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MEMORY, RECONCILIATION, AND PEACEBUILDING IN POST-CIVIL WAR SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

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AFRICAN PEACEBUILDING NETWORK
APN WORKING PAPERS: NO. 19

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ABOUT THE SERIES

"African solutions to African problems" is a favorite mantra of the African Union, but since the 2002 establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture, the continent has continued to face political, material, and knowledge-related challenges to building sustainable peace. Peacebuilding in Africa has sometimes been characterized by interventions by international actors who lack the local knowledge and lived experience needed to fully address complex conflict-related issues on the continent. And researchers living and working in Africa need additional resources and platforms to shape global debates on peacebuilding as well as influence regional and international policy and practitioner audiences. The APN Working Papers series seeks to address these knowledge gaps and needs by publishing independent research that provides critical overviews and reflections on the state of the field, stimulates new thinking on overlooked or emerging areas of African peacebuilding, and engages scholarly and policy communities with a vested interest in building peace on the continent.

MEMORY, RECONCILIATION, AND PEACEBUILDING IN POST-CIVIL WAR SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA[1]

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JUNE 2018

INTRODUCTION

This paper critically explores the nature of post-civil war peace in Nigeria since the end of the Nigeria-Biafra War in 1970. The context of this study is the recent emergence of neo-Biafran groups calling for the secession of the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria from the federation, almost five decades after secessionist Biafra was defeated and reabsorbed into Nigeria under the banner of national unity. Nigeria's post-civil war nation-state peacebuilding project was framed around reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction policies which shaped the nature of national citizenship, the "peace dividend," and reintegration of the Igbo into a united Federal Republic of Nigeria. The failure of these policies has inevitably fueled lingering post-war memories. The construction of individual and collective memories of the war is intertwined with relations of power, inclusion, and exclusion. Ultimately, while attempts at post-war reconciliation and national unity appeared to have eased opposing memories of the war in the public realm, group memories of "hurt," "injustice," and "marginalization" still flourished in the private realm—which consisted of kinship and family networks, town unions, and ethnic groups. Part of the focus of this paper is to examine the

connections between such ill feelings and the emergence of neo-Biafran groups within the country and in the diaspora that are evoking memories of, and nurturing the quest for, a "new" Biafra. As the mobilization efforts of the neo-Biafra groups gain increasing attention in Southeastern Nigeria, the problematic nature of Nigeria's post-conflict peace, which has not completely eliminated the risk of a relapse into conflict since 1970, is brought to the fore.

The Nigeria-Biafra War foreshadowed many of the devastating conflicts that would threaten the survival of most postcolonial African states. To this day, it still raises questions about the complex challenges facing peacebuilding in Africa. Consolidating post-war reconciliation and building durable peace is even more challenging in African contexts where state and nation building remain highly contested works in progress. This invariably has enormous consequences for lasting post-conflict peace, reconciliation, and settlement, and their impact on beneficiaries in specific contexts. The literature on the Nigeria-Biafra War tends to obstruct a broader understanding of the war, which many regard as the first major conflict in independent Africa, and the only Cold War secessionist crisis that was "debated seriously in terms of the substantive meaning of self-determination."[2] It was the only Cold War secessionist conflict to call into question the exercise, nature, and limits of the right to self-determination, and the ambiguity and contested nature of sovereignty in postcolonial Africa.[3] The past decade and a half have witnessed a steady flow of literature on memories of the Nigeria-Biafra War. Dominant forms of analysis dwell on the bifurcation of the conflict along ethnic, regional, and religious lines of "us" against "them," while others dwell on the "hard" positions on the major issues of self-determination versus national unity. There is a proliferation of "top-down" literature by major actors and generals who conducted the war that provides highly personalized accounts of it, in addition to other writers who were either active or passive participants in the war. This paper contributes to the debate by examining the relationship between memory and peacebuilding and calls for a rethinking of the ways we study and understand memory and peacebuilding in a post-war context.

MEMORY, RECONCILIATION, AND PEACEBUILDING

The realities of post-conflict societies are such that there is no determinate blueprint for peacebuilding. Most of these societies face hard choices in addressing difficult post-conflict issues, including addressing the legacy of

past injustices and atrocities, rebuilding broken relationships arising from conflict, establishing and guaranteeing public safety in every facet of life, and the need for legitimate, effective political and administrative institutions. The uniqueness of every post-conflict society makes these processes different in terms of what comes first, what is needed at a particular point in time, who should do it, and how it should be done.

Much of the discourse on peacebuilding draws substantially from *An Agenda for Peace*, published by former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in 1992. That document provides a systematic formulation of what the term "peacebuilding" entails in a post-Cold War context by defining it broadly as "structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" in the medium- and long-term in post-conflict societies.[4] *An Agenda for Peace* was clearly a spin-off of mainstream post-Cold War thinking that perceived peacebuilding as a central focus of international efforts, particularly in the rapidly expanding UN operations in Africa. As a critical component of the post-Cold War context, peacebuilding was poised to play a major role in post-conflict societies, and this accounted for the expansion of peacebuilding activities, institutions, and knowledge across the board.[5] To understand peacebuilding and establish a relationship between peacebuilding and peace, or reconciliation in Africa, three main perspectives are delineated in the literature. The first is the liberal peacebuilding tradition, which perceives peacebuilding as constitutive of a global project of liberal governance advanced by international, regional, national, and local actors. The second is the stabilization approach to peacebuilding, which perceives peacebuilding as primarily concerned with international stability, the status quo, and supporting secure states with well-policed borders. The third is the social justice model of peacebuilding. This normative position argues that peacebuilding should be based on social justice by addressing international, national, and local inequalities and inequities.[6]

