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Critique of 1967 Invasion of Mid-Western Region by Biafran Forces

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

The Biafran invasion of the Midwest Region in 1967 during the Nigerian Civil War resulted in a contest between the contending forces. The invasion generated intense debate among scholars, military officers, and political analysts. The Federalist school perceives the invasion as the conspiracy of Western Igbo military officers, who occupied the top hierarchy of the Fourth Area Command of the Nigerian Army, Benin City. The pro-Biafran analysts contend that the Federal Military Government had intelligence reports about the imminent Biafran invasion, but failed to defend the Midwest Region. They argue that the lethality and swiftness of the invasion were caused by lack of adequate arms to confront the Biafran forces. Given this polemical divide, this paper takes this debate further by exploring the two schools of thought to bring out refreshing perspectives on the inevitability or otherwise of the Biafran invasion. Findings have established that both the Federal and Midwest authorities should be blamed for the failure to forestall the invasion given the intelligence reports at their disposal. The West Igbo military officers should not be entirely blamed for conspiracy as evidence has shown that the Midwest border with Biafra was porous and not properly secured. Besides, the Fourth Area Command of the Nigerian Army lacked adequate arms to contain the Biafran forces. This paper suggests that if the Federal and Midwest State governments had acted swiftly based on intelligence reports and provided adequate arms to the Fourth Area Command of Nigerian Army, Benin, the invasion would have been forestalled.

Keywords: Asaba massacre, Biafra invasion, Midwest State, Ogbemudia, Western Igboland

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Introduction

The invasion of the Midwest Region by the Biafran forces was one of the significant events during the Nigerian Civil War. Although previous studies on the war from 1967 to 1970 have increased the historical account of the invasion of the Midwest by focusing primarily on its causes and the Federal Military Government's post-war reconstruction programme, the significant events that changed the course of the war have not been critically engaged and given adequate scholarly attention that deserve. The Biafran invasion of the Midwest is a dynamic subject, evolving with variant interpretations and perspectives. Whereas some scholars, military officers, journalists and political analysts have expressed their opinions on the subject including those who witnessed the events, it requires a multi-pronged scholarly investigation to correct some misconceptions and perceptions in the literature. Thus, the investigation of the Biafran invasion is more nuanced than the existing works.

The motives for the invasion, the Federal force's reconquest, the massacres as well as the Midwest State's post-war reconstruction programmes demand a more rigorous scholarly analysis to comprehend the dynamics of events, especially in the Western Igbo area that was heavily devastated during the war. There is also a compelling need to unravel the reasons why the invasion was successful, and the motives for the massacres which were the most contentious issues that have been selectively constructed by scholars, military officers at the frontline, journalists and public affairs analysts from different ideological persuasions.

Although there are detailed scholarly accounts of the events, the voices and eye-witness accounts of participants have not been adequately heard, rather, they have

been silenced and often glossed over in the narratives. Thus, a full knowledge of what happened in the area during the war is lacking, especially the systemic organised heinous massacre of Western Igbos during the war from 1967 to 1969. Given this lacuna, this paper aims to engage a critical analysis of the episodes to bring out some missing perspectives. This will help correct some wrong perspectives and situate the Biafran invasion, the reasons for the horrifying massacres in Asaba, Isheagu, Ogwuashi-Uku and other parts of Western Igboland and its aftermath on the people and other parts of the Midwest State.

Literature Review

Several studies exist on the Nigerian Civil War, especially those that focused on the invasion of the Midwest Region. They include the works of military officers such as Obasanjo (1980), Achuzia (1986), Idahosa (1989), Ogbemudia (1991), Isamah (2013), and others. Olusegun Obasanjo, one of the leading federal commanders in the war in his seminal book¹ presents an account of his experiences at his command during the war. He delves into the general issues of the war and the conduct of the Second Division of the Nigerian Army in Western Igboland including the massacre in Asaba. Commenting on the Biafran invasion of the Midwest, Obasanjo stated that about fifty persons were casualties in the Asaba massacre. This conservative low estimate of only fifty people is misleading as he blatantly distorted the figures and accused the innocent Asaba civilians of involvement in espionage for Biafra. This seems preposterous and subtly orchestrated to exonerate the masterminds of the heinous crimes in Asaba. Obasanjo's further claims that the killings were carried out without the knowledge of senior army officers is doubtful. However, his claims were debunked by Lt-Col. Patrick Idahosa, a unit

commander of the Second Division stationed in Asaba, who put what happened in proper perspective when he revealed that he and other senior officers knew about the massacre in Asaba.

Patrick Idahosa who was a unit Commander of the Second Division stationed in Asaba in his war memoirⁱⁱ describes how the federal soldiers killed many Asaba people who were chanting songs of welcome to them. He states that the Asaba massacre was one of the most horrible wartime incidents he had ever witnessed during the war. He acknowledges how most senior officers of the Nigerian Army and himself knew about the killings, looting and carnage that took place for days in Asaba and tried to stop it but failed.

In *Requiem Biafra*,ⁱⁱⁱ Achuzia, a leading Biafran soldier, gives an account of his military exploits in the war. Achuzia captures succinctly the contentious issue of the Biafran invasion of the Midwestern Region and the Federal Government reconquest leading to Biafran retreating from Benin to Agbor, Umunede, Ogwuashi-Uku, Ibusa to Asaba. He presents the roles he played as Commander of the 12th Battalion of Biafran Army in defence of the federal soldier's reconquest and occupation of Asaba, Ogwashi-Uku and other communities in the area in October 1967 including the Onitsha sector after crossing the River Niger.

In his book, *Years of Challenge*^{iv}, Ogbemudia gives an account of his stewardship as the Military Governor of the Midwest State. He narrates the part he played in pushing the secessionists out of the Midwest and the subsequent challenges he faced in handling the daunting task of the post-war reconstruction programme in the Midwest State. Ogbemudia's identification with the non-Igbo ethnic groups, undisguised bias, and unbridled prejudice posturing against the Midwest Igbo was

glaring. He casts the Midwest Igbo as "saboteurs", "collaborators", "conspirators" and "betrayers", especially events that led to what he describes as the "treacherous" Biafran invasion of the Midwest Region and some parts of Western State. Despite these obvious biases, the book is useful in examining the Biafran invasion of the Midwest and the Federal Government's reconquest.

