasury' (Achebe 1983:46). Achebe (2012:234) insists that if 'there was ever a measure put in place to stunt, or even obliterate, the economy of a people, this was it.' Third, Achebe submits that to further improvise the Igbos and ensure that their emerging commercial sector do not get back on its feet the federal government banned the importation of second-hand clothing and stock fish – two trade items critical to the economy of the

Igbos to rebuild itself. Fourth, implementing the Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1974, also known as the Indigenisation Decree, when the Igbos were still stumbling economically is a further proof of attempt to emasculate the Igbos and bar them from being equal stake holders in the life of the country.

Guyer and Denzer (2005) see the end result of the Decree as a ploy to achieve a permanent shifting of the balance of economic power away from the Igbos to other parts of the country. Such economic exclusion makes mockery of Gowon's principle of peace with equality and without victors or vanquished. Fifth, the three Rs – Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Reconciliation – launched by the Federal government to reintegrate the ex-Biafrans were not carried out. He notes that less than a fraction of the half a billion pounds requested by the administrator of East Central state for the reconstruction effort was given. Indeed, most aids given were the minimum that could be used as demonstration of official concern. For Igbo leaders there seems to be an orchestrated ploy to frustrate the Igbo's economically and all 'efforts to bring a single seaport to the entire South-East have been frustrated and jettisoned' (as cited in Okoli, Agbo and Okutu 2020:9). Indeed, Nwakanma (2019[a]) accused the federal government of continuously using the construction of second Niger Bridge to blackmail the South East into a submissive position. Finally from Achebe (2012: 235) the 'Igbo were not and continue not to be reintegrated into Nigeria, one of the main reasons for the country's continued backwardness.' Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (quoted in Ezeani 2013:167) sums up:

> They (Igbos) have been defeated in war, rendered paupers by monetary policy fiat, their property declared abandoned and confiscated, kept out of strategic public sector appointments and deprived of public services. The rest of the country forced them to remain in Nigeria and has continued to deny them equity.

When all these facts are put together, the slogan assumes the cast of a wicked mockery. For the slogan to be meaningful there is need to commit adequate resources for the rehabilitation of the war torn area. This is necessary given that the war apart from taking a heavy toll on the lives of Biafrans, also destroyed countless industries, businesses, schools, markets, churches, homes, farms, roads among others to the point that at the end of the war 'Biafra was a vast smoldering rubble' (Achebe 2012:227). Anele (2018:27) reports that 'those areas that constitute the defunct Biafran nation, especially the Igbo-speaking areas, are still suffering from the negative repercussions of the horrible civil war.'

A second indicator of seriousness is to incorporate, if any, the inventions of the vanquished into the country's capital assets to be used in the development

of the country. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of Biafra, in his last wartime speech articulated the technological feats achieved by Biafra during the war. According to him during the three years of the war Biafra built bombs, rockets, and designed and built refinery and delivery systems. The state extracted and refined petrol, and individuals refined petrol in their back gardens. Biafra built and maintained airports, under heavy bombardment and spoke to the world through a telecommunications system engineered by local ingenuity. For Achebe (2012:157) Biafra was able to expose the lie European oil companies had used to tie African countries down. He writes that:

> We were told…that technologically we would have to rely for a long, long time on the British and the West for everything. European oil companies insisted that oil-industry technology was so complex that we would never ever in the next five hundred years be able to figure it out…. In fact, we learned to refine our own oil during the two and a half years of the struggle, because we were blockaded.

