

## Tragic Stereotypes in Biafran Civil War: Critiquing Okoye's *The War that Was* and Onuoha's *Biafra: The Victims*

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### Abstract

The Biafran Civil War is a veritable source of many literary works, with a majority coming from authors of the defunct Biafra, especially the Igbo. Their themes, since the end of the war in 1970, have remained stereotypic. The 1966 pogrom in the aftermath of the Jan 15 1966 coup; deaths of vulnerable Biafrans during the war; how Gowon's 'No Victor, No Vanquished' policy was not implemented; federal government's harsh economic policies shortly after the war, and the Igbo marginalisation in Nigeria's polity are the stereotypes. They fail to explore the positives of the war, considering that Biafra, within the three years it existed, had breakthroughs in science and technology as well as purposeful leadership. This work observes that emerging works, which Okoye's *The War that Was* and Onuoha's *Biafra: The Victims* represent, toe the same trajectory. The research states that continuing with the old trends makes Biafran War literature synonymous with literature of lamentation. It therefore calls for the concentration of Biafran War literature on the positives therein. The data was collated from works rendered by scholars with divergent views. The study is foregrounded on New Historicism.

**Keywords:** Biafra, New Historicism, Stereotypes, Innovations

### Introduction

The emergence of most Nigerian historical and non-historical literary prose started with the Biafran War of 1967-1970. According to Nwahunanya, authors "used the conflicts as source of materials for creative literature" (1996, p. 1). Onuoha and Okoye portray the war from the perspectives of a defeated people spanning from the pre-colonial period to the present. They narrate how Britain skewed the leadership of Nigeria to the detriment of the Igbo nation.

This notion is anchored on the fact that the people of the South-East region, who constituted a major part of the defunct Biafra, are yet to find their political rhythm in the leadership positions at the Federal level since after the war. Within the old Eastern Region, which constituted Biafra, the perspectives about the war are also not favourable to the Igbo race. Amadi's narrative is that the Igbo were enemies of the South-South. He states that years before the coming of the colonial masters, Igbo people had annexed minority tribes of South-South, and imposed the Igbo culture on them. Amadi writes that the Igbo settled in the South-South region many years ago "to dominate the smaller tribes" (Amadi, 1973, p. 21). Saro-Wiwa portrays how soldiers of South-South extraction, that fought on the side of Biafra, were naive, and made to fight a war they did not fully understand.

Obasanjo (1980) and Faruk (2011) represent federal and northern perspectives respectively. Obasanjo posits himself as a hero whose goal in leading the Third Marine Commando of the Nigerian Army is to unify Nigeria. In his view, the war was "a clean and honourable" fight to unify Nigeria (p. 167). Faruk (2011), on the other hand, writes that the mayhem that was visited on the Igbo was "reprisals for the death of Northern leaders as a result of the Ifeajuna/Nzeogwu coup" (p. 31).

Okoye and Onuoha, whose works are the primary texts of this paper, recall their childhood experiences during the war up until Nigeria's present state. The works advocate the actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra as the only means of Igbo emancipation in Nigeria. They however portray the weaknesses within the Igbo society, and how they contribute to the Igbo woes.

Nigeria is a composition of heterogeneous peoples, with estimated 250 ethnic nationalities. The popular saying that united we stand is gradually becoming a mirage in Nigeria because its components identify more with their tribes than the centre. Behind all these is the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates on January 1, 1914. The promulgation of the Richard Constitution of 1945 further cemented the ground for regionalism in Nigeria. The 1959 Federal elections, meant to usher in Nigeria's Independence, "were embroiled in crises" (Obasanjo, 1980, p. 3). The climax of the crises was the one with the Awolowo-led Action Group in 1962, which led to Awolowo's imprisonment in 1963. Aside these, there were also the census crisis of 1962; the Tiv riot of 1962 - 1965, and the flawed 1964 Federal elections. The Western Regional Election of 1965 was characterised by malpractices, which led to breakdown of law and order. According to Ademoyega (1981), "Sardauna/Balewa administration was aimless and helpless" (p. 65).