Godwin Alabi-Isamah's work^v gives a detailed chronological narratives of the various war operations in the area. He discusses the various human rights violations by both the Nigerian soldiers and the Biafran forces laying more emphasis on the Biafran invasion of the Midwest, and his role in fighting on the federal side and later compelled by circumstances to fight on the Biafran side. Brigadier-General Alabi-Isamah, a federalist from the Midwest Igbo group, was the army commander in the Asaba sector; and he describes how he tried to resist the invading Biafran troops but failed. Recounting his civil war experiences, he considers the Biafran invasion of the Midwest as a great strategic blunder by asserting that the Biafran forces should have explored other war strategies in resisting the federal army than invading the Midwest Region. He states how the invasion of the Midwest created division among the different ethnicities in the region, with Midwest Igbos sympathising and supporting the Biafran cause, while other ethnic groups shifted their loyalties to the federal government.

Another category of literature comprises those from eye witness accounts such as John de St. Jorre (1972), Okocha (1994), and Okafor (2002). John de St. Jorre's book^{vi} gives an account of his Civil War experiences on both sides of the divide. Jorre visited both Biafran and Federal Government territories during the hostilities and was painstaking in the collection of

evidence to balance his findings. He comments on the Biafran invasion of the Midwest acknowledging that the Fourth Area Command of the Nigerian Army in Benin-City lacked arms to defend the Midwest against the Biafran soldiers. Though Jorre was a foreign war correspondent, the strength of his book lies in its objectivity and the dispassionate detachment he exhibited in the collection of facts and writing of the book by giving a concise and objective account of the Nigerian Civil War.

Emma Okocha in his book^{vii} examines the travails of the war on the Asaba people. He highlights the harrowing experiences Asaba and other neighbouring communities suffered, particularly the massacre of unarmed and defenceless civilians in Asaba during the federal troops occupation of Midwest State under the command of Col. Murtala Mohammed. As a survivor, Okocha exposed the untold story of the Asaba massacre through an eyewitness narrative of the killings in Asaba during the Civil War. In a similar vein, Stanley Okafor's article^{viii} presents an eyewitness account of the Asaba massacre from a survival perspective and avers that the killings were premeditated by the federal forces that had a list of those that were targeted to be eliminated.

Other works from the academia include Uchendu (2007), Bird and Ottanelli (2011), Iweze (2013), and Nwaokocha (2016). Uchendu's work^{ix} focuses basically on how Western Igbo women, who constituted the women's militia wing of the Biafran troops struggled and manoeuvred to maintain economic stability during the civil war. She further highlights the survival strategies adopted by the women in their responses to the war and post-war time developments. She exposes the constraints to the valorized resilience of the Western Igbo women and how they surmounted

them, especially in the face of federal forces' non-compliance with the rules of engagement during the war. The work captures the travails of the Western Igbo women, who constituted the most vulnerable groups, were resilient and rose above the devastations and disruptions of the war to shoulder the responsibilities of their various households. Elizabeth Bird and Frazer Ottanelli's work relying extensively on oral sources and complementing with extant literature explores the impact of the traumatic memory of the war on Asaba and Nigeria.^x It focuses on the massacre of hundreds of people in Asaba by the federal soldiers during the civil war and establishes that it amounts to ethnic genocide that targeted and decimated Asaba people. The authors extensively interviewed some survivors of the mass killings and relatives of the victims that were moaned down by the Nigerian soldiers and maintained that virtually every family in Asaba lost one or more loved ones and relations to brutal killings during the civil war. They examine the devastations of infrastructure, dislocations of family structures and displacement, gender roles and disruption of social structures in Asaba.

Daniel Olisa Iweze's doctoral thesis^{xi} focuses on the politics of the post-civil war reconstruction programme implemented by the Midwest State Government under Brigadier Ogbemudia as it affected the Western Igbo people. It explores the post-war conditions of the people who suffered physical and human devastations, and economic and social disruptions. It examines the reconstruction of the economic and social infrastructure that were destroyed during the war, and the reconciliation of the Midwest Igbos with the non-Igbo groups in the state. He contends that most damaged infrastructure was not properly reconstructed, and the people were not well reconciled and integrated into the matrix of

the Midwest and Nigerian State in the implementation of the Midwest State and Federal Government's post-civil war reconstruction programmes.

Odigwe Nwaokocha in his doctoral thesis^{xii} deals with the Nigerian Civil War in Aniomaland (Western Igboland) and examines the roles of the Western Igbo people in the war and its impact on them. He posits that the people's involvement in the war was through conscription by both the Biafran and Federal forces. He argues that the Western Igbo area was a theatre of war that led to massive destruction of physical, economic and social infrastructure, dislocation of families, displacement, starvation, human suffering, privations and massacres of unarmed civilians in Asaba, Ibusa, Ogwashi-Uku, Isheagu and Utagba-Unor among others. He contends that the Nigerian Civil War had a devastating impact on the economic, political and social spheres of the people.

The extant works provided useful insights and perspectives, and represent significant contribution to the historiography of the civil war and post-war reconstruction in Nigeria. This paper seeks to extend the frontiers of the knowledge derived from the texts by critiquing to corroborate or debunk some misconceptions inherent in them.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the strategic theory that was developed by Tsu Sun and Carl Von Clausewitz in analysing the Biafran invasion of the Midwest State during the Nigerian Civil War in 1967. Strategy theory is concerned with the use of force to achieve the goals of one community in conflicts with others. It is concerned with how to employ armed forces to advance political, social, economic, cultural or ideological goals.^{xiii} Strategic theory is concerned with the use or application of force to achieve certain goals.

Sun Tzu, one of the foremost earliest war strategists in his classical book titled: *The Art of War* in his definition states that "Strategy is the art of planning and directing military operations to achieve victory through the most efficient use of resources, while minimising risk and maximising gains".^{xiv} He describes comprehensively the different approaches of strategy and their application to achieving victory in war. Carl Von Clausewitz defines strategy theory as "the employment of battle as the means towards the attainment of the object of war".^{xv} He identifies war as "a political instrument, a continuation of political activity by other means". Clausewitz considers war as a political instrument that intersects with military action. Strategic theory is conceptualised as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfil the end of policy".^{xvi} A common feature of strategic theory as espoused by eminent theorists is that it entails the planning, coordination, and use of tactics in military operations to meet the overall political and military objectives.