Yet, fifty-plus years after, Nigeria still imports refined oil. According to Ikokwu (2019:17) 'Nigerians are surprised to learn [in 2019] that we spent more money importing refined petroleum products from abroad than the amount for which our crude oil is sold to foreign entities.' In Ikponmwen's assessment, in an interview he granted Aliu (2020:7), Nigeria would have done better if it took advantage of the skills and expertise that the people in the enclave of then Biafra exhibited and made the best use of them. Aliu quotes him as stating that looking 'at the technological development around the world, it is true that the Igbos have proven that they are a people who have the skills to succeed in any endeavor they embark on.' Okolo (2017) blames the continued dependence of Nigeria scientifically and technologically on the West to the inability of Nigeria to acknowledge, harness, invest and sustain Biafra's inventions during the war. Ikeazor cited by Ezeani (2013:56-57) adds: 'Biafra was …that spark of African modern technological ingenuity and inventiveness that might have, if allowed, taken African development on a different course today.' He maintains that Biafra 'Biafra was potentially Africa's Japan or the seat of Africa's scientific and industrial revolution, but she was killed in infancy and Africans confined to the consumer pattern of life that suited British and Western commercial interests and exporters.' In Richard West's lamentation as cited by Achebe (2012:171-172) 'Biafra is more than a human tragedy. Its defeat…would mark the end of African independence. Biafra was the first place I had been to in Africa where the Africans themselves were truly in charge.' Also there was no attempt by Nigeria to study the intellectual input of Biafra on how best to build a great nation on a strong intellectual foundation as set out in the Ahiara Declaration. For instance the Ahiara Declaration was emphatic that without social justice 'harmony and stability within society disappear and antagonisms between various sections of the community take their place' (Ojukwu 1969:2). It also

stressed the need for self-reliance by ensuring that the state takes control of the main springs of the economy – the means of production, distribution and exchange (Ojukwu 1969:18). If Nigeria had paid attention to these the present crises would have been prevented.

A third indicator of seriousness is to apply a high degree of analysis to understanding the context and issues that led to the war and to device and implement strategies to forestall all future occurrences. The main reason the Igbo's seceded was the high degree of insecurity they felt due to the brutal way they were massacred following the January 15, 1966 coup. Soyinka (2009) reports that it was a progressive pogrom of the Igbos, which erupted in October 1966, that catalysed their resolve to secede. He further writes that he was 'not alone in writing embittered articles on the massacres, especially denouncing the lackadaisical attitude of Gowon's government towards the killings' (Soyinka 2009:110). For him secession was justified but from practical considerations, politically and militarily unwise. In Alabi-Isama's (2013) view the killing of the Igbo's made them to feel unsafe wherever they were in the country except in their own region of origin. To prevent the disintegration of Nigeria, the federal government declared what was termed the war of unity on Biafra to pull it back into the Nigerian family. Alabi-Isama (2013:434) laments that many decades after the end of the civil war fought to keep Nigeria united, that Nigeria is still far from being united. To him that is an indication 'that something is fundamentally wrong.' What then is fundamentally wrong? To begin with, those things that led to the war – lack of love between Nigerians, religious bigotry, tribalism, favouritism have not been addressed and are even worse now. For instance, the Igbos still do not feel a part of the Nigerian family. ABC Nwosu in an interview with Agbakwuru (2019:30) states that 'Ndigbo are very unhappy with their situation in Nigeria and all Nigerians should know that.' For Igbo leaders, crimes are still perpetrated against the Igbo in present day Nigeria especially given the way innocent and harmlessly protesting Igbo people are massacred by soldiers under Operation Python Dance, Crocodile Tears, and the like (as cited in Okoli, Agbo and Okutu 2020:9). Achebe (1983; 2012) insists that Nigeria will probably achieve consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo. Importantly, the insecurity is still on-going. Ezeani (2013:165-166) reports that a December 2011 published research by the *International Society for Civil Liberties and the Rule of Law* states that '90 per cent of the 54,000 people murdered in Nigeria by the state and quasi-state operatives since 1999 are Igbo.' Further he notes that 'at least 90 percent of people murdered by the Boko Haram across Northern Nigeria in their (2011/2012) 23 days hysteric mayhem are Igbo' (Ezeani 2013:166). Sobowale (2019:43) writes that Boko Haram is still very much around, capturing towns and villages, over-running army barracks and killing soldiers.' Ikokwu (2019:17) reports that the United Nations rapporteur to

Nigeria attributed the loss of more than 30,000 lives and several millions of internally and externally displaced refugees in IDP camps to Boko Haram terrorism. In Onovo's view, in an interview he granted Kanu (2019), Boko Haram has resurged after the Buhari-led government negotiated with them, paid them two million Euros as ransom and released many of their fighters and bomb makers that were arrested by President Goodluck Jonathan's government. This is, perhaps, part of the advantage of being in the victor's camp. One only need to reflect on the fate of Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), hounded as a criminal for years, abducted and jailed in 2021, for agitating for the revival of Biafra, by the Buhari-led government to appreciate the depth of the disparity in treatment.