Taken together, the "liberal" and "stabilization" paradigms of peacebuilding aim to impose order and "subvert radical challenges to the global and national distribution of power and resources, and to stabilize the international system," while maintaining hegemony and domination through material and discursive means.[7] Beyond these lie the "social justice" paradigms of peacebuilding, which seek to encourage broad access to state resources and institutions, emancipate marginalized and disadvantaged groups, and redistribute income, among other goals.[8] Peacebuilding programs designed in support of social justice may still be contested, fragmented, and contra-

dictory; the form or nature of "justice" and the agents and vehicles for its promotion or implementation may remain unsettled. This does not mean that the redeeming features of the social justice paradigm of peacebuilding should be neglected, as it is the only paradigm that can lead to reconciliation. The idea of reconciliation is still a contested one that is perceived and deployed across all levels of society. For some, reconciliation is differentiated and can be an end or a means, an outcome or a process. For others, it may be politically neutral, unavoidably ideological, conservative, or transformative in orientation.[9] Reconciliation, as adopted here, is an umbrella term for an overarching process that specifically refers to concepts of justice, peace, healing, forgiveness, truth, reparations, and human rights, among other issues, in a broader peacebuilding framework necessary for the post-conflict transformation of society into a more peaceful, inclusive, and democratic one.[10] Reconciliation has been applied to several levels of conflict—from individual and group to broad systemic and structural conflicts—and it continues to take on different meanings. While a great deal of debate still exists on the applications of reconciliation, it is pertinent to state that the concepts mentioned above are "complementary and interdependent instruments of the overall relationship-building process of reconciliation," and "reconciliation is not one instrument among several, rather, it is the overall relationship-oriented process within which these diverse instruments are constitutive parts."[11]

This paper expatiates on the ways that conflicts and peacebuilding practices impact memory and how individual/group memories of hurt, injustice, and marginalization remain relevant in post-conflict contexts. Nigeria's post-civil war peacebuilding project has generated a range of diverse memories that have not necessarily been conducive to reconciliation and peace, but rather have reinforced and reignited the conflict in many ways. This prompts the need for a deeper interrogation and understanding of "the very meaning [of] 'peace' that various peacebuilding approaches claim to be building."[12] Addressing the existence of post-war individual/group memories of hurt, injustice, and marginalization involves more than advancing or integrating "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches and "best practices." Instead, it entails a critical interrogation of the notion of peace "by recognizing the inter-subjective processes implicated in building, living and thinking peace."[13] Memory is powerful in linking individuals/groups to peacebuilding projects; it is critical in broader debates about a peacebuilding agenda, the ways peace and reconciliation can be reached, and what kind of peace and reconciliation is tenable or untenable in a post-war context. There is an ur-

gent need to examine the intimate but undervalued nexus between individual/group memories of war and post-conflict peacebuilding. Put differently, "notions of 'root causes,' causations, and post-conflict reconstruction are meaningless unless connected to the inter-subjective understanding of the conflict and the post-conflict situation held by those that lived through it," which can help in designing better tools for processing memory that can further enhance individual and societal reconciliation after conflict.[14] The burden of memory is borne and shared by individuals or groups that are socially or culturally knit together, and as such, memory is strongly linked to political and economic processes, practices, and agendas. Nigeria provides a contextual example for exploring the nexus between memory and reconciliation and what this means for newly emerging post-conflict states in Africa such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Somalia. This does not in any way suggest that these countries will replicate the Nigerian experience, or that they should emulate what Nigeria has done. Rather, it is to demonstrate the challenges that confront post-conflict African states, especially in a context where wars have actually ended, but the tendency for relapse into conflict persists.

NIGERIA'S POST-CIVIL WAR PEACEBUILDING PROJECT: A RETROSPECTIVE EXPLORATION

The events leading to the Nigeria-Biafra War have been sufficiently explored and do not require any repetition at this point. However, it is pertinent to note that by the time Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the stage had already been set for the nation-state project to experience a host of destabilizing crises, beginning with emergency rule in the Western Region in 1962, the census crisis of 1962–63, and the election crisis of 1964–65. The intervention of the military on January 15, 1966 (interpreted as an Igbo/Eastern-led coup) and a counter-coup (interpreted as a reprisal Hausa-Fulani/Northern-led coup) that followed six months later on July 29, 1966, effectively marked the end of Nigeria's First Republic and the collapse of its federal experiment.[15] This inter-ethnic power struggle between the dominant ethnic groups broadened in scope when it failed to reach a sustainable resolution to the crisis.[16] Following a series of failed negotiations, the disagreements and differences between General Yakubu Gowon (Nigeria's military head of state) and Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu (the military governor of Nigeria's Eastern Region) over the future of Nigeria and the political structure to adopt going forward led to the suspension of an orderly process of engagement. The federal government lost its effective

authority over the Eastern Region, which seceded from the main federation, declaring its independence as the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. The Nigerian government responded to the secession with military force on July 6, 1967, and the ensuing conflict ended with the collapse and surrender of Biafra in January 1970.

