

CHAPTER 14

YAKUBU GOWON: THE CHALLENGE OF
NATION BUILDING

SAHBED ADERINTO

Yakubu Gowon attended the famous Government College, Zaria (now Barewa College) between 1950 and 1953. He enlisted in the Nigerian Army in 1954. Between 1954 and 1966, he was trained militarily in Ghana and the United Kingdom. He was a member of the United Nations peace-keeping force in the Congo (1961), and rose from the rank of Second Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel.¹ Arriving from London two days before the January 15, 1966 coup, which terminated Nigeria's First Republic (1960-1966), Gowon, in conjunction with other "loyal" officers, helped quell the rebellion and was subsequently appointed Army Chief of Staff under Major-General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi's administration.² Gowon became Nigeria's second military leader to take the role of head of state when another coup abruptly ended Ironsi's tenure on July 29, 1966.³

Leading Nigeria during one of the most turbulent periods in its history, Gowon not only inherited a fragile political structure following two successive coups in January and July 1966, but he led Nigeria in the Civil War (July 1967-January 1970). The war was between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, the former Eastern Region, which declared that it was a sovereign nation on May 30, 1967. Unlike most Nigerian military rulers, whose regimes were for the most part unpopular at home and abroad, Gowon's place in Nigerian history seems uncertain. While the "federalists" (sections of the country under the Federal Government) regard him as a nation-builder, the secessionists (those under the newly declared Republic of Biafra) consider him as a vindictive anarchist who committed genocide against the easterners, especially the Igbo.⁴ J. Isawa Elaigwu, in his academic biography of Gowon, asserted that Gowon was dubbed "the Abraham Lincoln of Nigeria" during the civil war.⁵ By 1975, he had been accused of ineptitude in managing the resources and unity of the nation.⁶ The coup of July 29, 1975, which terminated his nine-year rule, appeared inevitable in the light of the high level of corruption that permeated virtually all spheres of Nigerian society.⁷ A year after his removal from office, Gowon's dwindling fame deteriorated further when he was implicated in another coup that ended the regime and life of Brigadier General Murtala Mohammed, his successor.⁸

This chapter is organized chronologically to reflect the changing character of Gowon's leadership as Nigeria's longest serving military head of state. The proceeding section will examine how he came into power, situating it within the context of enormous political instability that engulfed not only Nigeria, but also the entire continent of Africa during the 1960s and 1970s. This section is followed by a critical analysis of Gowon's regime between 1966 and 1970. It is not accidental that this section focuses more on crises and Gowon's prosecution of the civil war.⁹ The civil war remains one of the most significant themes in Nigerian history, not only because it threatened the unity of the nation-state, which Obafemi Awolowo described as "a mere geographical expression,"¹⁰ but also because its outcome realigned inter-group relations among Nigeria's over 200 ethno-cultural cleavages. The penultimate section examines Gowon's leadership in the postwar era, 1970-1975.

Aside from rebuilding a country devastated by a "war of unification" or "police action" as Gowon tagged the civil war,¹¹ the postwar era saw the initiation and implementation of a number of programs aimed at re-establishing democratic governance. If Nigeria needed military rule in order to prevent it from disintegrating—as Gowon reiterated on the eve of the civil war—in the postwar era, the nation, he stated "must not rush matters, and should proceed very carefully" in returning power to the civilians.¹² This section is guided by the following questions: How effective was Gowon's postwar reconstruction and rehabilitation in "healing the wounds" of hostility? Did Nigeria need another five years of military governance to return power to civilians? Why did Gowon rescind the promise made in 1970 to relinquish power to the civilians in 1974? Was the coup that removed him from office justified against the backdrop of allegations of gross misappropriation of public fund and his inability to take Nigeria to the "promised land"? The last section examines his life after leaving office and his current status as an elder statesman. Unlike several military leaders who attempted to return to power as democratically elected civilians, Gowon has distanced himself from public politics and has remained "politically neutral" in addressing issues that threaten the oneness of the country.

PRELUDE TO GOWON'S ASCENDANCY: ETHNICITY
AND POLITICAL FRACTURE

The 1960s and 1970s in Africa were decades of reclamation of African dignity, exemplified by political self-determination and independence from European colonial hegemony. No sooner did the civilian authorities begin to consolidate on the gains of self-rule, than military coups and civil wars swept across the entire continent.¹³ From Libya to Congo, Togo to Uganda, sub-nationalism and violence, accentuated by military involvement in politics, exposed the fragility of peace (that the European colonialists had managed to contain with force) and the enormous challenges of nation building.¹⁴ Political instability dimmed the bright lights of self-rule and proved wrong Kwame Nkrumah's

conviction that independence would solve all Africa's problems.¹⁵ Greed, corruption, and mismanagement of national wealth by the civilian governments of immediate post-independent Africa explained the intervention of the military in politics,¹⁶ the artificiality of nation states, divisive character of ethnic plurality, and the draconian policies of the colonial masters which laid the foundation of the continent's quagmire. The military coups also exposed the weak civilian political leadership and the political ambition of the military leaders.

With particular reference to Nigeria, it is impossible to dissociate the political convulsion of the 1960s from events dating back to 1914 when the British colonialists created the political entity now known as Nigeria. Lord Lugard's amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates (chiefly for economic and administrative convenience) in 1914 ended over five decades of evolution of the Nigerian state that started with the annexation of Lagos, the first part of modern Nigeria to be brought under colonial rule in 1861.¹⁷ Nigeria was created without any sensitivity to ethnic plurality. Admittedly, the Nigerian geographical area had established political and economic relations with one another centuries before the advent of colonialism; however, European imperialism drastically transformed the established patterns of relations. Obaro Ikime's conclusion on the impact of colonialism on Nigerian societies is incontestable: "In terms of inter-group relations, colonial rule was something of a paradox: on the one hand, it brought Nigerian peoples together in new groupings and for new purposes; on the other, it emphasized already existing differences and introduced new ones."¹⁸ The policy of divide and rule that the British introduced basically ensured that Nigerian ethnic groups did not form strong political and cultural identities and alliances that could militate against colonial hegemony. Hence, the northern and southern regions did not begin to dialogue politically until 1947, after the Richards constitution introduced regionalism.¹⁹ In addition, the segregation of non-natives in urban centers and countless other divisive cultural and religious policies laid the foundation of a disunited Nigeria that post-independence political elites inherited.²⁰