The strategic theory is best suited to analysing the Biafran invasion of the Midwest Region. Given the fact that strategy involves the art of using battles to win war, the invasion of the Midwest Region was strategically planned and systematically executed by the Biafran forces to win the Federal Government. The invasion was strategic, a military and political attempt by the Biafra secessionists to debilitate or defeat the Federal Military Government by taking over Lagos, the then capital of Nigeria in the early part of the civil war.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative methodology and data was collected through primary and secondary sources. A primary source comprised oral interviews with selected informants consisting of military

officers, permanent secretaries, and other civilians who were participants and eye witnesses in Western Igbo towns and communities during the Civil War and post-war periods. The interviews were documented by taking notes and recording with tapes during the fieldwork and later transcribed. The conduct of interviews was aimed at exploring local and metropolitan voices that narrate the war and post-civil war events. It allows informants to freely share their experiences and perspectives on the invasion of the Midwest Region. It also offers a great opportunity to obtain variant voices from informants to cross-check insights from the extant literature. The Federal and Midwest State Governments' publications were also consulted. Secondary sources include published works, unpublished dissertations, theses, journal articles, edited book chapters, memoirs, and media sources. The primary and secondary data were subjected to critical analysis to either authenticate their validity or debunk some perceptions in the sources.

The Biafran Invasion of the Mid-Western Region

Col. Emeka Ojukwu, the Military Administrator of the Eastern Region's declaration of the Republic of Biafra led to a civil war on July 6, 1967, with two-pronged federal attacks on the northern borders of Biafra at the towns of Gakem, Obudu, Nyonya and Enugu Ezike in Ogoja and Nsukka sector. The towns of Ogoja, Nsukka and Bonny later fell to the Federal forces.^{xvii} The capture of Bonny cut off the Biafran port of Port-Harcourt and the sea blockade of Biafra. The subsequent Federal forces' strategy was to capture Enugu, the Biafran capital.^{xviii} The Biafran invasion of the Midwest Region was central to its strategies. The major aim of the invasion was to capture Lagos, as Ojukwu believed that occupying Lagos would boost the morale of

Biafran troops and signal Biafra's victory over Nigeria. Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, a Western Igbo officer was tipped to lead the invasion, but he died suddenly in the early period of the war at the Nsukka battlefield.^{xix} Despite fighting on the side of Biafra, he did not support secession and Ojukwu did not trust him. Hence, he was not given any command position during the war before his death at the Nsukka sector in 1967.

With the advance of federal forces from Nsukka to Enugu, Ojukwu played a masterly trump card when the secessionist forces led by Col. Victor Banjo overran the Midwest Region. His justification for the incursion was to seek the support and solidarity from Yoruba support, probably to exploit the opportunity of forming a "Southern Solidarity Front" and isolate Northern Nigeria. Banjo being "an independent military commander and dynamic political force"^{xx} had his plans to command and was not much concerned with the Biafran cause.

On August 9, 1967, the Biafran Liberation Army invaded Asaba and occupied all strategic locations without encountering much resistance.^{xxi} At Agbor, the Biafran soldiers formed three columns, one headed for Benin-City, the region's capital; another went to Warri, while the third went to Ubiaja in the northern part of the state.^{xxii} The Biafran occupation of Benin jolted David Ejoor and some Midwest State's military officers and top civil servants went into hiding, while Imoukhuede, J.O. Adeola, Commissioner of Police, and Olu Akpata were captured and detained in Enugu.^{xxiii} Col. Banjo after taking full control of Benin-City, declared a free "Independent Republic of Midwest" contrary to Ojukwu's plans and military calculations. He appealed to the people to defend their territory against the aggression of the Federal government and persuaded

the Yoruba to support the Biafran secession.^{xxiv}

The Biafran forces after halting in Benin continued their march to Ore which was one of the most crucial war engagements because if Biafran troops had continued their attacks and conquered Lagos, that would have changed the direction of the war. However, the Biafran soldiers hesitated by halting their movement to Lagos and the failure to exploit this opportunity proved costly for Biafra forces. Banjo's delay in concentrating on setting up his administration, and making misguided and confusing speeches made his loyalty became doubtful. Sometimes, he described himself as a Nigerian with intentions to fight for Nigeria's unity.^{xxv} The Federal troops exploited this opportunity by containing Biafran forces at Ore and Biafrans retreated to Benin.^{xxvi} Ojukwu recalled Banjo to Enugu and appointed Major Albert Okonkwo as the military administrator on August 17, 1967. This ended Banjo's short sway of "mayfly of power" in the Midwest Region. He was arrested and shot for collaborating with federal troops during the Midwest invasion.^{xxvii}

During the Biafran invasion of the Midwest State, Col. Ogbemudia escaped to Lagos on September 9, 1967, and later served in the Second Division of the Nigerian Army.^{xxviii} On 20 September 1967, Major Albert Okonkwo declared the Midwest State as the "Independent Republic of Benin" but after some hours, Federal troops led by Lt. Col. Murtala Mohammed retook Benin-City. It was a short-lived republic giving way to Ogbemudia's appointment as the Military Governor of Midwest State on November 17, 1967.^{xxix} With these military reconquests, the Midwest incursion boomeranged and Ojukwu believed that it was caused by the disloyalty of his officers. He arrested, tried and executed Major Banjo along with

Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Sam Agbam and Philip Alele for allegedly plotting to overthrow his government.^{xxx}

Federal Troops' Re-Conquest of the Mid-Western Region

The Biafran invasion marked a turning point during the war. In reaction to the shocking invasion, General Gowon declared a total war on Biafrans. The Federal Government accused the senior Western Igbo military officers of the Second Area Command in the Midwest Region of complicity with Biafran forces. On August 11, 1967, the Supreme Headquarters announced that: "what happened in the Midwest State was a military coup by Ibo officers of the Nigerian Army stationed in the area".^{xxxi} General Gowon instructed Colonel Murtala Mohammed to form the Second Infantry Division to crush the secessionists from part of the West and Midwest. Col. Murtala Mohammed hurriedly formed the Second Division of the Nigerian Army comprising three brigades mainly from office clerks, radio operators, physical training instructors and recruits.^{xxxii}

The invasion of the Midwest Region has elicited intense debate among scholars on why the state was easily invaded by the Biafran forces. Some analysts have argued that General Gowon exploited the Midwest State to trick and provoke Biafra to invade the Midwest for him to launch a reprisal attack on the Biafran forces; meanwhile, the Biafran border with the Midwest was desultory defended. Others view the invasion from an ethnic lens and contend that the invasion was the corroboration between Biafra, Western Igbo military officers and civilians. Irrespective of the polemical divide, the fact remains that Nigeria's border with Biafra at the Niger Bridge was poorly blockaded and defended. The easy invasion of the Midwest State was due to the porosity of borders as contained

in Ogbemudia, John St. Jorre, Obasanjo, and Isamah works. According to Ogbemudia:

Before the invasion, the Asaba end of the bridge was never defended by more than one policeman and a soldier irrespective of the Federal government's order that the border should be closed, but the Lagos end at Oluku and Ohonsu were heavily defended.^{xxxiii}

Ogbemudia's statement contradicted that of Obasanjo, who personally carried out routine patrol checks on the West-Midwest border. Obasanjo asserts that: On 10 August 1967, during my visit to all the West/MidWest border to assess where troops were stationed, it was noted that the company based at Ore under Lt. Iluyomade were not holding their defensive position at Ofusu which is the boundary between the West and the Midwest but at Otu, a quarry camp a distance of fifteen miles short of where they were supposed to be. They were immediately ordered to move to Ofusu.^{xxxiv}

Despite the divergent views of the two military officers, Obasanjo's eye-witness account of the Federal Government's blockade at the West/Midwest borders a day after the Biafran invasion shows that both the Asaba end of the Niger bridge and Ofusu (Ohonsu) borders were desultory defended by the federal authorities. This suggests that the infiltration of the Biafran soldiers into the Midwest should not be blamed entirely on the conspiracy of the Western Igbo officers of the 4th Area Command.