In the view of Uwechue (1971), "prolonged political disturbances were climaxed by a bloody coup d'etat" of January 15, 1966 (p. 5). He posits that it was "organized by mostly young Igbo military officers, and those killed...were mainly from the North" (Amadi, 1973, p. 8). The composition of the coupists informed the designation of the coup as Igbo.

The military, under Gen Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi, was "formally invited by the civilian government to take over the administration of the country" for stability. Ironsi promulgated Decree No. 34 which the North did not agree with (Uwechue, 1971, pp. 5-6). Another fault of Ironsi, according to Obasanjo (1980), is his failure to "decide whether to designate the coup plotters as heroes of the 'revolution' or send them before a martial as mutineers or murderers" (p. 6). The era witnessed anti-Igbo riots across the North. The skirmishes led to the massacre of Ndigbo and looting of their property in the North. Ironsi was killed on July 29, 1966 at Ibadan while he was touring the nation to restore peace in the land. With Ironsi's death, Lt Col Yakubu Gowon became the Head of State on 1 August, 1966. Brigadier Babafemi Ogundikpe, the most high-ranking officer, was not allowed to take up the position by some privileged elements in power. Col Emeka Ojukwu, Governor of the then Eastern Region, wanted the natural order to be followed. The climax was that he later "refused to accept or recognise Gowon as the new Supreme Commander" (Akpa, 2019, p. 44). The crisis led to a meeting of the Supreme Military Council at Aburi, Ghana. The outcome of the meeting was given varying interpretations. Schwarz states in Obasanjo (1980) that it "was only Ojukwu who understood the real issues" (p. 10).

The situation escalated to the secession bid of the old Eastern Region out of Nigeria under the name Biafra. The move for Biafra's secession began on 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967 when Col Ojukwu was "mandated by the Consultative Assembly" and "by the desires of the people" of the Eastern Region to secede from Nigeria (Achebe, 2012, p. 91). According to Uwechue (1971), the creation of Biafra was "authorised by all Biafrans" (p. 51).

Biafra survived from 1967 to 1970. The people of the defunct republic are natives of today's South-East and South-South. Biafra's secession bid was championed by Gen Ojukwu. Ojukwu handed over powers to his Deputy, Gen Phillip Effiong (1970-1970), before going on exile, marking the end of Biafra. Gowon after the crises declared the war as 'No Victor, No Vanquished'. Since this declaration, the Igbo seem disenchanted with the Nigerian project with their notion that they are being marginalised. Akpa (2019) sums that "the deafening echoes of the agitation for the same Biafra should ... tell those [who] take pride in being avatars of inglorious history to reflect again" (p. 42).

The rebirth of Biafra is being championed by many groups, and their reason is that the people of the South-East are being marginalised in Nigeria's super-structure. One of them is the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). It was launched in 1999, and led by Ralph Uwazuruike, a lawyer. The other is the institution of the Indigenous People of Biafra led by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. Kanu was arrested in Kenya in July 2021, and is being tried in Nigeria. His arrest, according to his special counsel, Aloy Ejimakor, violates international laws because Kanu travelled to Kenya as a Briton. Ejimakor asserts that Kanu's arrest amounts to an "extraordinary rendition" (Ejimakor, 2021). Kanu's adherents are many, and his alleged incarceration informed the declaration of Mondays as sit-at-home in Anambra, Enugu, Imo and Abia, and partially in Ebonyi and Rivers states.

The picture painted above portrays the beginning and the after-effects of the Nigerian Civil War. It also captures the dilemma of exclusion that the Igbo claim that faces them in staying as a part of Nigeria. This dilemma makes the Igbo continue to nurse the pains of the war.

### **Concept of Tragedy: Review of the Term**

Tragedy encompasses man's violations of fundamental rules of the universe with their unavoidable consequences, at times, affecting a generation. According to Akwanya (1998: 11), tragedy brings "out the factor of human limitation both in not fully understanding [universal laws] and the inability to change them or escape the consequences of breaching them."

Stereotype, as used in the title, is synonymous with the state of dwarfism. Its effect is the tragedy of the Biafran War literature whose themes have been stunted for over fifty years. These themes revolve around the same issues, without being incisive.