If the colonialists laid a shaky foundation for independent Nigeria, the politicians of the First Republic failed to strengthen it. The main political parties of the era — National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Northern People's Congress (NPC), and Action Group AG—all emerged along ethnic lines, thereby reinforcing the preexisting inter- and intra-ethnic and regional division.²¹ High level of suspicion and mutual distrust featured prominently in daily political life as each region and ethnicity vied for political positions and power. This, in addition to unabated corruption and violence following the 1965 election in the Western Region, enabled Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu to lead a group of Majors—mainly of Igbo ethnic group but also including a Yoruba, Major Adewale Ademoyega—in organizing a bloody coup that brought an end to the First Republic on January 15, 1966.²² Nzeogwu blamed the ethnic imbalance of the killings on "misguided consideration" by officers entrusted with the task of eliminating prominent Eastern and

Midwestern leaders,²³ but northerners felt the coup was aimed at removing their political influence by imposing Igbo rule over the government of the country. Their suspicion gained momentum and the situation degenerated when Major-General Johnson Thomas Ironsi, an Igbo who became head of state after the coup, formed a predominantly Igbo cabinet, did not punish the coup plotters, and passed the infamous Decree 34 which transformed Nigeria into a unitary state.²⁴

"A POLICE-MILITARY ACTION": GOWON AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

Gowon emerged as the head of state on August 1, 1966 after the counter-coup of July 29, 1966.²⁵ Brigadier General Babafemi Ogundipe, the most senior officer after the demise of Ironsi, should have become the new head of state. Having narrowly escaped death during the coup—"he fled pistol in hand from his northern body guards and sought sanctuary aboard the navy's frigate."²⁶ Scared of heading a constantly rebellious army, Ogundipe later became Nigeria's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom. Worse still, the northern "rebels" would not take orders from any other officers but Gowon, the most senior officer from the North. There were widespread speculations that Gowon knew about the coup. This was because of the manner in which he was able to bring the mutinous army under control, and the fact that he did not reprimand Murtala Mohammad and other northern officers who participated in the counter-coup.

In his reflections on the crisis, Ambassador Raph Uwechue raised four pertinent questions about why Gowon could not claim innocence of involvement in the coup: "Why did he not punish the murderers of his supreme commander? Why did he avoid the use of the word 'rebels' for the perpetrators of the July coup? Did he find it politically impossible to act against them? Was he in the same dilemma as General Ironsi found himself on assumption of office?"²⁷ Be that as it may, Gowon's ascendancy paid off—the "mutineers" abandoned their arms, discipline was restored into a seriously divided army, and another chapter in Nigeria's history began under the command of a 32-year old northern Christian military leader. In his first address to the nation, Gowon reviewed the events of the preceding months and declared:

I have come to strongly believe that we cannot honestly and sincerely continue in this wise, as the basis for trust and confidence in our unitary system of government has been unable to stand the test of time... Suffice to say that putting all consideration to test, political, economic as well as social, the basis of unity is not there, or is badly rocked not only once but several times. I therefore feel that we should review the issues of our national standing to see if we can help the country from drifting away into utter destruction.²⁸

If Ironsi's regime appeared to be insensitive to the cultural diversity of the Nigerian state and took highly important decisions unilaterally or in consulta-

tion only with his Igbo advisers, Gowon's administration from the onset demonstrated the need to carry all constituencies along in the drive towards peace and stability.²⁹ In condemning Ironsi's unitary system, Gowon remarked: "Personally, I was not a unitary system of government man. I had always believed in federation of Nigeria, bearing in mind the set-up of the country—the old regional set-up, the various ethnic groups in the country. Our variety was such that you could not get the best out of the people under [a] unitary system of government."³⁰ He went on to convene an ad hoc Constitutional Conference in September 1966 where civilian representatives from the four regions deliberated on the best means of forging a united Nigeria. With the exception of a unitary system, a number of conflicting political arrangements, ranging from federalism to confederalism were proposed by representatives of the regions. While the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions favored confederalism, the Midwestern wanted federalism. Gowon was said to have allowed all the consistencies to freely voice their opinions while keeping the debate within the scope of upholding national unity and respecting the country's diverse cultural landscape.³¹ However, he wanted federalism, which allowed each constituency a degree of internal autonomy, with a strong center.

The issue of state creation also featured prominently at the Conference. While the Northern, Western, and Midwestern Regions demanded for the creation of more states, the Eastern Region delegates thought it would weaken their base and power to collectively mobilize for the common good of the region. It is important to note that agitation for creation of more states or a smaller political entity to cater for minorities' representation dated back to the colonial period.³² As Henry Alapiki, among others scholars have noted, the coalition government of NPC and NCNC created the Midwestern Region in 1963, not primarily to make government closer to the citizens, but to trim the influence of AG, their main opponent.³³ The Constitutional Conference exposed a number of trajectories about nation-building and the divisive character of the Nigerian state. Although elements of sectionalism predated the 1960s and had featured prominently in the numerous constitutional conferences held during the decolonization era, Gowon, like most Nigerians, realized that the January and July coups further worsened the precariously held national unity.

New developments characterized by violence against the Igbo in the North created a major set-back for the Constitutional Conference, which Gowon thought would allow him to return power to the civilians.³⁴ Fearing their safety, the Eastern Region's delegates, led by its Governor, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, declined to attend further meetings unless northern troops were evacuated from Lagos where the conference was being held. The Western Region delegates also declared that the presence of northern soldiers in their jurisdiction was unacceptable. Gowon was forced to postpone the conference indefinitely and announced that federalism, not confederalism was best for Nigeria.³⁵ According to Elaigwu, this

break down of negotiation impacted Gowon's decision to stay in power longer than he wanted. Elaigwu argues that Gowon saw the civilians as grossly incapable of managing the affairs of a country at the brink of collapse.³⁶ It is hard to disagree with Elaigwu's explanation for Gowon's decision not to relinquish power to the civilians given the high level of insecurity, north-south dichotomy, and militarization of the entire country. If junior officers were not taking orders from their superiors, the highly unpopular politicians definitely lacked the credentials to command the respect of a constantly rebellious army.³⁷