The end of the Nigeria-Biafra War was marked by the magnanimous proclamation of "no victor, no vanquished" by the General Yakubu Gowon-led Federal Military Government (FMG). This was widely welcomed and immediately followed by the policy of "Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction (3Rs)" toward the victims of the war. In a national broadcast, titled "The Dawn of National Reconciliation," Gowon declared that the task of reconciliation had truly commenced.[17] The harsh conditions of surrender expected from the FMG did not materialize; rather, the period was marked by the magnanimity of the FMG in pronouncements that guaranteed the personal safety and security of the Igbo and their properties, the right to reside and work anywhere in Nigeria, the reabsorption of civil/public servants of Igbo extraction into the civil service and the military, and the granting of general amnesty to the Igbo. John de St. Jorre, whose popular account referred to the conflict as "The Brothers' War," argues that this was probably the only armed conflict of its magnitude in history, perpetrated with so much viciousness and bitterness, where no reprisals, trials, or executions occurred.[18] A retrospective examination reveals that the FMG pronunciations did not fulfill the intended purposes, as they turned out to be more sensational than real. It gradually became apparent that there were indeed those who emerged as "victors" and others who were really "vanquished." The institutional and structural context of Igbo marginalization and alienation as reflected in subsequent developments and events in post-war Nigeria explains this point.

After three months of war in 1967, Biafra had lost two-thirds of its territory, and its capital, Enugu, was sacked in the fourth month. This meant that war was brought home to Biafra, and the territory was transformed into a vast refugee camp. In 1968, the federal government established the National Rehabilitation Commission (NRC) with the primary task of coordinating post-war food relief efforts, compensating those whose property had been destroyed or damaged by the conflict, resettling and assisting fleeing populations, and undertaking reconstruction projects.[19] However, these policies were never actually implemented in the post-war era, raising the question of whether or not the Gowon regime was sincerely committed to genuine

reconciliation. The situation was aggravated when the federal government openly rejected, rounded up, and expelled the personnel of humanitarian organizations and countries that were eager to assist in these efforts in Biafra at the end of the war.[20] The federal government's reservations stemmed from the view that these relief organizations and church charities played a crucial role in sustaining Biafra's war efforts and in prolonging the conflict.[21] The federal government's half-hearted and insincere approach to reconciliation along with its misguided approach in dealing with humanitarian organizations and countries willing to assist in post-war reconstruction in the region marked the beginning of ill feelings and sentiments harbored by the Igbo in post-civil war Nigeria. Operating from a position of relative disadvantage and inequality, the East-Central state remained the only state out of the twelve created in 1967 to be governed by an "administrator," while the others had military governors. This situation persisted until the Gowon regime was toppled five years after the war.

The post-war reconciliation rhetoric experienced a further crisis with the enactment of the Public Officers (Special Provisions) Decree No. 46 of 1970, which prevented senior Igbo civil servants and public corporation personnel from being reabsorbed on the grounds that they were accomplices who had aided Biafra's war effort. Predictably, many top-ranking civil servants of Igbo extraction were routinely dismissed or compulsorily retired from the armed forces, prisons, and police. This was a situation that was radically different from what was promised, but the logic behind the action of the government was to reward the ethnic groups that remained in the federation after Biafra's secession, and not to be seen to be rewarding those who had taken up arms against the state.[22] The fate of army officers of Igbo ethnic extraction was even more severe, as they were rounded up and subsequently faced a military tribunal, where some were dismissed without benefits for their role in the secession while others were discharged with full benefits. Some officers remained in detention, and others were reabsorbed and put on probation without promotion for a period of four years.[23]

The government-instituted Abandoned Properties Implementation Committee (APIC) was a considerable setback to national reconciliation in post-war Nigeria. This committee presided over the sale of Igbo properties outside Igboland and in parts of the former Eastern Region (Port-Harcourt) to indigenes of those states—at ridiculously low prices. The government's decision to adopt the "Twenty Pound Policy" and the Banking Obligation (Eastern States) Decree of 1970 further eroded the promise of reconcilia-

tion.[24] The Indigenization Decree of 1972—which reviewed the ownership structure and control of Nigerian enterprises and compelled foreign companies to sell part of their shares to Nigerians at a time when the Igbo had barely recovered from the effects of the war and were still perceived to be economically emasculated—capped this string of pernicious and polarizing policies. The unequal structural relationship between the Igbo East Central States and other states in the federation was deepened with the new national revenue-sharing formula that came into effect after the war. The modification of the Distributive Pool Account (DPA) in 1970 led to the reorganization of "distributive imperatives," under which fifty percent of the DPA resources were shared equally among states. The other fifty percent went proportionally to their populations—benefitting regions that had been split into more states—while the clamor for more states by the Igbo failed to yield any real results.[25] There was a shared perception among people of the Igbo ethnic group that the establishment of only two Igbo states in the 1976 state-creation exercise, compared with the creation of five states each in the Hausa/Fulani (Northern) and the Yoruba (Western) regions, had put the Igbo at a huge disadvantage in the competition for socioeconomic and political opportunities in the federation.[26] The postwar rhetoric of reconciliation succeeded to a large extent in imposing relative peace and stability, but also provided the cover for the pursuit and entrenchment of the "victor's" interests.

THE "MAKING" OF POST-WAR (OFFICIAL) MEMORY/ REMEMBRANCE

Post-civil war Nigeria was characterized by a seeming state of "calm" that proved effective in masking the realities of a failed peacebuilding process. Anthony Kirk-Greene has observed that a "tentative drawing of a distinction between reconciliation and reintegration, and again between levels of reconciliation" defined the immediate post-war era.[27] This became immediately apparent in the tendency to neutralize the conflict and restore a semblance of status quo in a manner that would ensure that while post-war reconciliation may not necessarily erase ill feelings emanating from the war, it would not stand in the way of everyday life going forward.[28] Given the fact that the general attitude toward the war was "to let sleeping dogs lie," troubling memories of the war were expressed privately, and there was a near silence on the issue. The post-civil war public space came across as one where people harbored memories of hurt and injury but did not express them, and these memories were gradually eased out of the public do-

main and increasingly became the property of private memory. Specifically, the manner of reconciliation advanced by the Nigerian state was aimed at eliminating group differences and peculiarities and shoring up a sense of inter-ethnic cohesion. As such, it constituted a veritable new grand narrative that superseded other narratives and gave the impression that Nigeria emerged from the war as a stronger and more united nation.

