DECEPTION IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967 – 1970

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Abstract
Deception as a war strategy and tactic was greatly deployed in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970 but has not been duly accounted for. It was deployed in phases: before the war as deceptive diplomacy; during the war as deceptive strategy and tactics, and as propaganda. Relying on primary and secondary sources, the paper is both scientific and analytical and concludes that deception in the war was significant. As deceptive diplomacy, it contributed to bringing the war to bear; as deception in battle, it aided mass killings; and as propaganda, it faulted the reality of events and information, and prolonged the war.

Key Words: Civil War, Biafra, Deception, Nigeria, Strategy, Tactics

Introduction

The West African country; Nigeria, is a former British colonial territory which gained its independence on October 1, 1960 (Kavwam, 2020). Nigeria is made up of over 300 ethnic nationalities with the predominant ones being Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and Fulani (Sowunmi, 2020). Political developments characterised by ethnicity and religion coupled with military involvement in politics among other things plunged the country into a civil war in 1967 (Azikiwe, 1969).

The Nigerian Civil War (NCW) which lasted from 1967 to 1970 witnessed the deployment of deception by the Federal Military Government (FMG) and the defunct Republic of Biafra. Deception constituted part of the war strategy and tactics and was significant for

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the mass murder it aided in the conduct of the war in various theatres of operation. In accounting for major battles in the NCW, scholars have not included battlefield aspects of deception. Thus, the paper is an attempt to document deception as part of the military strategy and tactics employed by the FMG and federal troops, and by the defunct Republic of Biafra and Biafran forces during the civil war. It is focused on analysing the strategy and tactics of deception in the war and analysing deception and mass murder in the context of battle in the NCW. Indeed, the share numbers and the preponderance of such tactics will constitute an aspect of major battles of the NCW. While studies on aspects of genocide in the NCW have already been documented, discussing mass murder in the light of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the war is beyond the scope of this study (Heerten & Moses, 2014, 170-171).

Enormous writings exist on the NCW. They include the works by John de St Jorre (1972); A. A. Adekunle (2004); Egodi Uchendu (2007); Olusegun Obasanjo (1980); Godwin Alabi-Isama (2013); Akinjide Osuntokun (1989); and O.T Ntukogu and O.V. Uhere (2019) among others too numerous to be highlighted. Enormous writings also exist on deception. They include the works by Beaumont Roger (1982); Betts R. K (1982); Cruickshank Charles (1980); and Richard Ibu (2015) among others. In all, the work by Richard Ibu appears to be the only study on an aspect of the themes (the NCW and deception). This study, therefore, stands to contribute to writings on the NCW with a focus on deception.

Conceptual Discourse

Several concepts have been used in the narrative. Thus, there is a need to conceptualise and contextualise these concepts for a better understanding of the usage and meaning of these concepts in the study beginning with:

Major Battles

Every battle or aspect of battle is as important as the other as none is inconsequential. Thus, no matter the conceptualisation, it is imperative to contextualise every battle as a major battle as every aspect of military

operation in war is of paramount importance to the military in theatres of operation. Indeed, it is the aggregate of the successes and failures in battles that help determine the outcome of war.

War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity

It has been proven beyond reasonable doubt that there were instances of mass murder some of which have been classified as genocide, thereby constituting war crimes or crimes against humanity in the NCW. Discourse on genocide in the Asaba area has been captured by Emma Okocha (2012); and S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser Ottaneli (2017). Acts of genocide in the Nigerian Civil War were not limited to the Asaba area. Thus, discourse on genocide in the Afikpo area of Ebonyi State, specifically Amasiri, Akpoha, Itim, Ibii, Enohia, Nkpoghoro, Ohaisu, Ozizza, Ugwuegu and Unwana has been captured by IC Ewah (2019). There may be still instances of genocide in other theatres of the NCW that are yet to be established and where a study or studies on genocide in the NCW may be ongoing. Be that as it may, some instances of mass murder in the NCW were executed through the tactics of deception whereby the people who thought themselves safe with the presence of the federal troops, were summarily executed by those who were to protect them. This was the case in Asaba and Afikpo among other places (Osakwe, Tangban & Ahmed, 2017 & Ewah 2019).