Tragedy, from the classical age, is a representation of man worse than he is. Aristotle in his *Poetics* dwells more on tragedy with the goal of making society better. By showcasing man worse than he is, Aristotle aims at making man realise the complexities of life, and the need to be good. His *Poetics* portrays the inevitability of every action of man, both on earth and in the hereafter. That lies the didactic nature of literature.

Aristotle (2008: 8) defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions."

Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell (2010: 433), in summarising Aristotle's *Poetics*, state that the goal of tragedy is to arouse pity (*cleos*) and fear (*phobos*) to induce a feeling of emotional purging (or *catharsis*) in the audience. They further posit that classical tragedy centres on the life of "a protagonist of high birth, who, as a result of a fatal tragic flaw or an error of judgement or *harmatia*, faced a disastrous reversal of fortune (*katastrophe*), and proceeded from happiness into suffering and even death."

There have however been definitions of modern tragedy, with some modifications in some of the tragic elements expounded by Aristotle. According to Kael, quoted in Stratford (2021: 2), a tragic hero "must have greater aspirations, ambitions...; in modern tragedies, smaller men with smaller dreams act through impulse, rather than hubris...Modern tragedy therefore adds irony to Aristotle's mix, reducing once-heroic tragic figures to the size of ordinary humanity." Modern tragedy therefore gives room or prominence to minor characters. It also subjects many views to critical analyses, in the process redefining the concept of tragedy in its entirety. Authorities are questioned. The high-placed are challenged by the low. This is an antithesis of what ancient tragedy is all about.

The tragic approach to this discourse is therefore to interrogate what overtly is viewed as tragedies of the Biafran War as portrayed in the texts under review. It challenges the continued stereotyping of the same themes of the war for over five decades, leaving the war positives behind. The defunct Biafra was at a time landlocked, and survived for about three years from ingenuities of her natives. The tragedy is the failure of the same race to replicate substantially what Biafra achieved in a distressed three years. It is also tragic that the Igbo resilience and innovations are dying. The other tragedy is that writers about the Biafran War stereotype the woes of the war, making the literature static. This deliberate omission makes Biafran War linger in memories of Igbo generations.

### **Interrogating Tragic Stereotypes in the Selected Texts**

This paper uses the New Historicism approach to interrogate how the texts under review recycled the same tragic themes that have characterised the Biafran War literature since time immemorial, and suggests how these themes could be made more pragmatic in the interest of the war literature as well as the people of the South-East region.

### The Discourse

The blockade of territories of Biafra by the Federal Government during the war is a recurring theme. Such trend makes historical and literary accounts of Biafran War unrealistic in the contemporary world. The blockade was adopted to cut off Biafra's external dealings, both in humanitarian and military affairs. The after-effect was devastating. According to Onuoha (2012: 14-15), "things that were very strange became food for our consumption, such as lizards, rats, and raffia type maggots. For our vegetables, cassava leaves and budding cocoa fruits were cooked and served as soup. Unripe pawpaw was grinded and cooked as jollof rice."

Onuoha recasts how the world bodies jettisoned human rights conventions in the case of Biafra, and submits his lamentation through rhetorical questions: "to whom shall we run? Was it Britain that never wanted nor supported the Biafra cause? Or was it the Organisation of African Unity that could bark but could not bite?" (2012: 54). The blockade of the Biafran land goes against the United Nations' War Conventions, but because the interests of world powers, especially in oil, were concerned, no authority could challenge such obnoxious policy.

Okoye's account shows that the blockade is a deliberate ploy to create artificial hardship for Biafrans. The after-effect are large casualties caused by hunger and diseases.

Okoye (2015: 168-169) writes,

Among the civilians, there were many with distended tummies, children waiting to be attended to. Their treatment needed to start by giving them food first before administering drugs. The hospital had no food to give... Among adults, many were suffering ... malaria, others fever ... escalated by the tripartite of hunger, starvation and diseases.