Based on emergent developments at the time, peacebuilding was linked to national stability, as Nigeria aspired to reclaim its position as a strong and united country. Three critical developments made this necessary. The first was the incipient oil boom that almost coincided with the end of the war, giving the FMG the leverage to play a prominent role in the redistributive imperatives that characterized its mono-product economy while also providing the incentives that compelled different regional elites to play to the center. The second development relates to what were perceived as the positive effects of abolishing the existing four regions in June 1967 (North, East, West, and Mid-West). Though designed as a tactical move to undermine Biafra's claims to oil in the Niger Delta, the twelve states that replaced the regions in the post-war years served to eliminate the regional platforms that had dogged Nigeria's federal experiment in the first decade of independence. The third development was the hegemonic foreign policy stance adopted by the Nigerian state in the years after the war, which provided the context for exerting its authority in the sub-region with the formation of ECOWAS, thereby projecting an African-centered power in its foreign policy by giving practical expression to the elimination of the last vestiges of colonialism on the continent. Beyond these, and based on shared historical experiences and ideals of a Pan-African project, Nigeria mobilized its resources to host the second All African Games in 1973 and the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977.

Occurring as it did within the context of economic prosperity occasioned by the oil boom, relative security, grudging conviviality, and a need to position Nigeria as the "Great Hope of the Black Race," both to Africans at home and those in the diaspora, peacebuilding was interpreted to mean abandoning the pursuit of "sectional," "regional," or "ethnic" justice in the interest of post-war nation building. Given the prevailing context and what the government sought to achieve, partial reconciliation was the only possible outcome realizable at the time, one that allowed group memories of "injustice" and "hurt" to flourish in the private realm and domain of kinship, town unions, and family networks. This came at a cost. As Murray Last ar-

gues, "in keeping it (real reconciliation) out of the public domain, the sense of ambivalence was left unresolved, the scale of anger and resentment still felt could not be assessed nor its location identified."[29] It is highly likely that if the government's reconciliation policies had been genuine in embracing fundamental differences in views, opinions, and memories, it would have produced a different outcome in the context of the immediate post-war era.

In the decades following the end of the war, the Nigerian state adopted a variety of approaches to shape memories of the war to suit its own vision, interests, and politics. As Ana Maria Alonso opines, the sources through which a national government seeks to control its history are important because the hegemony and legitimacy of the nation-state and that of its groups and classes are heavily composed of representations of a national past.[30] These processes are "accomplished through the related strategies of naturalization, de-particularization, and idealization," which means that the tools of historical reconstruction are not easily available to competing groups or other claimants.[31] The Nigerian state excludes other contestants to memory by forging, circulating, reifying, and reflecting the formation of a "grand" national memory and identity which all groups in the state must rally around and proclaim their allegiance to. Official attempts to shape the memories of the war have found expression in the domain of education, curriculum design, and textbook writing, and these have been deployed as powerful vectors that aid the facilitation and dissemination of information and the legitimization of state discourses for political purposes. These tactics are replete in Nigerian government-approved texts for secondary school students, such as Modupe Duze's 100 Model Questions and Answers on National History of Nigeria for G.C.E. O' Level and WASC (1985) and Gabriel Eluwa's A History of Nigeria for Schools and Colleges (1998).[32] Although these textbooks made partial reference to the war, the references were kept to the barest minimum or written in highly biased language, which emphasized the positive aspects of the war—state creation, Nigeria's military expansion, and regaining of statehood—and confirmed the whitewashing of history to conform to a dominant and hegemonic agenda. The idea of producing Nigerian history textbooks that ignore the ethnic question connected to the civil war, the experiences of border communities on both sides of the divide, the massacre of minority populations, and the pogrom against the Igbo that preceded the war, remains a cause for concern. The broader agenda is to drive the nation toward a sense of collective amnesia and forgetfulness, but when this is not possible, attempts are made to delegitimize opposing views and narratives.

The Nigerian state employs the "memory power" inherent in memorials, monuments, and museums to project a form of collective meaning and nationhood.[33] These have proven to be very effective tools for memory production.[34] On January 15, 1985, the Nigerian state went to great lengths to launch the National War Museum project and subsequently commissioned it on September 14, 1989, designating it as the only museum that represents the (official) memories of the civil war in Nigeria. By using memory repertoires, such as pictures of wartime actors, artifacts, and other war relics, the state sought to promote one set message, among many others, and imposed a single meaning and interpretation on the Nigeria-Biafra War. Similarly, the annual Armed Forces Remembrance Day, commemorated every January 15 for the "Unknown Soldiers," coincides with January 15, 1970, the date the Nigeria-Biafra War officially ended. It is an event that honors all federal "fallen soldiers" who fought and died in all wars in which the country had been engaged, including the two World Wars, the Nigeria-Biafra War, peacekeeping missions, and other military engagements. This commemoration not only excludes and discredits Biafran soldiers who have been depicted as "rebels" and "traitors," but also delegitimizes their own version of events in the war and, in fact, expunges them from recognition and entry into the official national narrative. As an interested party with a direct stake in memory projects, the Nigerian state deploys museums, memorials, and monuments to serve official interests, neutralize competing narratives opposed to official views, and legitimize a national project. This has several implications for the nation-building project: it invariably continues to suppress sectional memories and uphold official memories in the name of moving forward; entrenches politicized memories in monuments, memorials, and museums that reflect skewed power relations that are capable of denying victims of war any form of justice or redress; and, ultimately, eliminates the possibility of examining ongoing reverberations of fragmented and contradictory memories in society by forcing a premature "closure" to the event.