Indeed, Naipaul's (2002:31) observation concerning what is lacking in Indian society helps to understand Nigeria's problem. He notes that there 'is an absence of that element, to which all contribute and by which all are linked, where common standards are established and a changing sensibility appears to define itself.' The failure to engage with the extent the scars of the war are still boldly imprinted on the mind and memory continues to affect the realisation of true patriotic spirit among Nigerians. Ezeani (2013:189) defines patriotism as 'a natural response emanating from a sense of belonging and contentment fostered by the state through its policies and actions.' For the ex-Biafrans the fragile sense of regarding Nigeria as a natural right was irretrievably destroyed by the war. Nwakanma (2019[b]:32) cautions that 'when people have no common stakes in the future of a nation, or its dynamics of power, they do not hearken to the summons of patriotism or nationalism.' Nigeria must face the fact that the civil war wrecked the country to a point from which it may take a long time to recover if it ever does. By marginalising a region, rendering its people politically weak and exacerbating inequality, the country is paving the way for its own demise. Nwakanma (2019[b]:32) warns that the 'threat to Nigerian sovereignty is already within' because it 'is in the natural inclination of those who feel themselves unrepresented in the nation to subvert the conditions of tyranny that isolates and marginalizes them.' Symptoms of this is already in full swing in the form of agitations coming from some ex-Biafran people, typically represented by Movement for the actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and IPOB. Interestingly, this deep sense of discontent is not limited to Igbo people alone. Soyinka (2020) views the country as 'a contraption teetering on the edge of total collapse.' Indeed, Igbo leaders insist that as 'long as the marginalisation goes, Igbo groups like Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, and Movement for Survival of Biafran People, MASSOB, among others will continue to show their misgivings and the ripple effects are always uncountable' (as cited in Okoli, Agbo and Okutu 2020:9). Does a country not have a responsibility to itself to undo the wrong of the past? Fortunately, Fukuyama (2011:18) reminds us that 'human societies are not trapped by their

pasts.' What Nigeria needs is to have the courage to engage with the past, not through slogan, but in a meaningful way: accepting the mistakes that were made, correcting them and strengthening the three dimensions of political development – the state, rule of law and political accountability such that every part of the country and individual is equitably protected.

A fourth indicator of seriousness is the inclusion of the war history in the educational curriculum and setting up of war monuments in honour of those who lost their lives during the conflict and especially the Biafran children that died of starvation. While Nigeria celebrates many important dates in the life of the country – Independence Day, democracy day, June 12 – the only one that is not celebrated and never mentioned is the Nigeria–Biafra war. It has never featured as part of official school curriculum. The official silence surrounding the war is almost as if it did not take place. In Gould's (2012:201) assessment the country makes no further reference to the war; there are no memorials to the war even in the national museum in Lagos; there is nothing in the school curriculum to tell pupils of the war; it 'seems as though a certain air-brushing of the event has occurred in the minds of the population and throughout the topography of the country.' Ezeani (2013:142) notes 'the incomprehensibleness of the fact that hitherto there is nowhere in the whole of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria with a memorial monument for the victims of the Biafran historic tragedy.' In Byrne's (1997) view the ability of Nigeria to face its history would be a demonstration of maturity in addition to building a monument at Uli and acknowledging the roles of all the participants in the tragedy. Indeed,

Achebe (2012) wonders if the information blockade around the war is a case of calculated historical suppression. For Anele (2018:27):

> it is interesting to observe that whereas successive administrations, including the present one, have celebrated May 29 as democracy day…, the significance of commemorating the birth of defunct Biafra as a yearly event was not an item in the public consciousness even in Igbo heartland until the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra led by Nnamdi Kanu emerged on the scene.