This 'blockading' theme is as old as Adam in Biafran War narratives. Rather than dwelling on it by contemporary authors, they could explore how the South-Easterners could avert food shortage should the North 'blockade' food supplies to the East. Of course, the solution is encouraging agriculture. What Onuoha and Okoye portray above are food insecurity and the need for societal preparedness against unforeseen circumstances. The tragedy is that after the war, the people of the defunct Biafra migrated back to the North to face the same fate that almost annihilated them. The states of the old Eastern Region have also not fared better. It is piteous that sources of food in the entire Igbo land are mainly from the North. Creative writers have not exposed how the economic initiatives of old Eastern Region, which were conceptualised by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, and executed by Dr Michael Okpara have been made barren by successive governments of the five Southeast states in particular.

Another stereotype of Biafran War literature is the modelling of what a hero should be. A hero is someone who defends a cause selflessly. One aspect of the Biafran War that has received copious reviews is the resilience of Biafran soldiers in fighting the more sophisticated Federal forces. Despite their being overwhelmed, Biafrans courageously held unto the war for three years with its accumulated human and material losses.

Okoye (2015: 199) writes that,

They were ready to sacrifice their lives to ensure that their freedom was intact... People who had been mercilessly pushed to the wall vowed to iron it out even with bare hands. At the inception of the war, they came out voluntarily to fight. There were really a small number of weapons to commence and face the federal troops. But it was enthusiasm to defend their freedom that was the propelling factor.

In Onuoha's *Biafra: The Victims*, the soldiers were simply frustrated. Many died for lacking fighting tools. The suicide mission of Biafran soldiers is captured by Onuoha (2012: 19-20) thus, "there was this comic relief, which says that the Biafran soldiers never had the real ammunition to fight the war; that they depended so much on radio propaganda and resulted in beating big drums each time they ran out of ammunition, and that when the Federal army heard the big sound, they thought the Biafrans were still shelling enemy positions."

This act and its literary portrayal is tragic in the present time. Many youths from the defunct Biafra believe that they could fight without arms, and would be designated heroes as Ojukwu should they die

in the process. This is suicidal. The continued portrayal of this aspect of the war by emerging authors is an antithesis to the evolution of Biafran War literature. The best method is to redefine how this approach is rather villainous. This task is for creative writers.

Another tragedy is fighting a war that one is not prepared for. Okoye states that Biafrans were ready to fight with 'bare hands'. The saying that only a mad man fights an armed man with bare hands comes in here. This contributed to the huge casualties on the side of Biafra. Authors' modelling Ojukwu as a hero from this perspective is paradoxical. Having seen the helplessness of the people he represents, the best option would have been diplomatic. Such would have also served as a stopgap measure to fully prepare for the war if that became inevitable. This was ignored by Biafran stakeholders. This caused the ditching of the Biafra project by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in the middle of the war. Zik invariably realised the futility of the war, and probably, his advice was not hearkened to.

Some Federal Government's economic policies shortly after the end of the war have also been stereotyped. The portrayal points to the fact that the natives of the defunct Biafra, with their high hopes following the 'No Victor, No Vanquished' policy of the Federal Government, were shortly after the policy, made to face harsh economic policies. For instance, they earned twenty pounds of whatever bank savings they had after the war. Onuoha (2012: 60) writes that "their bank deposits, some in million pounds, would only be entitled to twenty pounds. All other savings and interests were forfeited also to the Federal Government." The same thing applies to FG's Indigenisation Policy, where shares of public liability companies were sold. This singular act, according to Onuoha (2012: 61), indicates that "the war is merely called off while efforts are on to exterminate us gradually and slowly." Quoting him further, "these two policies killed and widowed people more than the actual war" (2012: 60).

The same thing applies to the Abandoned Project declaration of the Gowon Government. This policy ensured that property hitherto owned by the Igbo in some parts of the country were declared abandoned, and the ownership lost. Akpauche, the narrator, compares the policy to a "deadly poison that killed in hundreds and in countless heart attacks, just emerging from a three year war only to know that all you have toiled and depended upon for your livelihood had been taken away by the same government that did not want you to secede" (Onuoha, 2012: 59). He mentioned the affected places to include Port Harcourt, Kano, Jos, and Kaduna.