Battle Deception

The employment of deception in war is an age-long practice. It is sometimes strategy, sometimes tactics and sometimes both. Mark A Gabriel (2005) has described it (deception) as 'an art of war practised by radicals'. The view by Mark A Gabriel could be misleading as deception cannot be said to be an art of war practised by radicals alone. As war strategy and tactics, it could be employed by regular and irregular forces; conventional and unconventional forces. In war, deception could be employed by adversaries against one another (What is Deception, 2020, 16). The Islamic scholar, Mark A Gabriel (2005, 117), further observed that in Islam, war is all about deceit and that deceit is one of the essential tools of *Jihad*. The employment of deception in war and by

forces gave rise to the concept of Military deception which is an indirect way of achieving operational objectives in combat operations. It could serve the purpose of defence or attack (Tao & Quanyan, 2020, "https://arxiv.org, 1).

Deception has been defined by Tao and Quanyan (2020, 1) as the technique used to cause humans to have false beliefs. To Barton Whaley (2016, 1), deception is 'the manipulation of appearances such that they convey a false reality.' It has also been defined as the act of 'causing another to believe what is not true; to mislead or ensnare' (What is Deception, https://www.rand.org). Deception or so to say, military deception according to Ibu (2019, 77) is the measures taken to deliberately mislead the adversary's decision-makers about friendly capabilities, intentions or operations in ways which may be exploited by friendly forces. As Barton Whaley (2016, 1) remarks, deception 'is the only weapon that a warrior (soldier, troops or forces) can wield that, to the extent it succeeds, will impose uncertainty and the element of surprise on the opponent. In other words, surprise is the intended result of deception'. For deception to be effective there has to be an element of surprise, deceit and concealment of the plan. Forms of deception include but are not limited to camouflage, concealment, diversion, conditioning/exploit, and mimicry (What is Deception, https://www.rand.org). Deception could take many forms and in the NCW, was deployed by the adversaries sometimes by chance and sometimes as part of a planned operation such as leaking false intelligence to mislead and misguide an adversary. Propaganda and strategic communication belong to the spectrum of deception.

Deceptive Diplomacy in the Nigerian Civil War

While the clouds gathered for the storm (the NCW), the Odumegwu Ojukwu-led government of the Eastern Region and the Yakubu Gowon led FMG of Nigeria, while negotiating peace, were making plans to commence war. Deception was employed first, not as war battle strategy and tactics but in negotiations and the conduct of diplomacy before the outbreak of the war. While the events preceding the July 1966 counter coup included the killing of Easterners especially the Igbo in

parts of Northern Nigeria, there was a process of negotiation for the exchange of troops between Yakubu Gowon and Odumegwu Ojukwu (New York Times, 13/8/1966). The agreement held that troops outside their regions of origin should be allowed to return to their regions of origin but without their guns. In fulfilling this agreement, a train with Northern troops was pulled out of Enugu (Eastern Region) to Kaduna (Northern Region) on August 12, 1966 (New York Times, 13/8/1966).

The deception that followed was the unexplainable compromise by Odumegwu Ojukwu in allowing the Northern troops who left Enugu for the North to go with their guns while the Eastern troops returned from other regions to the East unarmed. New York Times (13/8/1966) reported that

> in working out the exchange agreement, the key hurdle was how to ensure the Hausas' security as they moved through the east to the Northern Region border. Col. Gowon feared that if the Hausas were deprived of their weapons, they would be attacked by Ibo civilians seeking revenge. Col. Ojukwu insisted that the weapons remain behind for use by the returning Ibo troops. Eventually the officers compromised: a reported handful of Hausa infantry men armed with automatic rifles, were allowed to 'ride shotgun' on the train.

At the time when Easterners especially, the Igbo were being massacred in parts of Northern Nigeria leading to Igbo exodus from the North ((New York Times, 17/8/1966), Northerners in the East though not short of security challenges were being considered for self-defence in the event of any attack from the Igbo. This move by Gowon which also led to limited guns in the Eastern Region at the outbreak of the war was highly deceptive. One could only wonder how Ojukwu managed to fall for it. Was Ojukwu making himself look like the weaker one or a victim of the Federal Government, or he fell for it because he was already acquiring weapons for the commencement of war?