Even at that he accuses President Buhari and other caliphate colonists and their errand boys and girls from Southern Nigeria of 'using state apparatus of coercion and power to stop people from remembering those who died in the struggle to actualize the sovereign state of Biafra' (Anele 2018:27). Achebe (1975:xiii) cautions that 'in [Nigeria] situation the greater danger lies not in remembering but in forgetting, in pretending that slogans are the same as truth.' He maintains that 'Nigeria, always prone to self-deception, stands in great need of reminders.' The danger in suppressing memory is that it forces the mind to a *hardened* remembering that never forgets.

A fifth indicator of seriousness is to spell out the punishment for war crimes and ensure its implementation. The pre-war and civil war killings of the Igbo's have been described as genocide (Achebe 2012, Soyinka 2009, Ezeani 2013). Throughout the conflict, Achebe (2012:229) reports that 'the Biafrans consistently charged that the Nigerians had a design to exterminate the Igbo people from the face of the earth.' He, in fact, insists that 'a detailed plan for mass killing was implemented by the government – the army, the police – the very people who were there to protect life and property. Not a single person has been punished for these crimes' even though 'it was a premeditated plan that involved careful coordination, awaiting only the right spark' (Achebe 2012:82). Effiong enlightens more. Speaking with Kumolu (2019) he maintains that the fact that the Igbos excelled tremendously in business and other areas and played leading roles everywhere before independence marked them out for envy and resentment from other regions. It got to a point the 'prominence of the Igbo became a threat and there was a question of what to do with them. If people are marked for attack or elimination flimsy reasons are always given' (as cited in Kumolu 2019:19). He recounts that long before the coup, then Premier of Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, in an interview complained that the Igbo always wanted to be the head and take charge. This, Effiong admits made him to 'realise that even before the pogroms of 1966, there were already plans to attack the Igbo.' For him the first coup was just an excuse to implement an already perfected agenda. In Achebe's (2012:77-78) view:

> One of the first signs…of an Igbo backlash came in the form of a 1966 publication from Northern Nigeria called *The Nigerian Situation: Facts and Background*. In it the Igbo were cast as an assertive group that unfairly dominated almost every sector of Nigerian society. No mention was made of the culture of educational excellence.

Ezeani (2013:228) reports that the theme song of Radio Kaduna, which is government-controlled, in 1967-1970 is 'Let us go and crush them [the Igbos]. We will pillage their property, rape their womenfolk, kill off their men folk and leave them uselessly weeping. We will complete the pogrom of 1966.' How can Gowon claim that he never intended genocide against the Igbos? What did he do to stop such hate theme given their potency to destroy? Schabas (2009) tells us that Julius Streicher was sentenced to death by the Nuremberg Tribunal and executed by hanging on 16 October 1946 even though he was not a member of the military establishment and had played no direct role in war crimes or crimes against peace but because of his hate propaganda which acted as incitement to murder and extermination at the time when Jews in the East were being killed under the most horrible conditions. Writing on the Calabar massacre of 1968 where the Nigerian forces shot about 2000 Igbos, mostly civilians, Achebe (2012:137) described the action as 'reminiscent of the Nazi policy of eradicating Jews throughout Europe just

twenty years earlier, the Nigerian forces decided to purge the city of its Igbo inhabitants.' Then, again, the 'economic blockade put in place by Nigeria's federal government resulted in shortages of every imaginable necessity…' and it got to a point where the rations went 'from one meal a day to one meal every other day – to nothing at all' (Achebe 2012:199-200). Further, he states that 'at the height of Gowon's economic blockade and "starve them into submission" policy, upward of fifty thousand Biafran civilians, most of them babies, children, and women, were dying every single month' (Achebe 2012:210). The starvation policy of the federal government fits in with the most obvious act of genocide by omission which is 'deliberately imposing conditions of life designed to destroy the group' (Schabas 2009:177). Igbo leaders insist that there are still cries of war crimes such as the Ogbeasowa massacre in Asaba on October 7, 1967 which claimed the lives of more than 2000 Igbo men, women and boys (as cited in Okoli, Agbo and Okutu 2020:9).