MEMORY, MARGINALIZATION, AND THE FAILINGS OF RECONCILIATION

Post-war sociopolitical and economic developments fed into the construction of individual and group memories of "hurt," "injustice," and "marginalization" in Southeastern Nigeria. Structural and institutional mechanisms were poised to play a key role in post-war reconciliation, peacebuilding,

and nation building. The displacement of the Igbo from the "formal" sectors of the economy led to their engagement in the "informal" sector, which is characterized by informal manufacturing and long-distance trading networks relying on operations outside state structures.[35] This, in Isaac Olawale Albert's view, intensified perceptions of political and economic marginalization, fostered a sense of neglect, and exacerbated the challenges of Nigeria's reconciliation with the Igbo.[36] The introduction of the structural adjustment program (SAP) as a policy response to Nigeria's economic crisis and the politics surrounding it complicated the contradictions and inequalities upon which the post-civil war national project was hinged. It further intensified the zero sum factional struggles for federal power, compounded the politics of resource control, and widened existing ethnic cleavages as ethno-nationalist identities became more conflictive and competitive.

The breadth and implementation of the adjustment program impacted fundamentally on every area of social and political relations, and ultimately, on ethno-nationalist consciousness. This is related to the fact that, under the rubric of the adjustment package, the state retreated from most areas of private life, and ethnic conflicts borne of struggles over resources, access to power, and local autonomy were sharpened under conditions of recession, depression, scarcity, and immiseration.[37] This period was marked by an unprecedented surge in the number and activities of ethnic unions in various forms, such as "development" unions, "progressive" unions, "hometown" associations, social clubs, community development associations, cultural organizations, and "migrant ethnic empires," which emerged to meet new challenges.[38] In order to broaden the sphere of development, diaspora organizations, unions, and community development associations in urban centers throughout the country resorted to "self-help" efforts. Responding to the famous axiom "What else is development other than helping your hometown?" they were able to mobilize capital to provide social services and amenities for their domestic constituencies in Southeastern Nigeria.[39]

The diminishing resources and opportunities attendant to the adjustment program intensified the competition for jobs, contracts, and other benefits, such that the level of ethnic consciousness and ethnic connections became the hallmark of negotiations during the period. The commercialization and privatization exercise that accompanied the adjustment package reinforced factional struggles for resources and power at the elite level in Nigeria, thereby fueling tension, mistrust, and conflict between the "winners" and "losers." This also provided fertile ground for the resurgence of ethnicity as a mobilizing factor in the struggle for state-divested shares in government

enterprises. Aware of the growing concerns about marginalization, injustice, and underdevelopment in the Southeast, and the dominance of the hegemonic group(s) that controlled federal power and oil resources, there was a push at the Igbo elite level to address the "Igbo Question" and its share of the national patrimony. Prominent Igbo groups like "Ohaneze Ndi Igbo" and "Aka Ikenga" (a Pan-Igbo sociocultural think-thank) through various fora, began to articulate the plight of the Igbo within the unfolding context and the need to accommodate the Igbo in the Nigerian project.

The flawed basis upon which the post-civil war national unity project was built had implications for Igbo memory, citizenship, and belonging in Nigeria. The post-civil war reconfiguration of power around these structural and systemic imbalances subjected the Igbo ethnic group to a structure and dynamic of power relations that was inherently unfavorable. This development found expression in the manner in which the Igbo ethnic group, previously considered a major ethnic group and one vital leg in Nigeria's regional "tripod" prior to 1967, was relegated to the margins of power. Certain post-civil war developments, as well as the perceptions of Igbo marginalization by successive military regimes in the 1980s and 1990s, have led to the redefinition of the Igbo—from being a majority to a "minority" ethnic group.[40] The exclusion of the Igbo from the power equation continues to pose enormous challenges to Nigeria's post-civil war national unity project. Though the Igbo ethnic group produced a vice-president and speaker of the federal House of Representatives nine years after the war, these achievements did little to assuage Igbo perceptions of marginalization. Apparently, in the post-civil war power configuration in Nigeria, the Igbo are perceived as junior partners, with the elites of the victorious ethnic groups occupying what Edwin Madunagu refers to as the "first circle" of power, while the Igbo elites have been relegated to the "second circle." The awarding of privileges to the Igbo faction of the elite has largely depended on historical circumstances and the prevailing structure of power relations in particular contexts.[41]

The primary implication is that this has denied the Igbo a true sense of reconciliation with regard to issues related to citizenship rights, devolution of power, true federalism, and equal access to power. Secondly, it eliminates the prospects of realizing the "Igbo Presidency Project," which has been central to the resolution of the "Igbo Question" and a cardinal negotiating point in the Igbo quest for reinventing the national unity project in post-civil war Nigeria. The "Igbo Presidency Project" is based on the "tripod theory," which is premised on the notion that stability can only be achieved in the

Nigerian federation when there is a balance of power between the three major ethnic groups. Presently, of the six geopolitical zones in the country, the Igbo Southeast remains the only zone with five states while others have at least six each. Igbo groups have continuously agitated against the mandatory exclusion and continuing deprivation and marginalization of predominantly Igbo states (Imo and Abia) which border oil-producing areas from oil revenues. This is seen by some observers as a situation that underscores the centralist mechanisms of control and zero-sum struggles that characterize oil politics in Nigeria. These developments continue to capture the nature of Nigeria's post-war reconciliation with the Igbo, and the dominant perception remains that the Igbo ethnic group is yet to be reintegrated into the Nigerian state forty-five years after the war.[42]