Gowon's failure to stop the pogrom in the North against the Igbo compelled the Igbo elite comprised of scholars, politicians, and civil servants to demand that Ojukwu declare the Eastern Region, named the Republic of Biafra, independent of the Nigerian State. Ojukwu's relations with Gowon quickly deteriorated as the former was said to have turned down all diplomatic arrangements to resolve the crisis. Respite, however, came in January 1967 when the Ghanaian head of state, General Joseph Ankrah, invited top Nigerian military officers to a meeting to resolve the national problem. Popularly known as the Aburi Accord, the agreement reached at the meeting touched on crucial aspects of legislative and executive powers. The regions were empowered to make legislation on certain issues, while the Supreme Military Council (SMC) comprising the governors of each region and top military officers would run the government at the center. Gowon and Ojukwu read the Aburi Agreement differently. While Gowon felt it provided a sort of federalism that recognized the power of the government at the center, Ojukwu believed it gave the Eastern Region the right to secede from the Nigerian state, if necessary.³⁸

Events took a new dimension on May 27, 1975 when Gowon announced the creation of twelve states out of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in an address to the nation. He gave a short history of minority demand for creation of states dating back to the colonial period.³⁹ The Northern and Eastern Regions were demarcated into six and three states respectively. Lagos the capital, the Western Region and the Midwestern Region received new nomenclatures as states.⁴⁰ Although Gowon presented the creation of states as a response to minority agitation for grassroot development and agency, a careful appraisal of the new political geography of the country reveals that it was meant to undermine the secessionist agenda of the Biafrans by creating division among them. By making Port Harcourt the capital of Rivers State, Gowon sought to deprive the seceding Biafrans access to oil and made the entire Igboland landlocked. Other structural imbalances in the state creation rendered its professed purpose of bringing government closer to the people questionable. For instance, the Western Region that became the new Western State with an estimated population of 9.5 million was more populous than about five states combined.⁴¹ In all, it is hard to accept Gowon's constant denial that the creation of states was not targeted at the Biafrans, because a substantial portion of

his address to the nation about the new *status quo* focused on Ojukwu's alleged criminal activities. According to Gowon:

The whole world is witness to the continued defiance of federal authority by the Government of the Eastern Region, the disruption of the Railway, the Coal Corporation, the normal operations of the Nigerian Ports Authority, the interference with the flight schedules of the Nigeria Airways and other illegal acts by the Eastern Region Government culminating in the edicts promulgated last month by that Government purporting to seize all Federal Statutory Corporations and Federal revenues collected in the East. The consequence of these illegal sets has been the increasing deterioration of the Nigerian economy. It has also produced uncertainty and insecurity generally and pushed the country with increasing tempo towards total disintegration and possible civil war and bloodshed on massive scale. In the face of all these, I have shown great restraint, hoping that through peaceful negotiations a solution acceptable to all sections of the country can be found. Unfortunately, the hopes of myself and my other colleagues on the Supreme Military Council have been disappointed by the ever increasing campaign of hate by the Governor of the Eastern Region. Lt. Col Ojukwu has continuously increased his demands as soon as some are met in order to perpetuate the crisis and lead the Eastern Region out of Nigeria... That refinery is owned jointly by the Federal Government and Regional governments. Illegally, since last year, the Authorities at Enugu have interfered with the flight routes of the Nigeria Airways. Only recently they committed the barbaric crime of hijacking a plane bound for Lagos from Benin.⁴²

If Gowon conceived the creation of states as a strategy to contain Biafran sub-nationalism, Nigerians (especially northern minorities) felt it was a step in the right direction. More minority groups enlisted in the federal army as citizens of the new states celebrated a turning point in their long history of political representation and fairness. Instead of demoralizing the Biafrans, Gowon's scheme simply intensified their solidarity and pitched them increasingly against the federal government. Ojukwu's popularity among the Igbo soared as he made the East a safe haven for returnees who felt insecure living in other parts of the country, especially the North. Three days after Gowon's announcement of the creation of states, Ojukwu officially proclaimed the sovereignty of the Republic of Biafra. He said in his address:

Fellow countrymen and women, you, the people of Eastern Nigeria:

...you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any Government based outside eastern Nigeria; Believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves; Unwilling to be unfree partners in any association of a political or economic nature; Rejecting the authority of any person or persons other than the Military Government of eastern Nigeria to make any imposition of whatever kind or nature upon you; Determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Federal Republic of Nigeria; Prepared to enter into such association, treaty or alliance with any sovereign state within the former Federal Republic of Nigeria and elsewhere on such terms and conditions as best to subserve your common good;

Affirming your trust and confidence in me; Having mandated me to proclaim on your behalf, and in your name the Eastern Nigeria be a sovereign independent Republic. Now Therefore I, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, by virtue of the authority, and pursuant to the principles recited above, do hereby solemnly proclaim that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of The Republic of Biafra...⁴³

Biafra's declaration of sovereignty became the last straw that broke the camel's back. On July 5, 1967 Gowon ordered a "police action" against Ojukwu — thereby signaling the beginning of a thirty-month civil war. A lot of work has been done on the Nigerian Civil War; therefore, it is not necessary to retell the story here.⁴⁴ Aspects that need to be revisited and reemphasized include the contradictions between how Gowon conceived the war and its prosecution on the one hand, and the actual events on the war front on the other. In several of his communications with Nigerians and the international community, Gowon tagged the war a "police action" to give the impression that he was not fighting a section of the country in a civil war, but merely attempting to correct Ojukwu's "insubordination." He continued to defend the legitimacy of the conflict and delineate between a "police action" and a "civil" war even decades after leaving office:

Whilst it was commonplace for the media reports to refer the crisis as a "Civil War", we preferred to call it a rebellion, and to therefore term the action taken to deal with it as "Police Action/ Military Action," not war. These terms were deliberately used because I believed that the terms "war" promoted the image of a battle between two hostile enemies. I did not consider the Eastern Region and the Igbo an enemy, but rather a misled area. Furthermore, war would entail the excessive use of force and justify unethical behavior and action that, in my opinion, was unacceptable.⁴⁵

He went on to indicate that the federal troops were trained and directed to treat the civilian population and war prisoners with respect.⁴⁶ However, in several of his addresses to the nation between 1967 and 1970, he repeatedly used the term "war."⁴⁷ To give the impression that his soldiers were friendly with civilians, images of federal soldiers carrying Igbo babies and smiling with their mothers, flooded government controlled media.⁴⁸ However, the reality of war and the oral testimonies of the military, civilians, and members of the international community revealed the enormous atrocities committed by the federal troops.⁴⁹ Biafran-sponsored images of suffering women and children were published in global media and helped to sensitize the international community to the "genocide" committed against the Igbo.⁵⁰ The Biafrans also gave the international community the impression that the war was a religious one: between the northern Muslim majority (represented by the Federal government) and Biafran minorities (Christian).⁵¹ Although Ojukwu admitted deliberately to using the images of dying women and children to elicit international support against the federal government — post-war assessment even further revealed that he overstated the impact of Gowon's blockade⁵² — the indisputable

fact is that a war, not a "police action," unleashed a lot of havoc on the civilian population and claimed an estimate of about two million lives.⁵³