However, on why the Governor of the Eastern Region compromised, it is important to note that Ojukwu had his own

deceptive plan against Nigeria. Prior to August 12, 1966, the report by the New York Times suggests that Ojukwu had contemplated Igbo secession as he believed that all Igbo troops would be repatriated to the East consequent upon which he hoped to form an Igbo battalion. This, to Ojukwu, suggested the first step towards separation and independence and was largely necessitated by his belief at the time that separation should be in peace and not in combat (New York Times, 09/8/1966). Nevertheless, recently declassified evidence from Sao Tome and Principe points to the fact that Ojukwu prior to 1967 had begun to acquire guns (weapons) with which to prosecute the war (Seibert, 2018, 270).

On the politics of recognition of Biafra by Biafra and for non-recognition by Nigeria, the internationalisation of the war first became a matter for the African home front with then pan African Organisation of African Unity (OAU) faced with the task of resolving the Nigerian crisis. Even though in the end, the decision of the OAU was predicated on negotiation and mediation (settlement), the organisation insisted on one Nigeria (Audu, Osuala & Ibrahim, 2013, 144). Before this decision of the OAU, the parties to the war worked so hard to outsmart each other in an attempt to negotiate favourably for their own side of the war. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo representing the Biafran side and the Nigerian side respectively were at their best in protecting the interest of their own side of the war. Thus, at the OAU Heads of State meeting in Kinshasa in 1968, Awolowo against the submission of Nnamdi Azikiwe for Biafra, insisted that the debate on the Biafran war was an internal matter which the OAU was by her constitution, forbidden from meddling in (Ogunsanwo, 2009, 135). This submission by Awolowo which had significantly shaped the decision and stand of the OAU regarding the NCW, had serious negative implications for Biafra.

Prior to the actual war as the evidence suggests there was the deployment of what this article refers to as 'deceptive diplomacy' by both actors; Gowon and Ojukwu. Deception no doubt, characterised the negotiations and reports by the belligerents before and during the war. Thus, while there was a state of war, there was no actual war between

the belligerents. John de St. Jorre (1972, 126) has used a World War II terminology to describe this situation when he referred to the war as the 'phoney war.' Thus, on September 3, 1939, during World War II, France and Great Britain declared war against Germany without setting up any major offensive against her. This period of inaction was called the phoney war (The Second World War, https://www.musee-armee.fr). In Nigeria at the time, 'the threat of war hung menacingly in the sodden air, but no one seemed to know quite when and in what shape it would take. The only constant was its inevitability (St. Jorre 1972, 126). This may have been because while negotiating peace, the adversaries were equally envisaging the eventuality of war.

Before the outbreak of hostilities, Ibu (2015, 84) argues that Biafra achieved some level of concealment (Biafra tried to ensure that her level of preparedness for war was not known to Nigeria). He added that to achieve proper deception, Biafra engaged and participated in negotiations with Nigeria geared towards resolving the crisis while at the same time mobilising for war with further preparations including the war period setting up of Research and Production (RAP) board to make up for the short-fall in armaments and the challenge of arms purchase for the war purpose. In mobilising for war, even before the declaration of secession and independence of Biafra on 30th May 1967 1967 (Tamuno, 1989, 10), recruitment into the Biafran forces was already in place across the former Eastern Region (Oko, 2017). Thus, before secession, Odumegwu Ojukwu's team went about recruiting men in readiness for war. It was reported by New York Times on 15 March, 1967, that

> the Eastern Region government mobilises civilians, to resist what it fears may be an attack by the northern-led Federal Government in Lagos. The organisation of village civil defense units and guerrilla-type home guards were set in motion several weeks ago. Throughout the Eastern Region, provincial secretaries were working extra, screening thousands of able-bodied youths for the home guards (New York Times, 15/8/1967).

All these were already in place while the government of the Eastern Region went on with negotiations aimed at ensuring a peaceful resolution of the crisis with the FMG. This act of deception by Odumegwu Ojukwu was designed to 'present a weak front and deceive the FMG into believing that Biafra was ill-prepared and unwilling to engage in war (Ibu, 2015, 84). In another instance, Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, while addressing the Eastern Region's Consultative Assembly on 26 May 1967, is said to have averred that no power in black Africa could defeat or subdue Biafra by force (St. Jorre 1972, 121). Though this submission by Ojukwu was to a greater extent hyping and portraying Biafra as a powerful nation, as well as justifying her resolve and preparedness for war, it invariably was hoped it could make the FMG jittery and possibly, not attack or declare war against Biafra. However, the saying that no power in black Africa could defeat Biafra could be more understandable in the light of deception than the deception of weakness and show of unpreparedness for war. This appears to justify the reason for Yakubu Gowon's initial reaction to Biafran secession which the FMG felt was not much of a threat and thus, would last for a few days, and be quashed with a police action (New Nigeria, 12/8/1967, 1). In what appears as the FMG's understanding of Biafra's readiness for war, then Major Murtala Mohammed was eager to march to Enugu to thrash Ojukwu's rebellion but was stopped by Yakubu Gowon (Ogunsanwo, 2009, 126). As the police action could not achieve the desired objective, it became clearer to Gowon that Biafra was more prepared than it portrayed itself. Additionally, the declaration of the Eastern Region as an independent Republic of Biafra on 30 May 1967, further compelled Nigeria to declare total war against Biafra (St. Jorre 1972, 122).