THE "IGBO QUESTION," RESISTANCE, AND ALTERNATIVE SPACES OF MEMORY CONSTRUCTION

The place of the Igbo ethnic group and its perceived second-class citizenship in Nigeria has become more contentious in contemporary times. A proper articulation and understanding of the "Igbo Question" must be carried out within the context of the overarching Nigerian "National Question." The "Igbo Question," emanating from post-civil war memories of marginalization, hurt, and injustice, should not be treated as unique or as the only example of its kind. Rather, it should be examined within the related and comparable contexts of the failure of other state-imposed post-war peacebuilding projects in Africa. Thus, the "Igbo Question" reflects broader issues of state legitimacy, national citizenship-deficit, and the failure of the postcolonial nation-state building project. The "Igbo Question" is a subset of the broader Nigerian "National Question," outside of which it can hardly be understood. It is symbolic of ethnic identity struggles related to self-determination, autonomy, and separatism in the Nigerian state, drawing on issues and perspectives surrounding the salience, construction, mobilization, and politicization of ethnic identity and the dynamics of its deployment and use in national politics. The "Igbo Question" has been framed by situations, policies, and actions that produce grievances and the overwhelming feeling of the deprivation of "nationhood" and Igbo belonging within the context of the political arrangement in Nigeria. While the "Igbo Question" came to a head during the crises leading up to the Nigeria-Biafra War in 1967, it has assumed a different dimension in the post-civil war era. In the post-1999 dispensation, it has led to the emergence of neo-Biafran groups in Southeastern Nigeria and a renewed clamor for disengagement from the Nigeri-

an state.

Spurred by specific memories of marginalization, hurt, and injustice, Nigeria has witnessed the proliferation of neo-Biafran separatist movements clamoring for the disengagement of the Igbo from the Nigerian project into a separate political and administrative arrangement known as the "Republic of Biafra." On September 13, 1999, barely four months after Nigeria's return to civil rule, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) became the first neo-Biafran group to emerge that promoted the interest of Igbo-speaking Nigerians (or Biafrans). Several neo-Biafran groups such as the Biafra Youth Congress (BYC), MASSOB International, Biafran Liberation Council (BLC), Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and the Coalition of Biafra Liberation Groups (COBLIG), which claims to be an umbrella body comprising seven Igbo liberation groups in Nigeria and two in the diaspora, have since emerged. The advent of these groups is a direct response to the perceived failure of the Nigerian state and successive governments to address the Igbo predicament since the end of the civil war, let alone resolve it.

Collectively known as the neo-Biafran movement, this is an assortment of second-generation, youth-based Igbo nationalist movements. As theorists of nationalism have argued, shared memories passed across generations are critical to forging collective identities, and as such, youth mobilization is critical to the rise of nationalist movements.[43] Karl Mannheim points out that political and social occurrences configure youth culture through critical shared experiences during a child's formative years.[44] The significance of these occurrences, as Howard Schuman and Jacqueline Scott note, is that memory plays out differently in different generations, but that the period of adolescence and early adulthood, which is often linked to "youth," is the primary period for the generational imprinting of political memories.[45] Consequently, new generations define and position themselves against older generations and assume a relationship to the past that is different from that of their elders.[46] The views of the neo-Biafran groups regarding the present are critical in this enterprise, since linking the past to the present requires not only "reinventing" or "reinterpreting" the past, but also redefining the present to fit with the newly reconceived shape of the past. These views are often expressed publicly and in open violation of government order by taking up parallel governmental functions, engaging in various acts of civil disobedience, and challenging the absolute authority of the Nigerian state in Southeastern Nigeria.

Individual and collective memories are inextricably intertwined. Stories of individuals who experienced the Nigeria-Biafra War form an important base for both personal and social identity, and this serves as a mobilizing tool for both the eyewitnesses of the war and those born after it. This is buttressed by Jacob Climo and Iwao Ishino's assertion that memories shared with others allow those who did not actively participate in the events to incorporate them indirectly into their own memory collection.[47] Personal memories hinged on the objective conditions of the lives of many Igbo who witnessed the war, along with the shared collective memories of those who did not, converge to strengthen the nationalistic impulses of the neo-Biafran movement as it embarks on the struggle for the realization of the Biafran dream. The testimonies and memoirs of prominent Igbo play a crucial role in mobilizing the future generation, a development that lends credence to Paul Connerton's assertion that memoirs and autobiographies of famous citizens and political elites are worth remembering, owing to their propensity to make radical changes in society.[48]

MASSOB became the first movement to give life to the neo-Biafran ideology when it hoisted the Biafran flag and officially presented the "Declaration of Our Demand for a Sovereign State of Biafra from the People and Government of Nigeria" on May 22, 2000.[49] Since then, the green-red-black Biafran flag has become a powerful symbol and reminder of the Biafran nation and Igbo nationalism. There have been various successful and unsuccessful attempts to hoist the flag in major roads, streets, billboards, and strategic places in the Southeastern states of Nigeria. Members of the movement carry the flag to symbolically show their allegiance and patriotism to the MASSOB's quest for self-determination, and these events are always marked by clashes between the movement and State Security Services (SSS). MASSOB adherents have also engaged in various acts of civil disobedience, such as the sit-at-home orders in 2004; boycotts of the National Identity Card Scheme, 2006 National Census Exercise, and 2007 National and State elections; and the issuing of Biafran passports and identity cards.[50]