Despite the inherent contradictions between how Gowon conceived the war and its prosecution, and the actual events on the war front, he does deserve praise for not openly spreading anti-Igbo hatred. Unlike most African civil war leaders such as Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and Omar al-Bashir of Sudan among others—who orchestrated hate-crimes, hate-speech, and annihilation of sections of their countries, Gowon tailored the war towards maintaining the unity of the nation, not punishing the Igbo people.⁵⁴ It is difficult to refute his genuine sense of respect for Nigerians and the unity of the Nigerian state in his numerous addresses to the nation both during and after the war. Indeed, he regretted the loss of lives of innocent citizens and did not legitimize the use of violence against the civilians.⁵⁵ As he recounted in several of his interviews, although the federal armies were trained not to molest the civilian population, the war commanders and soldiers were given free hands to prosecute each episode of the war in accordance with prevailing circumstances. This meant that his commanders carried out most if not all the atrocities against the Igbo people. Whether these atrocities could be considered "genocide" is an issue that will continue to receive critical reflections. For the UN, OAU, Britain, Canada, Poland, and Sweden that observed the war, "genocide could not describe what was going on in the war affected areas of the country."⁵⁶ Even if the war was genocidal in nature, one does not expect a country like Britain to report it since it was the largest supplier of ammunition to the federal government.⁵⁷

"TRANSITION WITHOUT END": GOWON'S POST-WAR NIGERIA

When it became apparent that the federal government would eventually win the war, Ojukwu handed power to his deputy, Major Phillip Effiong on January 9, 1970 and fled to Côte d'Ivoire to seek asylum. The civil war ended on January 15, 1970 when Effiong officially surrendered to Gowon and pledged the easterners' loyalty to the unity of the Nigerian state.⁵⁸ In his address to the nation announcing the end of hostility, Gowon stated: "The so-called "Rising Sun of Biafra" is set for ever. It will be a great disservice for anyone to continue to use the word Biafra to refer to any part of the East Central State of Nigeria. The tragic chapter of violence is just ended. We are the dawn of national reconciliation. Once again, we have an opportunity to build a new nation."⁵⁹ He declared that there was no victor and no vanquished and assured the Igbo people that it was not the Nigerian state who was their enemy, but instead Ojukwu, who had turned them against the government. Gowon probably understood the impact of the war on women and children when he remarked that: "Special attention will be given to the rehabilitation of women and children in particular, so long denied the comfort of homes, the blessing of education and the assurance of a future by Ojukwu's wicked tyranny and falsehood."⁶⁰

In order to effectively pursue post-war reconstruction, Gowon inaugurated his famous three R's (reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction).⁶¹ This program was targeted towards reintegrating the Igbo into the Nigerian workforce and national life and "healing the wounds" of hostility.⁶² He instructed the federal army to give the surrendering Biafran troops a "human treatment,"⁶³ and formed a War Damages Assessment Committee "to collect and analyze reports of war damages from individuals, organizations, and institutions in both the public and private sectors and their claims for relief."⁶⁴ Other programs included the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) that compelled Nigerian youth to live among non-natives or outside their states of origins. The one-year compulsory national service as Gowon conceived it, would allow Nigerian youth under the age of 30 to learn about other cultures and appreciate the ethnic, religious, and geographic diversity of the country.

Gowon's 3Rs were only partially successful. Of the total estimate of N400m needed to revamp damages to physical infrastructures in East Central State alone, only N30m was made available for the 1970/71 fiscal year.⁶⁵ A flat and one-time payment of N40 given to each of the 200,000 depositors of old Biafran and Nigerian currencies was grossly inadequate in cushioning the effect of the war.⁶⁶ The fact that Igbo soldiers and policemen who fought on the side of Biafra did not receive amnesty until 2000 discredits Gowon's reconciliation and rehabilitation program.⁶⁷ In addition, a recent book, which Apollos Nwauwa and Chima Korie edited, reveals that the Igbo "nation" and people are still grappling with the consequences of the civil war over forty years after it ended.⁶⁸ There are also widespread claims that Gowon's three Rs were prejudicially implemented along ethnic lines. For instance, Effiong in 2001 claimed that while high-ranked Biafran Igbo officers have been rehabilitated by the federal government, he has yet to receive any benefit, because he was an Ibibio minority. Effiong believed that Gowon's "No Victor, No Vanquished" pronouncement was a "mere paper promise."⁶⁹ Other national integration schemes such as the NYSC have also not achieved their desired goals. A doctoral research study on the scheme completed in 1982 reveals that it was not making any meaningful impact in reducing negative ethnic stereotypes and perceptions.⁷⁰ Recurring violence against corps members—most recently during the April/May 2011 elections where about ten were killed in Bauchi and other northern states—attest to the failure of the scheme expected to unite Nigerians.⁷¹ Ironically, the corps members who symbolize Nigeria's "unity" are now targets and victims of politically and religiously motivated violence in northern Nigeria.⁷²

It would appear that no one doubted the need for military leadership following the two coups in the 1960s and the outbreak of the civil war in May 1967. However, Gowon did not allow Nigerians to start demanding return of power to civilians once the storm of violence subsided. He announced in 1970 that he would be returning power to the civilians in 1974 after implementing the following nine programs:

- (1) the re-organisation of the Armed Forces;
- (2) The implementation of the National Development Plan and the repair of the damage and neglect of the War;
- (3) the eradication of corruption in our national life;
- (4) the settlement of the creation of more states;
- (5) the preparation and adoption of a new Constitution;
- (6) the introduction of a new Revenue Allocation Formula;
- (7) conducting a national population census;
- (8) the organization of genuinely national parties;
- (9) the organization of elections and installation of popularly elected governments in the States and in the centre.⁷³

Gowon's failure to properly implement these programs (especially the census of 1973) in addition to corruption accounted for the downfall of his regime. The 1973 census figures were grossly inflated to make the North more populous than the South. The provisional figure gave an increase of 72% and 11% from the 1963 census to the old Northern and Eastern Regions respectively. The old Western Region decreased by 06%. Southern leaders led by Awolowo believed the figures were inflated to make the North more populous than the South and asked for its cancellation. Since census figures were the criteria for federal allocation and representation, southerners felt Gowon wanted to cripple development in the region. The political atmosphere of the country became tense when Gowon refused to cancel the figure and went on to ratify it. Sensing an impending security threat to the oneness of the country, he declared in 1974 that he was postponing the return of power to civilians, which was already slated for 1975, indefinitely.