The conspiracy theory that emanated from the Federal Government was more potent. The official position of the Federal Military Government was that the Western Igbo officers who dominated the 4th Area Command of the Nigerian Army were supposed to defend the Midwest; rather, they surrendered to the Biafran army

cowardly without putting up any resistance. The Lagos Radio specifically named Col. Conrad Nwawo and Col. Okwechime as the leaders of the "corroborators and mutineers".^{xxxv} The Federal government's pronouncement seems to be mere propaganda to cover up its failure in defending the border at the Niger Bridge even when there were Intelligence reports of the imminent Biafran invasion.^{xxxvi} Available evidence maintained that on August 15, 1967, Col Ejor, the Midwest Region Governor, got information about the planned invasion by Biafran soldiers. Mr. Adeola, the Midwest State Police Commissioner was said to have received special reports of the planned Biafran invasion.^{xxxvii} In the face of this overwhelming evidence, the Federal and the Midwest Region authorities were duly informed about the Biafran incursion into the Midwest but failed to act to forestall it.

The Commander of the 4th Area Command, Lt. Col. Nwawo, who was named the leading collaborator, debunked the Federal government's position and stated that the 4th Area Command lacked arms and ammunition to counter-attack the Biafran soldiers. He was quoted as saying that: "you do not fight a war with service pistols".^{xxxviii} The lack of arms was a challenge to the Midwest Region and the 4th Area Command. At one point, Lt. Col. Ejor was said to have made private arrangements to import arms.^{xxxix} It is glaring that the Midwest Region Government and the 4th Area Command lacked arms and a well-equipped military to contain the Biafra forces.

The Western Igbo officers who constituted seventy percent of the 4th Area Command of the Nigerian Army were due to the pre-secession arrangement of August 9, 1966, in which all officers were directed to go back to their regions of origin to stop the spate of killings in the North.^{xl} It was based on this directive by General Gowon that the

military officers from the Midwest returned to join in the defence of the region.^{xli} The 4th Area Command was formed and the most senior officer Col. Nwawo became the Commander. In the Command structure, the Western Igbo officers dominated the upper echelon of the Command except for Lt. Col. Ejoor, Major Ogbemudia, Major Eromobor and Captain Odiwo.^{xlii} The officers of Western Igbo dominance were coincidental, and not a deliberate strategic positioning to accelerate the Biafran invasion of the Midwest Region.^{xliii} Being senior officers, their top positions were in line with the military command structure and tradition. They did not only occupy senior positions but were more in number than other ethnic groups before the war.

The Nigerian authority's vilification and labelling, casting the Western Igbo military officers as "saboteurs, corroborators and traitors" is lame blame. Reflecting on the civil war events some years later, Ogbemudia absolved the Western Igbo officers of any conspiracy by maintaining that the federal authorities did not provide sufficient arms and equipment to the Fourth Area Command to engage in sustained combat against a determined Biafran aggressor and surrendering to a better-equipped opponent was a better alternative.^{xliv} So, lack of arms in the 4th Area Command contributed greatly to the Biafran troop's swift invasion of the Midwest. Jorre's comment is instructive:

"Two days before the invasion,...Throughout the Midwest there is a great deal of confusion over arms. Recently, new rifles have been sent up from Lagos for the Midwestern troops. There are only four Bren guns, two 81mm. mortar in the whole state; no armoured cars, artillery or anti-tank weapons".^{xlv}

Col. Godwin Isamah, a Western Igbo military officer, who at a time a Federalist and later a Biafran soldier (made this choice due to certain circumstances and survivalist instinct), corroborated this view when he posits that:

There was a reorganisation of the 4th Area Command in which troops were deployed around the region. Curiously, more troops to guard the Lagos road than the Asaba end. The government ordered that the Asaba Onitsha bridge linking the Eastern Region with the Midwest be closed to traffic going to the East, but this was not done.^{xlvi}

Col. Isamah stated that the River Niger Bridge was later closed to traffic after Lt. Col. Ejoor visited Asaba. Isamah replaced Col. Rudolph Trimnell, and he was transferred to Asaba to guard the bridge with a company of 100 troops as part of the battalion with its headquarters at Agbor under the command of Major Henry Igboba.^{xlvii} Evidence from Ogbemudia, Obasanjo, and Isamah suggest that neither the Midwest Region's border with Biafra at the Niger Bridge nor its border with the Western State was well defended; and this facilitated the Biafran troops' invasion without any resistance until they reached Ore in the Western State.

Motives for the Invasion

The Biafran invasion had military and political motives. Before the Civil War, Col. David Ejoor supported the Federal Government but played the role of a mediator when he emphatically stated the neutrality of the Midwest on the eruption of the Civil War.^{xlviii} However, subsequent events proved him wrong. The invasion was meant to open the Biafran swift passage to Lagos and dissociate the hitherto lukewarm

Midwest and Yoruba in the West from the Federal war effort.^{xlix} It was a military strategy to reduce Federal troops' pressure on the Northern sector at Nsukka, and therefore, divert its attention from capturing Enugu. It turned the Midwest into a theatre of war by the contending Federal and Biafran forces contrary to David Ejoor's earlier pronouncement emphasising the neutrality of the Midwest Region. Besides, the invasion made the Yoruba change their neutral position and provided Awolowo with the opportunity to rally the Yoruba to stand solidly behind Gowon's led Federal Military Government.¹

The second motive is anchored on the strategic political calculation by the Biafran government. During the crises that engulfed the country from 1960 to 1966, the three regions publicly declared their intentions to go their separate ways. The Northern Region was the first to declare its separatist intention and this was re-echoed by Obafemi Awolowo, who declared that if the prevailing political climate did not improve, the Western Region would secede. It was based on these pronouncements by the two other Regions (in addition to the insecurity of the Igbo in the Northern Region and the inability of the Federal Government to adequately address the worsening political situation in the country) that Ojukwu declared the Republic of Biafra. The calculation was that the Western Region would follow suit and declare the Republic of Oduduwa, but instead, Awolowo mobilised his kinsmen to fight Biafra secessionists. When Awolowo was released from prison by General Gowon and appointed the Vice-Chairman in the Executive Council and Commissioner of Finance, he opposed the Biafran secession. Biafra's invasion of the Midwest and swift inroad to the West made Awolowo declare that he was "irrevocably committed to Nigerian unity".^{li} So, the plan to utilise the

Midwest territory in its totality with the Western Region against the Federal Government did not materialise.