As harsh as these policies might seem, they have been over-stereotyped. The authors fail to interrogate claims that, for instance, the twenty pounds policy was on interim to enable the verification of the victims' bank documents after which they were paid their savings. Again, over dwelling on these themes makes the agonies of the war linger from generation to generation. Rather than focusing on these depressing themes, more creativity should be geared towards exploring how survivors of the war substantially triumphed and even overtook some of the perceived oppressors in the fields of academics, entrepreneurship, and living standards. Such will make mankind appreciate that there are supernatural forces that operate with justice.

Another recurring stereotype is the gory depiction of the agonies of the war with emphasis on hunger and general lack. Okoye identifies the consequences to include diseases and deaths. He writes, "it contributed to kwashiorkor, a disease caused by acute shortage of protein foods, lack of salt and balanced diets... We saw the corpse of a baby by the roadside... It was the order of the day" (2015: 55). He expatiates that there was "a man who had taken out his two daughters of about three and six years of age respectively at 'ama', an expanse leading to a compound, to bury. He told us that her daughters died because they couldn't bear the scourge of hunger anymore like him" (Okoye, 2015: 170). Onouha captures the same scenario in his novel. He portrays how ordinary natives of the defunct Biafra were turned to refugees. The narrator recollects that the masses were using logs to cross some rivers, with some of them falling inside, with nobody to rescue them (Onouha, 2012: 15). He also recalls how "a man had his intestines bombed out, and only survived by using his hands to carry the intestines to a far away hospital", as well as the closure of schools and churches, and "preachers and worshippers alike were running to save their lives, and God was patient with them" (2012: 15).

Matters about the Jan 15 1966 coup keep recurring in the Biafran War literature. The polity in Nigeria in the First Republic was in shambles because of the ethno-political quagmire caused by mainly the nation's foremost nationalists. They fought for the independence of the country in unison, but had no plans towards sustaining the nation's unity afterwards. There were evidences that the nation was more divided according to her ethnic leanings than as a people.

A peaceful Nigeria cannot be achieved by stereotyping the Jan 15 1966 coup as an Igbo coup; after all, the coup was initially commended by the generality of Nigerians based on mass suffering caused by the then bad leadership. What should be the thrust of renderers of historical and literary accounts of the war should be good governance so that a need for military coup would not arise again in Nigeria.

Okoye dwelt on these matters gravely, inadvertently designating his work as a purveyor of history with no positive impacts on Nigerians. Such makes creative writers more of destroyers because reading these expository aspects of Nigeria's history provokes ethnic hatred and suspicion. The best option is to deconstruct the root causes of the coup, and provide solutions. In this case it is bad government, and building a national consciousness is the way forward.

Onuoha however identifies that if the coupists were not overzealous, the Biafran War would have been averted. According to him (2012: v), "the Biafran Civil War, which killed in thousands and millions, was a cataclysm that could have been avoided had the architects, planners, masterminds and power actors not succumbed to tribalism, hatred, mistrust and misconception." He fails however to be categorical on the way forward. Faulting the composition of the plotters and selective killings of the politicians then defeats his posture as a constructive artist. Onuoha was however correct by faulting reprisals which the people of the old Eastern Region faced. He maintains that such action was displaced because what led to the coup remained corruption and nepotism in the polity. He captures it that "instead of the enemies being political profiteers, swindlers, the men in power, the ten percent patrons, the tribalists, the nepotists, and those that corrupted the society as Nzeogwu perceived, the real enemies of Nigerians became any person of Igbo origin, and any person that bore Igbo names, and had sympathies for the Igbos" (Onuoha, 2012: 24). He regrets that "for this mortal mistake of a few, the Igbo blood flowed on every street in the North" (Onuoha, 2012: 25). The narrator blames the coupists and the political leaders for 'refusing to jaw-jaw', rather chose to settle a political issue 'with the barrel of the gun' (Onuoha, 2012: 26). The tragedy therefore is the fact that having allegedly killed the vulnerable Igbo in various parts of the country because of a possible flaw of a few, why has hatred upon them not ended with the war?

In the area of mineral resources deposits, Biafra, within its three years of existence, discovered deposits of the likes of salt, according to Onuoha. This was at the peak of the economic blockade of the territories of the defunct Biafra by the Federal Government in collaboration with the Western world. A typical example, writes Onuoha, is the salt deposit at Uburu. The salt was in liquid, and was sent across to the suffering masses to ameliorate their malnutrition. Till today, no part of the Eastern Region can produce salt despite such deposits. Literary and historical scholars hardly delve into this aspect to draw the attention of policy makers to rise to the occasion.