From 1973 to 1975, corruption, according to S.O. Osoba, a frontline neo-Marxist "was the single most significant issue on which the Gowon regime became seriously embattled with the Nigerian public."⁷⁴ A short list of corrupt practices during the period included: The misappropriation of salaries of soldiers killed in action during the war and; inflation of contracts; the looting of public and private property in occupied territories by Biafran and Nigerian soldiers; and the looting of millions of pounds of sterling from the Central Bank, Benin in 1968, among others.⁷⁵ Gowon ignored allegations of mismanagement leveled against his officers and refused to book them—even as affidavits were sworn against them.⁷⁶ Rather, he consistently argued that he could not disgrace his officers before the public or announce their misconduct over the radio.⁷⁷ It would appear that he deliberately overlooked the misrule of his governors in order to avoid being overthrown. Gowon gave his reason for compensating these corrupt officers by arguing that: "they all stood by him during the difficult days of the Civil War..."⁷⁸

Gowon could not fully satisfy all his cronies with the resources of the entire nation. Colonel Joe Garba, the Commander of Brigade of Guards—who led the July 29, 1975 bloodless coup that removed him (Gowon) while attending the OAU summit in Kampala Uganda—was dissatisfied that he was not appointed a federal commissioner.⁷⁹ Garba was the only officer that

was not posted out of Dodan Barrack, the seat of government throughout Gowon's nine year rule. He was Gowon's most trusted confidant, and certainly not considered a usurper. Murtala Mohammed, one of the 1975 coup plotters, was subsequently appointed by the Supreme Military Council (SMC) as Murtala Mohammed, in his first address to the nation, gave a long and coherent justification for the coup, scoring Gowon low in virtually all cardinal components of nation-building. He said:

Fellow Nigerians, events of the past few years have indicated that despite our great human and material resources, the Government has not been able to fulfill the legitimate expectations of our people...This situation, if not arrested, would inevitably have resulted in chaos and even bloodshed. In the endeavour to build a strong, united and virile nation, Nigerians have shed much blood. The thought of further bloodshed, for whatever reasons must, I am sure, be revolting to our people. . . . This trend was clearly incompatible with the philosophy and image of a corrective regime. Unknown to the general public, the feeling of disillusionment was also evident among members of the armed forces whose administration was neglected but who, out of sheer loyalty to the Nation, and in the hope that there would be a change, continued to suffer in silence...Responsible opinion, including advice by eminent Nigerians, traditional rulers, intellectuals, et cetera, was similarly discarded. The leadership, either by design or default, had become too insensitive to the true feelings and yearnings of the people. The nation was thus plunged inexorably into chaos.⁸⁰

Murtala began immediately to his political visions into action. His program to make Nigeria a disciplined and strong country initially appeared radical, but Nigerians later liked it. Murtala became one of the most popular and respected military leaders Nigeria ever had.

CIVILIAN LIFE: EXILE AND ELDER STATESMANSHIP

Gowon was reported to have taken the news of the coup in good faith—as if he knew it would happen.⁸¹ The new administration tactfully exiled him by declaring that he was "free to return to the country as soon as conditions permit."⁸² Definitely, the political atmosphere of the country was not conducive for him to return: he might be killed or jailed under the pretext that he wanted to force his way back to power. Although the governments of Uganda and Cameroon offered him asylum in their countries, he finally settled in London—after living in Lome for a few months. It did not take long for Gowon's quiet civilian and exiled life to be disturbed when a February 13, 1976 bloody, but unsuccessful coup led by Lieutenant Colonel Dimka claimed Murtala Mohammed's life. Gowon was implicated in the coup in a way he probably did not anticipate: the coup leaders testified to have met him on several occasions and that the coup was carried out to reinstall him as the head of state. Gowon's image both at home and abroad further deteriorated. The new administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo subsequently stripped him of his military title, stopped his retirement benefit, and declared him a fugitive. He re-

mained a wanted person until 1981 when the government of President Shehu Shagari granted him amnesty and permission to return to the country. Gowon spent his retirement life improving himself intellectually by enrolling in an undergraduate program at the University of Warwick in October 1975. However, the student body associated with the International Socialist Groups criticized university authorities for granting him admission on the ground of abuse of power.⁸³

Today, Gowon plays an elder statesmanship role within Africa and the international community at large. He is considered a resourceful person on issues of national integration and nation-building.⁸⁴ In 1992, he established "The Yakubu Gowon Centre for National Unity and International Cooperation," as a private, non-profit, non-partisan, non-government organization (NGO). The mission and vision of the organization include: "To promote a peaceful and united Nigeria, free of disease and poverty, where every citizen has an opportunity for self-expression and the realization of their full potentials" and "To achieve peaceful co-existence, national unity and socio economic development through good governance, diseases impact mitigation and poverty reduction."⁸⁵ In 2008, he led a team of 200 ECOWAS observers to monitor elections in Ghana.⁸⁶

CONCLUSION

The military involvement in African politics will always remain an aberration. Soldiers are trained to protect their countries from internal and external convulsion, not to rule.⁸⁷ They come to power in a messianic manner with countless promises of corrective measures, yet leave disgracefully. They do not have any constitutional power to rule and are not voted into power by the people. They rule with iron and blood, destroying societies beyond the condition in which they received them. Gross abuse of power, corruption, and violation of basic human rights are some of the countless vices of military rule in Africa as elsewhere in the world. The popular saying that the worst democracy is better than the best military appears cogent in the light of well-established trends of military misrule.

Nigeria, during the 1960s and 1970s, was ruled largely by soldiers who removed their colleagues from power on allegations, ranging from political ineptitude to corruption. Hence within a decade (from 1966-1976), four coups and countercoups took place. "Nigeria's military coup culture," according to Max Siollum, not only kept Nigerians' civic loyalty hanging in the balance, but created an atmosphere of fear and mutual distrust, inimical to the growth and development of the nation.⁸⁸ The leaders were busy prosecuting violence during the period when they were supposed to consolidate on the gains of self-rule by piloting the country through programs of sustainable development.