A sixth indicator is to open up a healthy and sustained reflection on the Nigerian project – its coming to being, and the necessary lessons the war provided and continues to provide. To begin with, the amalgamation was an ill-fated project conceived primarily to serve the economic interest of Britain which the north is meant to protect. As such, Nigeria's default structural arrangement by the British colonial government invested too much power on the Northern part of Nigeria. From the outset the 'British laid the foundation for the lopsided federation Nigeria eventually became by lumping together non-Hausa and non-Fulani ethnic nationalities alongside the Hausa and Fulani as a single geopolitical unit occupying about four-fifth of Nigeria's landmass' (Anele 2019:26). This Anele insists aided Balewa in his bid to match landmass with population to annul results of 1963 census which revealed that the South was more populous than the North. In its place, verification exercise which 'discovered' additional eight million people in the North was accepted. This paved way for subsequent northern military heads of state to create more states and local government areas in the north to the detriment of the south and also to ensure that more resources flowed from the south to the north. This was further compounded by the 1999 constitution which entrenched northern supremacy over the south. Anele (2019:26) laments that in 'the present arrangement the north has more states and more local government than the south, giving the region unassailable domination in institutions that determine the allocation of political power and economic resources, including the National Assembly.' He reminds that this situation is the reason 'according to current estimates, northern Nigeria which contributes less than twenty percent of revenue to the national treasury receives over fifty percent of it.' According to Sobowale (2020:17) 'Southerners are forced to labour only to observe the revenue from our collective effort going North….' Achebe (2012) points to amalgamation as complicating Nigeria's destiny by tying together over 250 ethnic groups with distinct culture and languages.

Igbo leaders stated that given the nature of some groups in Nigeria, the Nigerian union is an impossibility (as cited in Okoli, Agbo and Okutu 2020). In fact, they insist that war or no war, the "Lugardian" state is a very dubious and fraudulent amalgamation forged as a nation of divided people and nurtured against the strategic interest of the Igbo in order to exploit Southern Igbo and Niger Delta territories, which constitute the richest part of Africa. In Crowder's (1966) view the amalgamation of Nigeria amounts to bringing together groups of mutually-incompatible peoples. For Schwarz (1968:3) the Northern part of Nigeria and the Southern part of Nigeria are 'different countries.' Ojukwu (1969:8) submits that 'Nigeria was made up of peoples and groups with very little in common.' Britain's role in amalgamation, then, was fundamentally irresponsible. As a country with appreciable knowledge of history and crises formation and management, the Nigeria-Biafra war should have been foreseen in the category of known-unknowns.

If there is one lesson the war has revealed, it is the deep-seated division among the different entities that make up Nigeria. This division was further enlarged by the aftermath of the war, the continuing alienation of the Igbos and the almost permanent control of power by the North. What calls for greater concern is that this trend has continued till date. Politicians during campaigns, often, rent crowds to justify the purported number of their supporters. Iredia (2019:27) reports that the two major parties [APC and PDP] in order to validate the figures being bandied 'embarked on rallies to which they transported rented crowds in different parts of the country.' Indeed, the last presidential election of 2019 is reputed as the worst in Nigeria:

> The security forces took sides with the ruling party and unleashed violence not only on voters, but on INEC officers. There was voter suppression in most southern states while outrageous and inconsistent figures were published by INEC for many northern states. (as cited in Kanu 2019[a]:28).