The Biafran incursion was meant to forestall the Federal troop's occupation of the Midwest and onward passage to the Biafran enclave thereby violating the neutrality of the Midwest Region. It should be noted that the Midwest Region Government led by Col. David Ejoor refused to grant the Federal Government request to allow its troops' movement to Biafra stating that he wanted 'to prevent battle on Benin soil'. The incursion into the Midwest was the Biafran strategy for achieving a total 'liberation of Nigeria' from the grip of Northern political and military oligarchy. Major Okonkwo, the Military Administrator of the botched 'Republic of Benin', justified the invasion as a means to prevent the Federal Government from "forcing Midwesterners to enlist to fight against their own people", which undermined the neutral role of the Midwest.^{lii}

The invasion was designed to forestall the use of the Midwest by Federal troops against Biafra; to enlist the assistance of Midwest sympathisers to the Biafran cause, especially the Midwest Igbos in the state; to ensure an uninterrupted supply of essential commodities needed to sustain the secessionist state; and to use the Midwest as a launching pad in their effort to align with the Western Region against the North.^{liii} Despite the strategic objectives for the Biafran invasion, it was a blunder. It boomeranged and played against the Biafran forces with far-reaching repercussions. It changed the course of the war from the Federal Government's initial declaration of "police action" to a full-scale war. In addition, it upset the inter-ethnic and political balance and engendered distrust, suspicion and hostility between the Midwest Igbo and other non-Igbo groups in the

region. The sympathy and goodwill most Midwesterners had for Biafran cause weakened drastically making the non-Igbo groups shift their support to the Federal Government and became hostile to Biafrans.

The Contest for the Mid-Western Region

The Second Division of the Nigerian Army was hurriedly formed, and led by Col. Murtala Mohammed to recapture the Midwest, especially the Western Igbo area from the Biafran control. He declared that the liberation of the Midwest State had been achieved except for the areas between Agbor and Asaba, and warned that any obstacle to the task would be crushed.^{liv} In Benin, many Western Igbo people were killed by their non-Igbos. The killing of the Western Igbo in Warri and its environs made Major Ochefu, the Commander of the Third Division designated to liberate areas within the Warri axis confess that Urhobo and Isoko people did the killing of the Igbo.^{lv}

Initial military operations by the Nigerian Army in the Agbor and Aboh areas of Western Igboland began on September 28, 1967, under different divisions and battalions. The Third Division commanded by Col. Benjamin Adekunle liberated Aboh, Kwale and other communities in the Ukwuani section and later handed over the areas to the Second Division which carried out military campaigns in Agbor, Ogwuashi-Uku and Asaba.^{lvi} From Benin, the Second Division made two-pronged attacks on the Western Igbo area. The 6th Brigade after recapturing Agbor advanced to Ogwuashi-Uku, Ibusa and at St. Patrick College, Asaba where they met stiff resistance. The 7th Brigade moved along Iselle-Uku and joined the 6th Brigade at Asaba while the 8th Brigade was kept in reserve and stationed at Ilah town for the River Niger crossing to Onitsha. The combined forces of the 6th and 7th Brigades fought fiercely with the Biafran forces at St. Patrick's College before they

eventually dislodged the Biafran troops.^{lvii} Between 1st and 10th October 1967, these towns were bombarded leading to loss of lives, property, displacement and disruption of socio-economic activities. However, Akwukwu-Igbo, Okpanam, Ewulu and Ilah were spared. With the advance of the federal troops, the leaders tried to avoid the brutal killing of their people by organising receptions to convince the battalion commanders of their loyalty to the Federal government. The people were instructed to welcome the "visiting" Federal troops with the chant of "One Nigeria" by raising one of their fingers.

The idea of organising a reception was successful in Utagba-Uno, while in Ogwuashi-Uku, the Obi and his subjects' welcome reception with a chant of "One Nigeria" for the Federal troops were undermined by the commanders who indiscriminately killed many people and conducted house-to-house hunt for Biafra soldiers and their perceived accomplices. The *Obis* of Agbor and Owa pacified battalion commanders by presenting gifts to them. In Ibusa, residential homes belonging to top Biafra military officers such as Major Okwechime and Major Albert Okonkwo were destroyed. Various communities in the Agbor and Asaba sections were adversely affected, while those at the Iselle-Uku, Onicha-Olona, Ute-Ogbeje, Abavo and Ozanogogo axis were less affected. Before the arrival of Federal troops in Iselle-Uku, Obi Rufus Osemena had fled for Biafra leaving the leadership of the town to *Iyasele*. Reverend Samuel Martin established cordial relations between the Federal soldiers and the Iselle-Uku people. He organised the Iselle clan to send food to the Federal soldiers at Umunede. The harmonious relationship made the soldiers cautious in their treatment of the people despite their support for Biafra.^{lviii}

Massacres in Western Igboland (Anioma): 1967-1969

The Federal troop's re-conquest and occupation of the Midwest State from October 1967 to January 1970 led to the military intimidation and massacres of civilians in many Western Igbo towns and communities, especially at Isheagu, Ogwuashi-Uku and Asaba. The killings at Isheagu are attributed partly to the people's participation in the cross-border trade across River Niger between the Western Igbo and Onitsha, Odekpe, Atani, Ossamala and others in Biafra (otherwise called the "Attack Trade" or "Afia Attack" in local parlance). On May 2, 1968, the Federal troops entered Isheagu and killed many people including the king who was captured, manhandled and buried alive.^{lxix} In Ogwashi-Uku, the Federal troops accused the king and some elders of the town of harbouring and hiding Biafran soldiers in their homes.^{lxx} The town was burnt down and many people lost their lives during cross-fire between the Biafran troops and Federal soldiers. The killings of Ogwuashi-Uku people were also linked to their alleged involvement in the "attack trade" that was carried out inside the forest across boundaries where scarce commodities were exchanged for money.^{lxxi} Items traded on included salt, foodstuffs, drugs, petroleum products, motor and machine spare parts, tobacco, cigarettes, clothing, soap, stationeries and newspapers.^{lxxii}