In fairness, the texts under review have some incisive perspectives capable of changing the Biafran War literature as well as the fortunes of the people of the defunct Biafra. They exposed the dangers of propaganda in warfare. The entire South East presently sits on gunpowder, courtesy of propaganda of proponents of Biafra actualisation. It takes a tweet by Simon Ekpa, the prime minister of Biafran government in exile, to unsettle the entire region. Nnamdi Kanu utilised the same to the detriment of those he is fighting for. Okoye and Onuoha vividly expose the gains and odds of the Ojukwu propaganda, which this research interprets as an exemplar.

Although there are many places they eulogise the Ojukwu propaganda, the two texts were able to interrogate the concepts from the perspectives of minor characters. This research agrees that exposing such will provide the rationale for interrogating unnecessary calls for sit-at-home, go to war, and secessionist bids by Biafran agitators.

Ojukwu used propaganda to build the morale of his depressed people, and strengthen the capacity of his soldiers to fight on. Ojukwu also utilised it to get sympathies from donor agencies. It was further used to discredit some unpopular and unconventional methodologies adopted by the Gowon military government in the execution of the war. These are the benefits of the information machinery hypes of the war.

In view of Okoye (2015: 171), “not until the picture of the starving Biafran children were seen outside that the world became aware of the nightmare in the enclave. The pictures were that of those who were alive and must die if something urgent was not done to salvage them.” Such efforts attracted assistance from foreign donors.

The Ojukwu propaganda however brought unfavourable consequences to the Biafran masses. It did not let the people know the true situation of the war. Okoye (2015: 44) writes that, “but Radio Biafra kept airing wrong information that the sporadic firing was the handiwork of saboteurs who were being rounded up for prosecution. That inability to tell the populace the exact situation derailed evacuations until the Nigerian troops were at the doorstep.” The situation was so terrible that the escaping Biafran masses met their dooms by ignorantly running into Federal occupied areas. Okoye (2015: 45) writes that, “if an escapee attempted to use the old Enugu-Onitsha road, they will encounter the Nigerian troops who had come from Nsukka axis and had blocked the Ninth Mile corner.” Many lives were lost because of this misinformation.

In *Biafra: The Victims* by Onouha, Ntozu, Akpauche’s father, is a casualty of propaganda. He told his son, “Akpauche, my son, it is not the sound of the thunder. The civil war has finally met us. All the Gobelian propaganda of phantom victories has now collapsed. How much portrayal, how much hope raised of unfettered republic of Biafra? This is where I was born and this is where I will die. I am not running to anywhere” (Onuoha, 2012: 24).

The texts also substantially portrayed how the defunct Biafra sustained the war at the later stages through the ingenuities of her scholars. The popular saying that necessity is the mother of invention defines everything about Biafra. Biafra’s Ogbunigwe, a dreaded locally made bomb, easily comes to mind. It is however symbolic in this work to showcase innovations; not necessarily to kill, but for positive development. The centre of Biafran innovations was Awka, the present capital of Anambra State.

Daddy, Charles’ father, after listening to the BBC, reported with joy that Biafran forces “had attacked the opponents with a locally made armoured car, made in Awka, a town in the Biafran enclave” (Okoye, 2015: 102). If Biafra could make an armoured car within three years of its existence, why is it that Nigeria could not proportionately replicate the same over the years? The researcher is not unaware of Nigeria’s breakthrough in the production of MRAP (Mine Resistant, Ambush Protected) vehicles by Nigerian military engineers led by Major General Victor Ezeugwu (retrd) in September 2019. From 1968 to 2019 is fifty-one years, which it took Nigeria to relatively achieve what Biafra hurriedly perfected as Red Devil in 1968 in the heat of the war. Presently, Nigeria imports the majority of her military equipment. If Nigeria had keyed into how Biafra managed to produce her armoured vehicles and other war instruments then, Nigeria would by now be exporting same, thus improving the nation’s locally generated revenue and creating jobs for her teeming youths.