On November 5, 2012, the Biafran Zionist Movement (BZM), a splinter group from MASSOB, captured the attention of the Nigerian government when it declared an independent state of Biafra and raised the Biafran flag in the Southeastern city of Enugu. At the height of its activities, on June 5, 2014, members of the movement attempted to seize the Enugu State Broadcasting Service (ESBS), where they planned to broadcast the rebirth of Biafra

and hoist the Biafran flag in the Enugu State Government House. Challenged by both the Nigerian police and members of the SSS, over five hundred members of the movement were arrested along with Benjamin Igwe Onwuka, the leader of the movement.[51] The advent of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) represents the latest iteration in a string of post-civil war second-generation neo-Biafran movements to emerge in the Southeast. On August 30, 2015, three members of IPOB were killed and several others critically injured after the group allegedly came under attack from a combined force of Nigerian navy and police while participating in a peaceful demonstration in the commercial city of Onitsha, in Southeastern Nigeria. These tensions have been exacerbated by the recent emergence of Radio Biafra, an unlicensed station dedicated to the Biafran cause. The station has dominated the airwaves in Southeastern Nigeria and tapped into unresolved causes of the war to mobilize Igbo senses and sensibilities in the continued quest for Biafran independence. With a sharp male voice and unmistakable Igbo accent that frames the issues and minds of his listeners and audience, Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of the IPOB and director of Radio Biafra, speaks to the most painful chapter of Igbo history and evokes memories of Igbo defeat in the war. This became a source of serious concern to the newly elected President Muhammadu Buhari and the Nigerian government, and on October 17, 2015, Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Lagos as he was about to depart for London. Since his arrest, the entire Southeast region of Nigeria has been engulfed in the "mother of all protests" as his supporters continue to ground commercial and vehicular activities in major cities in the region.[52]

The neo-Biafran movement contests the sovereignty of the Nigerian state over Igbo land, evokes counter-claims of sovereignty, enacts specific regimes of security, and seeks to create alternative spaces of power and influence in the Southeast. These developments have proved to negate the "absolutist" view of the Nigerian state as the main guarantor of law and order, and have led to attempts by neo-Biafran groups to initiate alternative forms of social regulation as a way to resist formal state control and sovereignty. In spite of the pacifist claims of most neo-Biafran movements, it was inevitable that there would be clashes between the movement and state security operatives in the course of their activities. In a MASSOB statement, it was claimed that between 1999 and 2008, state security personnel in various cities killed over two thousand registered members of the movement across the country.[53] MASSOB published a compendium documenting the alleged massacres of its members across various cities in the Southeast and the detention of over one thousand members in Nigerian prisons.[54] Var-

ious clashes between several neo-Biafran movements and SSS personnel have resulted in a clampdown on these groups and their members across the Southeast. With the tacit and open support of some governors in the Southeast, there have been several raids on the movement's hideouts in the region, leading to the discovery of Biafran artifacts, Biafran army camouflage uniforms, items used by Biafran soldiers during the civil war, including a pilot car with a siren, a motorcycle outrider, and a locally fabricated explosive (rocket).[55]

The avowed intent of the Nigerian state to dominate post-war memory production has not been a complete success. The use of war counter-memory devices by opposing neo-Biafran groups against state-sanctioned memories is evident in ways that do not merely reflect past experiences, but serve the most important role of being orientational in their function.[56] To resist the potentially dominating power of nationalist historiography or narrative, Michel Foucault formulates the idea of "counter-memory" that differs from, and often contests, dominant discourses. Foucault also remarks that the critical nature of memory makes it a very important factor in the struggle and control of a people's memory, and translates into the control of their progress.[57] Deep-seated feelings of exclusion on the part of a segment of the population was a critical source of the Nigerian state's difficulties in entrenching its own interpretation of events, and the state's inability to appreciate this demonstrates its fragility. The state's failure itself becomes a metaphor for the ill that comes from a too-narrow conception of Nigerian nationhood, citizenship, and identity.

Prevailing narratives of national memory have proved to be too restrictive to accommodate the vast variety of differences in memory repertoires within the state, and this has succeeded in alienating not just minority ethnic groups, but also majority ethnic groups such as the Igbo, which have different individual and collective memories of the war. As Lynn Hunt points out, (state) legitimacy, in a sense, implies a general agreement on signs and symbols, and these signs and symbols are inherent in the exercise of power, with the state relying on them to convey and reaffirm legitimacy.[58] The Nigerian experience reveals the impossibility of imposing any one interpretation of history or any one definition of identity on the nation as a whole. Neo-Biafran groups have adopted images, symbols, and narratives of the past and a particular version of Igbo history as vehicles for establishing their claim to self-determination. This has involved the use of commemorations, anniversaries, flags, and Biafran artifacts to articulate alternative versions

of Igbo identity and to claim a unique cultural space that predates the Nigerian state. The politics of commemoration is shaped through symbolic means and rarely involves the use of direct force, but as Diego Muro suggests, commemorations of the dead are critical in reproducing the tradition of martyrdom, engendering an image of common identity, and generating further recruitment for political resistance.[59] References to Igbo genocide provide the opportunity for neo-Biafran groups to use symbolic and ideological tools to support, continue, and legitimate a particular narrative. The reinvention or recreation of political symbols aims at a reductive narrative of binary opposites and articulates the repression of Igbo memory vis-à-vis an oppressive Nigerian state, while accurately expressing the ideals, principles, and claims of the group for self-determination.