The Federal soldiers entered Asaba from Okpanam on October 5, 1967, where the 12th battalion of the Biafran army under the command of Col. Joe Achuzia stiffly resisted them. There was intense fighting between the Biafran and Federal soldiers until the 6th and 7th Federal battalions overwhelmed the Biafran soldiers. When the Federal troops eventually took control of Asaba, the *Asagba* (king) of Asaba and his cabinet planned a warm reception for the

federal troops as the people of Agbor and Ogwuashi-Uku had done. Adequate preparations were made for the reception to reaffirm their support and allegiance to the federal authorities. The planned reception did not hold because of the sudden attack by secessionist soldiers.^{lxxiii} Those who ran to the bush and other places returned on the assumption that normalcy had been restored to Asaba. On October 8, 1967, Asaba people dressed in the *Akwa-Ocha* (locally made white cloth) attire assembled at *Ogbe-Eke* square. Various quarters in Asaba were representatively led by their Obis and chiefs. While the people were dancing, Federal troops opened fire on the unsuspecting dancing groups.^{lxxiv} It was said that hidden machine guns were used to kill Asaba male dancers during the welcome reception turning it into a bloodbath and corpses strewn the streets of Asaba. It was a dance of death. Patrick Idahosa, a Federal army commander stationed at Asaba wrote in his war memoir that:

On October 9, 1967, when the Federal troops approached the town centre, they met a crowd of Asaba people approaching chanting songs of welcome which signified that they came in peace. The Federal soldiers disregarded the warm welcome and opened fire on the innocent citizens killing several of them and only a few managed to escape ...the Asaba episode is one of the most unhappy wartime incidents that

I witnessed. Even though, myself and several other officers tried to stop the carnage it was an uphill task for us...for some days, looting, irrational killings of innocent civilians and all kinds of carnage became rampant in the town.^{lxv}

During the recapturing of Asaba by the Federal soldiers many people were killed, some hid in the bush and ran to Ibusa, Achala-Ibusa, Oko, Abala and Utchi. Others crossed to the East by foot or ferried themselves by boat.

Some scholars have written on the Asaba massacre, and analysis on the subject will not be complete without mentioning Emma Okocha's book which was written based on the author's eyewitness account. This paper aims to explore the voices, memories and reminiscences of other survivors of the incident to validate or debunk some preconceptions made by those who have written about the incident. Okocha survived the massacres; while his entire family was wiped out. Recalling the pathetic incident in Asaba, Okocha wrote: "We dug graves for ourselves. Before we were told to jump into the grave, two other brothers came in. One was an undergraduate of Ibadan University; the other was a civil servant. Both of them were dumped into the grave and shot and the grave was covered..."^{lxvi} Another eyewitness account goes thus: *The crimes and human rights abuses perpetrated by the Federal troops in Asaba are unimaginable. ...Some people were made to dig graves into which they were shot...Federal forces under his (Murtala Mohammed) command unleashed a massacre of Igbos in Benin City and its*

environs... In a rain of blood, tens of thousands of innocent youths...were lined up on the streets of Asaba and executed in cold blood...^{lxvii} When the massacre started, other people were marched from their homes to the killing fields.

Many pensioners who were in their eighties and seventies were killed in their homes.^{lxviii} John St.de Jorre corroborated this assertion when he wrote that the "Asaba massacre was carried out by Igbo-hating Major from Benin".^{lxix} Chief Philip Asiodu posits that: "when the killings were taking place in Asaba,...scanty information was received at first in Lagos at the Supreme Headquarters of the Federal Military Government or in the media houses remotely indicating the extent of the massacre. Within a week, some gory stories reached Lagos, but there was no official account or confirmation, months later eyewitness accounts from a few of the men who escaped and the children and women before whose eyes the horrors took place made the event known. This is why there is not much detailed description of those terrible events in the histories of the civil war published by people on both sides of the divide".^{lxx} There has been deliberate suppression of reports by the perpetrators of the crime because such acts were completely contrary to the essential provisions of the Geneva Convention as regards the treatment of civilians and prisoners of war.

Reminiscences and sparking memories of the Asaba episode from informants agreed that the troops under Murtala Muhammed and Colonel Ibrahim Taiwo supervised the killing of the adult males in Asaba. They averred that the Nigerian military committed war crimes of horrendous magnitude in Asaba during the war, and have sought to cover it up and even erase them.^{lxxi} Ifeanyi Uriah who lost his parents and nine siblings during the massacre testified thus: "They ordered

everyone to come out to the town square. Col. Ibrahim Taiwo said it was time to dance around town and join our brethren, and he warned that everyone should come along. The people did as they were told, thinking they were being invited to a victory party. They didn't realise it was a ruse to coax all the men out of hiding. Suddenly, the celebratory atmosphere evaporated. Taiwo's troops began separating the men from the women. They were honest with us. They told us they were going to kill us. They took us to the mounted machine guns. Then it dawned on us that it was true. I was standing with my older brother at the edge of the crowd... He was the first to be dragged away by the soldiers. He let go of my hand and pushed me into the crowd. He was shot in the back. I could see the blood gushing from his back. He was the first victim of the massacre..."^{lxxii} The annihilation of the Asaba people took place at other locations. Some people were killed at Saint Patrick's College. Other people were marched to the school to be killed but were saved by the timely intervention of Revered Father Colon who pleaded with the Nigerian soldiers to spare them. There was also the house-to-house killing of males above the age of three or four; while some people were marched to the River Niger bank, shot and thrown inside the river.^{lxxiii}

Nigerian soldiers were alleged to have been instructed to kill every civilian male in Asaba. Among the victims was Chief (*Obi*) Utomi Onianwa, the Izama Onyia of Asaba who represented the *Asagba* of Asaba at the Ogbe Osowa reception. Others were Obi Eбенуwa, Chief Gab Nwandu, Leo Okogwu, Chukwuka Momah, and Sydney Asiodu.^{lxxiv} A prominent woman leader, *Omu* of Asaba, Mgboshie Okolie was brutally killed by the federal troops in 1969.^{lxxv} Among those who escaped death were Chief Isioma Onyeobi (he was shot and feigned dead) and Ifeanyi Uraih who

survived because he was buffered by bodies that fell on top of him. Emma Okocha survived, but he lost his parents and siblings. The killings in Asaba and the neighbouring communities of Ibusa and Oko led to the establishment of the first refugee camp at Saint Patrick College, Asaba. The massacre was unprecedented as there were tales of woes everywhere in Asaba. No one is certain about the exact number of people that were killed and it has remained a matter of conjecture. The existing official records are woefully inadequate and unreliable. Memories of the massacre are hazy and details conflicting. Nevertheless, oral histories and the voices of the people shed some light on the events. Ifeanyi Uraih gave an estimate that about 2,000 men were killed.^{lxxvi} The conservative estimate excludes those that were shot and thrown into the River Niger and others that were killed in their homes during the house-to-house search for male Biafran "collaborators" who were horridly buried in shallow graves. However, Olusegun Obasanjo presented an absurd figure asserting that:

An unfortunate event involving some fifty civilians took place in Asaba without the knowledge or approval of senior or superior officers. Troops of the 8 Brigade carried away for execution those civilians whom they suspected to be spying on them on behalf of the rebels after the Federal troops had suffered heavy casualties

from a surprise attack
by the rebels.^{lxxvii}

The estimated figure of two thousand from an eye-witness account seems authentic and reliable contrary to Obasanjo's conservative estimate that only fifty people were killed in the Asaba massacre. The higher figure seems reliable because the military usually gives a lower figure of deaths during war and conflicts. Obasanjo distorted the figures and apportioned blame on the innocent civilians of Asaba for involving in espionage that made the Federal forces suffer military reverses. Exonerating the officers that mastermind the heinous massacre in Asaba is preposterous. Obasanjo's statement that the killings were carried out without the knowledge of senior army officers is doubtful. Lt. Col. Patrick Idahosa, a Federal commander of the Second Division stationed in Asaba debunked Obasanjo's assertions by revealing that other senior officers and himself had knowledge of the killings and they tried to stop the carnage and irrational killing of innocent civilians which was rampant in the town for days.^{lxxviii}

Nobody is sure of the mastermind for the killings and why. Oral sources alleged that Col. Ibrahim Taiwo had a list of names of prominent citizens and civil servants who were targeted for killing. It was believed that Col. Murtala Mohammed, the Commander of the Second Division of the Federal troops carried out the massacre in Asaba to avenge the military reverses his Division suffered during the few weeks of the Biafran invasion of the Midwest State. Obi Nwakanma concurred with the Murtala-Taiwo conspiracy theory. He stated that troops under Murtala Muhammed and Colonel Ibrahim Taiwo carried out the killing in Asaba, where Federal forces committed war crimes of horrendous magnitude during the war, and have sought

to cover them up and even erase them.^{lxxix}

Today, this view is still held by the Asaba people in their search to know what happened during the war. At present, little has been recorded about the Asaba massacre as the details were hidden from local and international press. Nigerian authorities have flagrantly refused to comment publicly about it and left survivors, particularly eye-witnesses to the event, with no clue as to the cause of the massacre. However, a United States declassified memo of August 18, 1975, found Bigadier-General Murtala Muhammed culpable for committing genocide against the Igbo during the civil war. An excerpt from the memo reads *inter-alia*:

The memo was declassified on May 4, 2006, with the ref. number PA/HO Department of State, E.O. 12958, as amended, contradicts the official position of the Nigerian government...denying the genocide perpetrated by the Nigerian Army under the late Head of State's command during the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War.^{lxxx}

The US declassified memo is a death kernel to the conjecture that tends to exonerate Murtala from the genocide in Asaba. In other words, the declassified document supports the popular opinion that points to Murtala as the mastermind of the killings in Asaba and other parts of Western Igboland.

The reason for the scale of the massacre was attributed to the character of Federal soldiers whose non-compliance with the rules of engagement as enshrined in the Geneva Convention made them decimate Asaba civilians recklessly with impunity. The Second Division of the Nigerian Army is made up of mainly unprofessional soldiers with little military training and discipline. The destruction of the Niger Bridge by Biafran forces turned River Niger into a

barrier for easy movement of Federal troops. This led to the congregation of Federal soldiers at Asaba and invariably gave them ample opportunity to commit heinous crimes. Each time the Federal forces suffered military reverses, they revenged on Asaba and other communities. It is believed that if the Niger Bridge was not destroyed, the Federal soldiers would have crossed to the East in pursuit of Biafran soldiers and the atrocities they unleashed on Asaba would have been reduced.^{lxxxix} The killings in most Western Igbo towns and communities by the Federal soldiers are attributed to the people's sympathy for Biafrans. The Federal troops intended to retaliate for the role played by some prominent Western Igbo officers in "collaborating" with the Biafran soldiers in the invasion of the Midwest.

After the 'liberation' of Asaba by the Federal soldiers led by Col. Murtala Mohammed, Onitsha on the Eastern banks of River Niger became the next target. The Federal forces' advance to Onitsha was one of the most difficult war engagements because it involved crossing the River Niger. The Federal forces' advance from Asaba to Onitsha was met with severe difficulties due to the bombing of the bridge by the Biafran soldiers. The bridge was blown up at the Onitsha end by the Biafran forces commanded by Col Joe Achuzia as a decisive military tactic to impede the Federal soldiers' advance into the Biafran enclave.^{lxxxix} Achuzia's account of the destruction of the Niger Bridge and capture of Onitsha in this way: "Our enemy entered Asaba on 8th October; 1967. Our troops fell back into Onitsha town and blew up the bridge. Those of our troops who got into Onitsha were in complete disarray and disorganised, and in no fit state to halt any immediate attempt by Mohammed to invade Onitsha."^{lxxxix} Damaging the Niger Bridge constituted a major setback to the Federal troops' incursion into the Biafran territory

and this compelled Col. Murtala Mohammed to embark on an opposed river crossing against the directives from the Supreme headquarters in Lagos. The opposed river crossing cost the Federal army men and equipment, but after three unsuccessful attempts, Onitsha fell on March 23, 1968, after a bloody battle^{lxxxiv} and it marked the consolidation of the Federal forces' occupation of Asaba and the entire Midwest State.