Apart from armoured vehicles, the author also exposes other Biafran innovations which Nigeria and indeed Southeast states are yet to accomplish. One of them is local refining of crude oil. Biafra refined her crude oil perfectly, according to Okoye’s memoir. Conversely, Nigeria presently imports refined oil and exports crude oil. Further, Awka is symbolic in the book, as Okoye identifies it as Biafra’s technology hub because of its array of talented blacksmiths. The defunct Biafran government encouraged them. Awka still boasts of talented blacksmiths that perform wonders with their innate abilities. The much that is mainly heard from them presently is manufacturing illegal weapons which criminals allegedly use to perpetrate anti-social activities. The position of this study is that they have not been encouraged to develop because Nigeria is programmed as a consuming nation. A lot being

imported into the country presently could be manufactured in Awka if these same talents that sustained Biafran war through innovations are encouraged. In the absence of lack of encouragement, many blacksmiths in Awka, according to Okoye, divert their talents to negativism.

According to Okoye (2015: 103),

Awka people are known to be talented blacksmiths since time immemorial. Its choice of spearheading the evolution of manufacturing armoured vehicles was, therefore, not farfetched because they are great blacksmiths. They are artful gun makers too. Otto Von Bismarck, a one-time German chancellor, encouraged blacksmiths in his country... Talents not harnessed for useful purposes could be harnessed for negativism by hoodlums perfecting their nefarious acts.

Okoye's narrative indicts the Nigerian federation, as well as southeast states, for not being able to harness the positives of the war. Nigeria is today an importing nation while it has the potentials to be among the developed countries of the world. In such negligence and institutional failure lies the tragedy of the Nigerian Civil War because no lesson was learnt from it.

The same innovative negligence is portrayed in Onuoha's *Biafra: The Victims*. The cry over marginalisation of the present South-East Region of Nigeria has become synonymous with the Igbo since the Biafran War. The current agitations for self-actualisation as being championed by various movements are predicated on the under-development and political deprivation of the people of the old Eastern Region by the Federal Government. That is not the tragedy of the war.

The real tragedy of the war is the failure of the Igbo to build on the successes of the war to discover themselves. Onuoha writes that the difficulties of the war led to so many innovations. According to him, "professors who could not be directly involved in the Biafran War suddenly became plantain farmers and high-class businessmen"... (Onuoha, 2012: 57). The tragedy is that after the war, such professors, symbolising Igbo scholars, did not continue with such agricultural innovations. They relapsed and, like other Igbo agitators, resorted to the central government to send them allocations from the Federation accounts. It is the position of this research that this aspect of the war should take the centre stage of Biafran War literature not only depicting the warfare, but portraying the orchestrated dying Igbo innovations and resilience.

There is a popular saying that a writer often performs the role of a prophet. How much accountable have Biafran War writers held leaders of Southeast pertaining to increasing agitation for Biafra actualisation as well as increasing violence in the region? How much have they traced that what Igbos claim they suffer at the centre is being replicated within by Igbo leaders' insincerity of purpose? This aspect of creative writing should be explored because the agitation for Biafra is a direct misplacement of the problem within. If the zone called Southeast is properly governed, there will surely be less concern about what happens at the centre. Biafra as a metaphor would have been achieved within the super-structure called Nigeria without blood-letting.

Onuoha did justice to this by creating a picture of discordant voices among Igbo leaders, which has become the bane of unity among the Igbo, especially at the national level. The continuous agitation for the Sovereign State of Biafra in a confrontational manner is a sound evidence of lack of good leadership in the present-day Igbo land. There is mistrust among the youths on the sincerity of the privileged Igbo leaders, who are viewed as sell-out. The divisions, selfishness and unhealthy rivalries among such leaders deny Igbo youths the opportunities to learn from their 'role models'.

The address of the chairman of the Okada Forum, Mr Umeh Agu, in Onuoha's *Biafra: The Victims* during an emergency meeting of the Okada Union is a typical example of how frustrated Igbo youths seem to be in the present situation. They listen and believe whoever can speak to them in a language they understand. Mr Agu represents Igbo leaders who are rigidly agitating for the actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra. He recalls the usual narratives that necessitated the declaration of the defunct Biafra in 1967, among which are 'genocide, ethnic cleansing' (Onuoha, 2012: 1).