As illegitimate as the military leadership of the 1960s and 1970s were, the nation probably did not begin to see the true image of soldiers' rule until the

1980s and 1990s when Generals Mohammed Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha came into power.⁸⁹ It is through the comparison of the regimes of Gowon with those of Babangida and Abacha that one can fully come to terms with the place of Gowon in Nigerian history. First, unlike Babangida and Abacha, who practically emptied Nigeria's treasury during their thirteen-year reign, Gowon had a virtually "clean" record of not stealing national wealth. His biographies after leaving office lend credence to his "clean" financial records.⁹⁰ Unlike his contemporaries who retired to manage their ill-gotten wealth, Gowon went back to school and spent over nine years receiving academic degrees. How an incorruptible leader led such a highly corrupt regime is fascinating and needs further exploration. Second, Gowon did not really earn the appellation of a "dictator" — unlike the military leaders of the 1980s and 1990s. Although he also committed documented abuse of human rights — he jailed those who swore affidavits against his governors and Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka without trial — the regimes of Babangida and Abacha are considered the most brutal in the nation's history of military rule. It was also under Babangida and Abacha that politicization of religion, which is rooted in the Nigerian colonial past, took a more violent dimension as seen in the numerous religiously-motivated crises that swept across the nation.⁹¹

If Gowon is still being credited for preserving Nigeria's unity, he would also be remembered for failing to put the country on the path of sustainable economic development during the 1970s, when proceeds from oil reached an all-time high. He would have earned a better place in Nigerian history had he subscribed to the ancient saying: "A good actor leaves the stage when the ovation is loudest." His popularity reached its peak following the defeat of Biafra in January 1970; but he overstayed and allowed his cronies to mismanage the resources of the country, leading eventually to his disgraceful removal from power.

NOTES

¹ *The Biographies of Nigerian Heads of State, 1960-1990* (Kaduna: Library Board of Kaduna State, 1990), 15.

² James J. Oluleye, *Military Leadership in Nigeria, 1966-1979* (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1985), 38.

³ According to Gowon, Ironsi would not take advice from non-Igbo members of his cabinet (including him the Army Chief of Staff) and was insensitive to Nigerian ethnic and cultural plurality. See, J. Isawa Blagwu, *Gowon's Nigeria: Excerpts of Interviews with General Yakubu Gowon* (Jos: AHA Publishing House, 2004), 15-16. Major Kaduna Nzeogwu's remark corroborates Gowon's. He believed Ironsi "chose wrong advisers" who were "either mediocre or absolutely unintelligent." He thought he was "tribalistic in the appointment of his governors." See, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook, 1966-1969* Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 140. Ambassador Ralph Uwechue remarked that Ironsi "came to political office with an empty mind." See Ralph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 35.

⁴ See "The Pogrom, War and Starvation: Archive of the Pogrom that Wiped out Hundreds of Thousands of innocent Biafran Women, Infants and Children; Yakubu Gowon's-led Genocidal Campaign against the Igbo Nation and Obafemi Awolowo's Orchestrated Economic Blockade which Desperately Starved the Children of Biafra to Death."

<http://thepogrom-war-starvation.blogspot.com/2007/06/fleas-versus-falcons-over4-biafra.html> (Accessed on May 2, 2011).

⁵ See J. Isawa Elaigwu, *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman* (Ibadan, Nigeria: West Books Publishers Limited, 1985), 1.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Brigadier Murtala Mohammed, "General Gowon is Overthrown: Maiden Speech of Brigadier Murtala Ramat Muhammed, July 29, 1975." <http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/great-speeches-in-nigerias-history/> (Accessed on May 3, 2011).

⁸ Moses O. Ihonde, *First Call: An Account of the Gowon Years* (Lagos: Diamond and Publications Ltd., 2004), 179-195.

⁹ This period is also the most studied era of post-independent Nigerian history.

¹⁰ Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 76.

¹¹ Yakubu Gowon, *Unity, Stability, and Progress: The Challenge of the Second Decade of Nigeria's Independence* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1971), 5.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ The literature on civil wars and the military in Africa is large and growing. See among others, George Klay Kieh and Pita Ogaba Agbese (eds.) *The Military and Politics in Africa: From Engagement to Democratic and Constitutional Control* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), Taisier M. Ali and Robert O. Mathews, ed., *Civil Wars in Africa: Roots and Resolution* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Saheed Aderinto, "Review of Joshua B. Forrest, Subnationalism in Africa: Ethnicity, Alliances and Politics" (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2004) *Ethnic and Third World Review of Books* 7 (2007): 70-72.

¹⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (New York: International Publishers, 1957), 164.

¹⁶ See for instance the speech by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu who led the January 15, 1966 coup in Nigeria. Radio broadcast by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu - announcing Nigeria's First military coup on Radio Nigeria, Kaduna on January 15, 1966." <http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/great-speeches-in-nigerias-history/> (Accessed on May 3, 2011).

¹⁷ Tekena Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898-1914* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 1-95; J.C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 1-109

¹⁸ Obaro Ikime, *In Search of Nigerians: Changing Patterns of Inter-group Relations in an Evolving Nation State* (Lagos: Impact Publishers, 1985), 17.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The connection between ethnicity under colonial rule and the civil war is fully developed in P.C. Lloyd, "The Ethnic Background to the Nigerian Crisis," in S.K. Panter-Brick (ed.) *Nigerian Politics and Military Rule: Prelude to the Civil War* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970), 1-13.

²¹ Richard L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 143-283; and 321-376.

²² For the autobiography of one of the leaders of the coup, see Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1981). The coup's casualties, including the Prime Minister Sir Tafawa Balewa, Premier of the Northern Region, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Western Region, Chief S.L.A. Akintola, and top politicians and military officers were predominantly Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba. For a full list of prominent military casualties of the coup, see, B.J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973), 105.

²³ Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria*, 140.

²⁴ Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War*, 35-36.

²⁵ Ibid., 111. The casualties in the second coup included Aguiyi Ironsi, the Head of State and Major Fajuyi Adegunle, the Governor of Western Region, among other top Igbo and Yoruba military officers.

²⁶ Ibid., 101.

²⁷ See Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War*, 31-32.