The Aftermath

The Biafran invasion of the Mid-Western Region had far-reaching impacts. The invasion was a political boomerang that marked a turning point and changed the direction of the war. It violated Midwest neutrality and turned it into a theatre of war between the contending Biafran and Federal soldiers. It led to the Federal Government's extension of the economic blockade to the Mid-Western Region making the non-Igbo groups blame the Western Igbos and Biafrans for their sufferings because of the blockade. The military operation exacerbated inter-ethnic relations between the Western Igbo and other ethnicities. Col. Samuel Ogbemudia on the assumption of office remarked that he "presided over a bitterly divided people".^{lxxxv} The inter-ethnic hostilities prepared the ground for the punitive measures that were meted out to the Western Igbo during the Mid-Western Region's post-civil war reconstruction era.^{lxxxvi} The Biafran invasion polarised and engendered inter-ethnic suspicion, distrust and hostility between the Western Igbo and other groups. The Western Igbo people's loyalty to the Federal Government became a suspect leading to their killing in Benin and other parts of the State.^{lxxxvii}

The post-civil reconstruction programme of the Midwest State Government under Ogbemudia was aimed at the restoration of normalcy in the State. By

an Extraordinary Gazette of October 26, 1967, the Midwest State Government set up the "Rebel Atrocities Tribunal of Enquiry" headed by Justice Omo-Ebo to look into the "atrocities" allegedly committed by the rebels with the terms of reference which included "to enquire into the role played by public officers and other civilians in respect of secessionists' activities before and during the secessionist troops' occupation of the State".^{lxxxviii} Most Western Igbo civil servants and traditional rulers were arraigned before the tribunal on charges of conspiracy against the Midwest State and collaboration with Biafrans. By the end of December 1968, Western Igbo civilians including Dr. J.B. Azinge, Dr. N. Azinge, Mr. A.N. Asiekwu, Mr. Patrick Odigwe Okwechime, Mr. Jude Ikechukwu Esedebe, Mr. F. Ojugbana and others were arrested and detained in Lagos.^{lxxxix} The tribunal report was never made public but shrouded in secrecy making the whole process a charade. Col. Achuzia dismissed the tribunal as an Inquisition Panel that did more harm than good in reconciling the Western Igbo with other ethnic groups because of the inherent vindictive intentions of the Midwest State Government.^{xc} The majority of the Western Igbo people believe that the Tribunal was set up to denigrate and vilify them. The tribunal failed to reconcile the Western Igbo with other groups in the post-war era.

The majority of displaced Western Igbo civil servants were not reabsorbed during the rehabilitation exercise, except for Dr. Isaac Okonjo, the Secretary to the Midwest State Government under Ogbemudia, Mr. Ubaru and Mr. Orewawho were appointed Sole Administrators for Aboh and Asaba Divisions respectively.^{xc} Those who were reabsorbed were Ogbemudia's friends and aides, while many civil servants were either dismissed or compulsorily retired. This development

generated fear and anxiety in those who were seeking re-absorption. In the screening exercise, attention was focused on the part each person played during the Biafran occupation of the state. Those considered "the most guilty" were summarily dismissed from service, while those classified as "the less guilty" were re-absorbed, but demoted.^{xcii} According to Chief John Enemoh, Western Igbo civil servants were invited to Agbor, the tactical headquarters of the Federal troops to sign an undertaking with the strict instruction that they had denounced Biafra before they were allowed to go to Benin-City.^{xciii} The case of Chief Fred Esedebe is instructive. He was a Permanent Secretary in the Midwest State Ministry of Internal Affairs and Information before the war. He was appointed Secretary to the Government of the "Republic of Benin" under Col. Albert Okonkwo during the war. His application for re-absorption after the civil war was rejected and he ventured into the private sector. It was during the regime of George Innih in 1976 that his entitlements were paid, He was not reabsorbed into the civil service.^{xciv}

Western Igbo military officers of Fourth Area Command, Benin City were affected by Decree 46 of 1970 promulgated by the Federal Military Government. Federal and Midwest governments accused them of complicity in a secessionist incursion into the Midwest. The Brigadier Adeyinka Adebayo-led Commission of Inquiry constituted by the Federal Government to investigate their pre-war and wartime activities dismissed prominent Western Igbo military officers. They were Col. C.D. Nwawo, Lt. Col. A.S.B. Nwajei, Col. B.O. Ochei, Major A. O. Okonkwo, Captain H.A. Asoya, Captain G.O. Okonkwo, and Captain J.W. Isichei and others.^{xcv} Captain Asoya's application for reabsorption in the army was turned down,^{xcvi} while Captain Onyekweli was the only senior Western Igbo military

officer who was reabsorbed by Ogbemudia because he was the Aide Camp (ADC) to Major David Ejoor, who influenced his reabsorption.^{xcvii} The then Asagba of Asaba, Obi Onyetenu, who was formerly Chairman of the Midwest State traditional rulers before the war, lost this position and was demoted to a third-class chief after the war.^{xcviii}

The war was traumatic for the Western Igbo people. Socio-cultural practices such as burials, marriage ceremonies, festivals and religious rites were suspended during the war years.^{xcix} Civil war victims were accorded befitting burials after the war. Many households were displaced and sheltered in refugee camps for some months. The destruction of bridges and roads made transportation difficult. Infrastructural facilities comprising post and telecommunications, water boards, post offices, and electricity supply were equally affected.^c Many schools were either destroyed or shut down during the hostilities. Some of them served as military camps for the Federal soldiers and refugee camps for displaced persons.^{ci} Midwest Government hospitals functioned as military hospitals for the treatment of wounded soldiers and civilians but lacked drugs. Many people died from lack of adequate medical care at the General Hospital at Agbor between January and May 1968.^{cii} The figure is believed to be higher in Asaba, Ibusa and Ogwuashi-Uku the main theatre of war.

Conclusion

The Biafran invasion of the Midwest State and the Federal Government's reconquest was a turning point that made Western Igboland become a militarised war theatre. The invasion had political and military motives designed to systematically use the Midwest as a launching pad to forge an alliance with the Western Region against the Federal Military Government under

General Yakubu Gowon; to prevent the Federal troops' use of the Midwest territory to launch attacks against Biafra. Despite the objectives of the Biafran invasion, the strategic gamble was a blunder that boomeranged and played against Col. Odumegwu Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. The invasion had far-reaching impacts. It altered the course of the war from the "police action" declared by the Federal Military Government against the secessionists at the beginning of the war to a full-scale war. Ojukwu's plans of swift taking over of Lagos did not materialise and he blamed the Biafran military reverses on saboteurs. It made the Western Region shift from its neutrality to supporting the Federal Government against Biafra. It engendered distrust, and suspicion and exacerbated inter-ethnic hostility between Western Igbo and other non-Igbo groups. The goodwill and sympathy the majority of the Midwesterners had for the Biafran cause weakened drastically making the non-Igbo groups shift their support to the Federal Government and become hostile to Biafran forces and Western Igbos. Nigeria emerged from the war and became one political entity and began the task of post-civil war reconstruction and reintegration of the Igbo East and West of Niger into the matrix of the Nigerian state.

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