Since 1999, neo-Biafran groups have outright rejected the official commemorations relating to the civil war, such as the official Armed Forces Remembrance Day and the other monuments, but instead commemorate the annual anniversary of the founding of the Igbo-Biafran nation on May 30, 1967. Commemoration, memory, and identity fuse together in a manner that reinforces contemporary neo-Biafran ideology and produces an agenda that emphasizes a collective instrument of cohesion and social cooperation. Neo-Biafran groups draw on memories of violence perpetrated against the Igbo after the Eastern Region seceded from the Nigerian federation on May 30, 1967. Since this violence was carried out on a people (the Igbo) with one identity, the public commemorations are carried out in ceremonies emphasizing the message that those sacrifices have not been in vain. These commemorations are always disrupted by the SSS and the Nigerian Police Force, but more importantly they have become rituals that can be characterized as a "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character that draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling they hold to be of special significance."[60] These practices have engendered political goals, such as organizational integration, legitimation, construction of solidarity, and inculcation of political beliefs. They invariably channel emotions, guide cognition, organize social groups, and, by providing a sense of continuity, link the past with the present and the present with the future.[61] Of crucial importance is the understanding that groups are not just followers or partakers in rituals, but that they also create these rituals, thus making them a powerful tool for political action.[62]

The proliferation of poorly produced literatures, pamphlets, newspapers, handbills, posters, and banners, among other materials, by the neo-Biafran

movement serve as rallying symbols and as a means of claiming the South-eastern urban space for its cause. The depiction of these materials with outright political messages in the public transforms public areas, streets, and major roads in the region into a political space. The dotting of several strategic spaces with these materials means that they are taken over by political messages, and the public is forced to consume them because they cannot be avoided. The public constitutes the "willing" and "unwilling" consumer of neo-Biafran ideologies and propaganda. While the willing consumers are those who advocate and support the movement's quest for self-determination, the unwilling are those who are forced to encounter these materials even though they view them as objects of political propaganda in a political drama beyond their control.

Neo-Biafran movements engage in protests and demonstrations in the streets, town halls, and in other public arenas, while adorning themselves conspicuously in contemporary items of resistance such as Biafran t-shirts, mufflers, cardigans, and caps which challenge the Nigerian state. These materials are portrayed against the background of the Biafran colors (Green-Red-Black), and the strong preference for this attire is evident within the movement as members display a confrontational attitude in their quest for self-determination. As a relatively confrontational strategy, the use of these materials is indicative of the radical stance of the movement against the state, a tendency that resonates with other youth-dominated nationalist groups in Nigeria. While this attire indicates a social choice of consumption, it also constitutes a political choice based on their interpretation and reaction to the Nigerian state and the need to locate their sense of identity outside the state. This attire has become a popular national symbol of protest and remembrance in the public spaces across the entire region, and they use it to convey their cause or message, epitomize their struggle, and reclaim their identity. This is a brand of nationalism that constructs and espouses Igbo identity and sensationalizes the exploitation, marginalization, and persecution of the Igbo in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Scholars, activists, and development practitioners are now beginning to consider memory as a critical aspect of post-war peacebuilding. From Cambodia and Kosovo to Rwanda and South Africa, global and African attempts at reconstruction and reconciliation that ignore the role of memory have led to a "cold peace" in real and metaphorical terms. Of the three

approaches to peacebuilding highlighted in this paper, only the justice as peacebuilding approach accommodates reconciliation, while others emphasize a liberal peace or stabilization of the system. However, for reconciliation to have any meaningful impact on the system, it must accommodate marginalized memories of hurt and injustice, both in actual and historical terms. This involves approaching structural and systemic reforms in a manner that positively impacts individual and collective memories, particularly in post-conflict multiethnic contexts. That, in itself, would involve a paradigm shift in the notion and understanding of peacebuilding, from one that is not just about stabilizing the system to one that is concerned with healing the society. The challenge for post-conflict African states is to locate the quest for peacebuilding within a larger historical framework that addresses the injustice, hurt, persecution, exploitation, and marginalization to which it is responding. Greater resources and attention should be devoted to redressing grievances; this, in turn, provides the context where memories of conflicts are recognized and shared narratives are constructed in a public atmosphere that is open to reconciliation.

Lessons from Nigeria-Biafra and other intra-African conflicts suggest that reconciliation has the potential to point to a common future. But in most cases, the state does this by imposing a regime of forgetfulness, and, when this is not possible, it imposes partial or official remembrance, amounting to the outright suppression or elimination of individual and collective memories, both in the present and in future. The failure of reconciliation in Nigeria is based on the fact that the state has defined and instituted what it perceived to be the kind of reconciliation suited to Nigeria's post-war nation building project. More importantly, this notion of reconciliation hinged on a problematic notion of statehood, and state legitimacy, fuels a crisis of citizenship, and national belonging. These are all summed up in the enduring debate known as the National Question, which focuses on how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and regional groupings in Nigeria in a manner that ensures equal rights, privileges, access to power, and national resources.

The failure of post-war reconciliation affects the Igbo ethnic group in two ways. The first is that it has created "primary victims," the old(er) generations of Igbo who lived through the conflict and whose vivid memories are completely ignored, and for whom what is presently referred to as reconciliation is not relevant. The other category is the "secondary victims," those who have become victims owing to the perpetuation of initial conditions, as

has been witnessed with the advent of neo-Biafran movements both inside and outside Nigeria. The Biafran episode demonstrates vividly the enduring impact of ignoring or denying individual or collective memories and how it affects the prospects for reconciliation and peacebuilding. In view of the fact that those who are supposed to be the focus or agents of reconciliation are not recognized in such efforts, this suggests that sustainable peace, at least under the present conditions, is highly improbable.

NOTES

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