²⁸ Quoted in Elaigwu *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*, 68.

²⁹ Ibid., 76-88.

³⁰ Quoted in Ibid., 80.

³¹ Ibid., 76-88.

³² A good case in point is the Willink Commission entrusted with looking at the grievances of minority groups within each of the three regions. See, Michael Vickers, *A Nation Betrayed: Nigeria and the Minorities Commission of 1957* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2010); and R.T. Akinyele, "States Creation in Nigeria: The Willink Report in Retrospect," *African Studies Review* 39, No.2 (1996): 71-94.

³³ Henry E. Alapiki, "State Creation in Nigeria: Failed Approaches to National Integration and Local Autonomy," *African Studies Review* 48, No. 3 (2005), 55-58.

³⁴ Douglas A. Anthony, *Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity, Power, and Violence in a Nigerian City, 1966-1986* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002), 86-118.

³⁵ Yakubu Gowon, *Towards a New Era: Broadcast to the Nation* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1966), 4-7.

³⁶ Elaigwu, *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*, 78-85.

³⁷ Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966-1976* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 122.

³⁸ See the two versions of the agreements reached at Aburi. Federal government's version, "Final Aburi Communique." (<http://www.dawodu.com/aburi1.htm>) Accessed on May 3, 2011; and Press Release on the Aburi Accord by the Military Government of Eastern Nigeria." <http://www.dawodu.com/aburi4.htm> (Accessed on May 3, 2011).

³⁹ Yakubu Gowon, "Speech by Major-General Yakubu Gowon Declaring a Twelve State Structure for Nigeria, May 1967." <http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/great-speeches-in-nigerias-history/> (Accessed on May 3, 2011).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ See Elaigwu, *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*, 101.

⁴² The states included: North-Western State comprising Sokoto and Niger Provinces. North-Central State comprising Katsina and Zaria. Kano State comprising the Kano Province. North-Eastern State comprising Borno, Adamawa, Saradauna and Bauchi Provinces. Benue/Plateau State comprising Benue and Plateau Provinces. Lagos State

comprising the Colony Province and the Federal Territory of Lagos. Western State comprising the Western Region but excluding the Colony Province. Mid-Western State comprising the present Mid-Western Region. East-Central State comprising the Eastern Region excluding Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces. South-Eastern State comprising Calabar and Ogoja Provinces. Rivers State comprising Ahoada, Brass, Degema, Ogoni and Port Harcourt Divisions.

⁴³ Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, "Declaration of Biafra by Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, on May 30, 1967 (<http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/great-speeches-in-nigerias-history/>). Accessed on May 3, 2011.

⁴⁴ See among others, Ntieyong UdoAkpan, *The Struggle for Secession, 1966-1970: A Personal Account of the Nigerian Civil War* (London: Frank Cass, 1972); Patrick A. Anwunah, *The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970: My Memoirs* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2007); Alexander A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980); H. B. Momoh, ed., *The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970: History and Reminiscences* (Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 2000); Flora Nwapa, *Never Again* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992); Alfred Obiora Uzokwe, *Surviving in Biafra: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War: Over Two Million Died* (New York, NY: Writers Advantage, 2003); Yakubu Gowon and Philip Effiong, *The Nigerian Civil War and its Aftermath: Views from Within* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, 2001); Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980); Frederick Forsyth, *The Biafran Story: The Making of an African Legend* (Harmondsworth, UK, Penguin Books, 1969); and Luke Nnaemeka Aneke, *The Untold Story of the Nigeria-Biafra War: A Chronological Reconstruction of the Events and Circumstances of the Nigerian Civil War* (New York: Triumph Pub., 2007).

⁴⁵ Yakubu Gowon, "Governance Challenges in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries," Paper Presented at the UN 7th Global Forum, June 27, 2007.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Yakubu Gowon, *Broadcast to the Nation by His Excellency Major-General Yakubu Gowon, Head of the Federal Military Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces: Ending the War: The Last Lap* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1969).

⁴⁸ The following photo captions suffice: "In spite of all the noise about genocide against the Ibos of the East Central State, the Ibos themselves know that the Federal troops will not put any innocent civilian to death as this picture of a Federal Officer surrounded by friendly Ibo women and children shows in Aba, the rebel administrative centre liberated recently"; "At last we are saved, says the smiling mother when a federal soldier comforts her little baby after the liberation of Aba. Other civilians surround the friendly soldiers,"; "A Federal soldier gives an Ibo child the 'water of life.' The father of the child has no regard for the rebel lie that the Federal troops would poison relief supplies to his state." See Ibid.

⁴⁹ Aneke, *The Untold Story of the Nigeria-Biafra War*.

⁵⁰ See some videos at <http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/nigerian-history-videos/> (Accessed on May 4, 2011).

⁵¹ Jimi Peters, *The Nigerian Military and the State* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), 129.

⁵² "Nigerian Civil War" in *New World Encyclopedia*

http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Nigerian_Civil_War. (Accessed on May 4, 2011).

⁵³ Uzokwe, *Surviving in Biafra*.

⁵⁴ Gowon, *Broadcast to the Nation by His Excellency*, 7-10.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 7-10.

⁵⁶ Peters, *The Nigerian Military*, 129.

⁵⁷ For the international politics of the war, see John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁵⁸ Major-General Phillip Effiong, *Statement at Dodan Barracks on January 15, 1970 by Major-General Phillip Effiong, Officer Administering the Republic of Biafra* (<http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/great-speeches-in-nigerias-history/>) Accessed on May 6, 2011.

⁵⁹ Yakubu Gowon, "The Dawn of National Reconciliation": Gowon's Civil War Victory Message to the Nation, 15 January 1970

(<http://maxsiollun.wordpress.com/great-speeches-in-nigerias-history/>) Accessed on May 6, 2011.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ For an interesting reading on post-war migration and reintegration in Igbo communities in northern Nigeria, see Anthony, *Poison and Medicine*, 55-85.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Yakubu Gowon, *Building a Great and Happier Nation: The 1970/71 Budget* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1971), 4

⁶⁵ E. Wayne Nafziger, *The Economics of Political Instability: The Nigerian-Biafran War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 178.

⁶⁶ Jones O. Ahazuem, "The Long-Term Effects of the War," in Axel Harnett-Sievers, Jones O. Ahazuem, and Sydney Emezue, (eds.) *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below* (Enugu, Nigeria; and Hamburg, Germany: Jemezie Associates and LIT VERLAG, 1997), 191-210.