In his words, “today, we are faced with extinction; our roads have become death traps; ... We are denied the economic benefits of resources exploited from our lands; presidential candidates of Igbo extraction are rigged out. Our youths are unemployed” (Onuoha, 2012: 1-2). His lamentation continues when he urges his followers to fight on as “their parents died while sleeping at home” (Onuoha, 2012: 3). He also asserts that, “we must either confront the monster today, or fear the risk of death and still die” (Onuoha, 2012: 3). The implication of this is that the youths should go to war ill-equipped. It is a wrong approach by a presumed Igbo leader because such makes the youths adopt the same old order with its devastating consequences.

Mr Agu, meanwhile, is challenged by a professor and public servant, Ugwu Ugwu. Ugwu is coming from the intellectual perspectives. As much as his proposition of non-violence towards the agitation is more rational, the youths still shouted him down because his opinion does not support their radical methodology of realising Biafra. Ugwu’s submission is that, “while I agree with you of the precarious and debilitating conditions of our people, I, however, differ in the methodology of action. You want us to confront the federal power with what? That will be mass suicide for our people. Instead of opting out, let us sit down and bargain with them...” (Onuoha, 2012: 4).

The youths disagreed with him. Onuoha states that while Ugwu was still speaking, impatient youths started shouting “sit down, sit down, they have given you money. You are a sale-out!” (Onuoha, 2012: 4). The summary of the foregoing is that some Biafran agitators are products of wrong influences. Ugwu may represent the political elite of Ndigbo who have failed to lead by examples. They also arrogate power to themselves to the extent that the less privileged see them as their co-oppressors aside the Federal might. It is a big tragedy in the aftermath of the war as such intellectuals in government do not have the moral capacity to control Okada riders because of mistrust.

At the same meeting of the Okada Forum is Dr Igbe Obi, a political philosopher. Onuoha states that he is noted for his sophistry. It is however tragic that he shares different ideologies with Prof Ugwu to the extent of openly disagreeing with him in the meeting. This has become a major problem against building the Igbo consciousness. Without such unity, it will be difficult to achieve a common goal at the national level, amounting to what Achebe calls ‘destruction from within’.

Dr Obi is revered by the Okada riders who readily address him as ‘The Lion, the Lion’ (Onuoha, 2012: 5). He seems to be an opportunist. Before he spoke, according to Onuoha, he began “by raising his cow-tail hand fan, as if he is trying to conjure up the rain” (Onuoha, 2012: 4). His introductory speech says it all, “power is good. If you have it, when you have it, you can command mountains to move” (Onuoha, 2012: 5). He continues, “we are being marginalised; we are denied our economic and political rights...Ndigbo, you must not be afraid of the other man, because the other man is also afraid of you” (Onuoha, 2012: 5). To some extent, this is radicalisation, which would have been appreciated in a developed world where the rule of law prevails.

The secondary tragedy here is the possibility of Igbo elites being behind the agitation for the actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra at whatever expense. The position of this paper is that such moves are not condemned, but the procedures may be dangerous. Ugwu and Obi should have had a cause to speak with one voice and further educate the Okada riders that dialogue remains the best solutions to avoid the repeat of the error of the Biafran war. The victory of Dr Obi in the ensuing argument means that the agitation for the actualisation of Biafra is not rationally being fought.

### **Conclusion**

It is the position of this paper that agonies of the war should be done away with in the Biafran War literature. Selective forgetting is a defence mechanism in psychology meant to heal depressed souls. Recounting these ordeals in literature builds trauma on the readers, especially the younger generation. There is therefore the need for conscious efforts of writers about the Biafran War to make it innovative rather than its current lamentation status. Tears, it is said, never make the weak strong. The only way is to move on, overcome and conquer for self-discovery. Rwandan writers chose to write the good

narratives about the country's genocide between 7<sup>th</sup> April and 15<sup>th</sup> July 1994. Today, their wounds have been healed. The literature of the Biafran War should borrow a leaf from Rwanda.

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