Nwakanma (2019[a]:38) notes that 'Buhari's brazen disregard for other people, particularly the South Easterners, evidenced in his sustained pattern of discrimination in the last four years against them threatens Nigeria's national security far more than any other time in Nigeria.' Indeed, Soyinka (2020) accused President Buhari of lopsided appointments to crucial positions in civil service and parastatals and insists that Nigeria 'is divided as never before, and this ripping division has taken place under the policies and conduct of none other than President Buhari….'

A seventh indicator of seriousness is to restructure the country in such a way that no region feels marginalised. Kalu told Kanu (2019[b]) in an interview that the essence of restructuring is to create efficient systems that will ensure equity in representation. According to Ezeani (2013:151) 'equal relations are

difficult when one region of a state is so large or so powerful to override the wishes of the other regions put together.' For Nwakanma (2019[b]:32) the 'South of Nigeria, particularly the South East and the South-South regions have no interest in the survival of Nigeria as it is currently structured and shaped…'. Anele (2018:27) predicts that the 'quest for Biafra will remain a festering wound until either the defunct nation is restored in one form or another after peaceful dismemberment of Nigeria or a sane and responsible government emerges that would correct geopolitical anomalies in the current system and ensure justice and fairness to all ethnic nationalities in the country.' It is also important to remember that the discovery of oil in the old Eastern region was at the heart of the war (Byrne 1997, Achebe 2012, Gould 2013). Since the end of the war, the federal government has taken over the control of oil. Ishola Williams in an interview he granted Onuoha (2020:25) states that the current arrangement where 'the Federal Government takes all the money and shares it while considering 30 per cent extra for the states with resources' needs to be amended constitutionally. The amendment for him should 'let states control the resources in their territory and agree constitutionally what percentage to give to the Federal Government.' Indeed there have been many serious agitations from the Southern and Middle Belt leaders for the restructuring of the country. This led President Goodluck Jonathan to convey a National Conference in 2014. Instead of implementing the detailed resolutions of the conference, President Buhari on assumption of office in 2015 dismissed the reports and consigned them to the archives. Fukuyama (2011:7) warns that 'political decay occurs when political systems fail to adjust to changing circumstances.' The crises in Nigeria attest to the need for some fundamental things to change if the country is to be saved from extinction.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows a huge credibility gap between the slogan and the reality. The facts speak of clear evidence that there is no middle way between a victor and a vanquished: a victor is a victor and a vanquished is a vanquished. Contrary to what one might expect, the fact that over fifty years have passed since January 15, 1970 does not make things any easier. Instead the crises of confidence have continued to the point that even non-Igbos appear fed up with the state of the nation. To prevent a complete collapse of the country there is need to put in place fundamental elements for unity to exist. To achieve this will require concerted effort on, at least, two main regards.

The first is to translate the aim of the slogan into reality. To achieve this, there is need to embark on serious reconstruction of Igbo land as well as open up political space that will enable Igbos, and indeed all Nigerians, to have a level playing ground in contributing and determining the affairs of the country. This

cannot happen under the current Nigerian Constitution. As such reviewing the Constitution as a basis for effective restructuring of the country is a must. This will guarantee the emergence of implementable strategies on how best a country with disparate peoples and religions and cultural backgrounds can be fused into a strong entity where healthy differences are respected, nurtured, encouraged, promoted and sustained. This in turn will form the basis for creating strong foundation for common goals, objectives and values founded on and propelled by the principle of meritocracy.

Second there is need to prevent a repeat of the war. Here what is required is a *long* memory. The components of this will consists of a detailed and close scrutiny of *all* that happened, why they happened, the lessons they provide, how best to consolidate on the gains, what measures to put in place to forestall the negatives from reoccurring and how best to create a mental space for forgiveness, healing and restitution. This memory should also incorporate the vision of the present and the future. This will be done through a careful articulation of the pains and prospects of today and through in-depth analyses, rigorous investigation and clear-cut interpretation forecast the future. This way forgiveness, reconciliation and harmony will be achieved not through *conjured unity* or *hollow* slogan but through *empathic* reaching out to the *vanquished* in a way that will enable deep-seated injuries, bitterness, pains and hurts to loosen up, let go and heal.

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