⁶⁷ "Nigerian Leader Frees Biafran Soldiers,"

(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2459103.stm>) Accessed on May 7, 2011.

⁶⁸ Apollon O. Nwauwa and Chima J. Korieh (eds.) *Against all Odds: The Igbo Experience in Postcolonial Nigeria* (Glassboro, NJ: Goldline & Jacobs Publishing, 2011).

⁶⁹ Gowon and Effiong, *The Nigerian Civil War and its Aftermath*, 22.

⁷⁰ William Okechukwu Iyizoba, *Nigerian Youth Service Corps: An Evaluation of an Attempt to Foster National Unity in the Face of Ethnic Diversity* (PhD Dissertation, Rutgers The State University of New Jersey, 1982). See also, A. O. Sanda, *Problems and Prospects of the National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1980).

⁷¹ This development received widespread publicity and invigorated decades of criticism against the scheme. New pressure groups have accelerated demands that the scheme be discontinued. See among others: *Thisday Live*, "Bauchi Crisis: Another Corps Member Dies,"

(<http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/bauchi-crisis-another-corps-member-dies/90641/>). Accessed on May 7, 2011; and Next Newspaper, "Bauchi Governor Blames INEC for Murder of Corps Members,"

(<http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Home/5695195-146/story.csp>). Accessed on May 7, 2011.

⁷² See among others, Punch Newspaper, "Jos Crisis and the NYSC Programme," (<http://www.punchng.com/Article.aspx?theartic=Art20081221137584>). Accessed on

May 7, 2011. Punch Newspaper, "Jos Crisis: NYSC Threaten to Withdraw Corps Members," (<http://www.punchng.com/Articl.aspx?heartic=Art20100119373225>). Accessed on May 7, 2011.

⁷³ Gowon, *Unity, Stability, and Progress*.

⁷⁴ S.O. Osoba, "Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives," *Review of African Political Economy* 23, no.69 (1996), 377.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

⁷⁶ Billy Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 82.

⁷⁷ Elaigwu, *Gowon's Nigeria*, 82-83.

⁷⁸ Ihonde, *First Call*, 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁰ Mohammed, *General Gowon is Overthrown*.

⁸¹ *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*, 209-240.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Ihonde, *First Call*, 81. Gowon received Bachelor's degree in Politics and International Affairs (1979) and a Doctorate in Political Science (1984). His doctoral dissertation was entitled: "The Economic Community of West African States: A Study in Political and Economic Integration." He was probably in the best position to handle a subject of this type, having played a prominent role in the formation of the regional economic cooperation in May 1975.

⁸⁴ Example UN 7th Global Forum, June 27, 2007.

⁸⁵ "Yakubu Gowon Centre for National Unity (http://www.yakubugowoncentre.org/about_us.php) Accessed on May 14, 2011.

⁸⁶ "ECOWAS team here to ensure peaceful elections - Gowon." (<http://mobile.ghanaweb.com/wap/article.php?ID=154056>). Accessed on May 14, 2011.

⁸⁷ Saheed Aderinto, "Review of Adegboyega Isaac Ajayi, *The Military and the Nigerian State, 1966-1993: A Study of the Strategies of Political Power Control*," (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007) *African Affairs* 107, No. 429(2008): 665-666.

⁸⁸ Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence*.

⁸⁹ See among others, Larry Diamond, Anthony Kirk-Greene, and Oyeleye Oyediran, eds., *Transition Without End: Nigerian Politics and Civil Society under Babangida* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers: 1997).

⁹⁰ See Elaigwu *Gowon: The Biography of a Soldier-Statesman*. Although not without its own flaws, Elaigwu unveils a number of critical trajectories about Gowon's financial challenges in exile. See also, Ihonde, *First Call*, 76-87.

⁹¹ For more on the history of the politicization of religion see, J. Shola Omotola and Saheed Aderinto, "Through the Changing Scenes of Political Islam in Nigeria, 1903-2008": Religion, Violence and Secular Ideologies in an Evolving Nation-State," (Turkish translation)

"Evrilen Bir Ulus-Devlette Din, Siddet ve Sekuler Ideolojiler," 1903-2008: in Aysegul Komsuoglu and Gul M. Kurtoglu-Eskisar, eds., *Different Faces of Political Islam* (Turkish translation) *Yuzleri Siyasal Islam'in Farkli Yuzleri* (Istanbul, Turkey: Profil Yayincilik, 2009), 210-230.

CHAPTER 15

CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU-OJUKWU: AN ENIGMA AND THE DRIED MEAT THAT FILLS THE MOUTH

KENNETH NWOKO

Scholars, critics and commentators have written copiously on the man, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the former Military Governor of the Eastern Region and Head of State for the defunct Republic of Biafra. Such writings include his biography by Fredrick Forsyth, and commentaries by General Olusegun Obasanjo, Ukpabi Asika, and others. While these writings do reflect the perception of Ojukwu from the viewpoints of friends, foes, politicians, and others in the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil war, only a few works represent the contemporary image of Ojukwu. A vast amount of information regarding Ojukwu remains unexplored. This chapter critically examines Ojukwu's personality, leadership skills, and unique leadership style during the Civil War and through a contemporary perspective. The chapter also analyzes his political career during the Second Republic after his return from exile in the Ivory Coast, his presidential aspirations in the Fourth Republic, his political contributions to the growth of Nigeria as a nation, and allegations of his political godfatherism in the contemporary times.

Ojukwu, as one of Nigeria's most controversial leaders after the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), holds different meaning to different people, depending on which side of the prism he is viewed. In a way, this may not be unconnected with the root and meaning of his surname, Ojukwu, which he inherited from his father and by which he would be identified. Helen Chukwuma has extensively researched the roots and meanings of Igbo names, and for her, the name Ojukwu is believed to represent a minor deity in Igboland. It also refers to a variety of palm tree with yellowish pale fronds used for sacrificial rites.¹ In some places in Igboland, this category of palm tree is perceived as the king of palm trees. Perhaps, this was an insight on how Ojukwu was to be perceived; for he was revered like a deity or god, treated as a king, and viewed as a sacrificial lamb bearing the cross of the Igbo and the blame for the failure of the Biafran enterprise. He later assumed the traditional title of *ezeigbo gburugburu*, depicting his elevated position and perception as "the king of all Igbo." He was also portrayed as such in Igbo dirges during the war.² The linking of