Despite the fact that Biafra was ill-prepared for war, the war that was hoped to last for a few weeks lingered for 30 months due to Biafra's tactics of deception. Thus, when the FMG discovered that there was actually more to what was known regarding Biafra's readiness and resolve for war, total war was declared against the secessionist Eastern Region. It is not wrong therefore to argue that the understanding of the nature and reality of events in the war led to the adoption or imposition

of stricter measures at different stages in the war including the declaration of total war, the imposition of economic blockade against Biafra (Udeagbala, 2015, 182), and the change of currency by Nigeria in January of 1968 (Kirshner, 1997, 103) all in the attempt to cushion Biafra's resolve, opportunities, capability and victory in the war.

Battle Deception in the Nigerian Civil War

With the outbreak of hostilities and an end to the police action, the NCW is said to have begun with the declaration of total war on 12 August, 1967 by the FMG against Biafra, following Biafra's invasion of the Mid-West on 9 August, 1967 (Madiebo, 1980, 157). Brigadier Victor Banjo, a Nigerian officer of Yoruba origin was given the responsibility to lead the operation (Madiebo, 1980, 157). According to John de St. Jorre (1972, 167), the choice of Banjo was a pointer to Biafra's aim and the political calculations behind it. Thus, after the successful invasion of the Mid-West, Banjo halted the Biafran troops' advance to Lagos (St. Jorre 1972, 167). Ejoor (1989, 116) has noted that the operation was part of Banjo's plan to take over the government of Nigeria. The period also witnessed a conspiracy to overthrow Ojukwu. Thus, in what has come to be referred to as the 'Banjo Plot,' Banjo; Majors Emmanuel Ifeajuna; and Philip Alale; and Mr. Samuel Agbam were all court-martialed and killed in Biafra on 24 September, 1967 (St. Jorre 1972, 171 & Uwechue, 2004, 121). Banjo's considered accomplice in the Western State of Nigeria, Wole Soyinka, was imprisoned until the end of the war (Soyinka, http://www.postcolonialweb.org).

The deployment of deception in the civil war took a different dimension with the declaration of total war. It became a combination of deceptive diplomacy and deception in battle as part of the war strategy and tactics. In the Nigerian Civil War, when surviving and winning the war by any means became an obligation for the adversaries, deception became tolerable and, in some cases honourable (Daly 2015, 144), and in places like Asaba of present day Delta State, and in Afikpo of present day Ebonyi State among others, featured prominently leading to acts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Shuaibu (2019, 80) has noted that in the Mid-West theatre of the war,

> the 2 Division's operational area of influence was not only characterised with irregular warfare, it also witnessed irregularities. Of all the theatres of war in the Nigerian Civil War, the Mid-Western State has dominated the literature and tales about the alleged mass killings and gruesome acts of unprofessionalism exhibited by the Federal troops particularly in the Asaba area.

These irregularities were aspects of the civil war battles in the Mid-West which in itself was deceptive. Azuka, an oral informant, as recorded in Osakwe et.al (2017, 61), recalls that when the Mid-West came under the control of the Nigerian Army 'they asked the natives to assemble and welcome them and when they did, they were shot'. This has been captured by Emma Okocha among other scholars who have documented the Asaba massacre in a number of literature (Okocha 2012, Bird & Ottanelli 2017 & Nwaokocha 2019). The people when invited to welcome the federal troops probably felt a sense of relief that they had become safe, unknown to them that they were being deceived by the federal troops to be massacred. This was also the case and fate of the people of Afikpo at the hands of the federal troops (Ewah 2019). John de St. Jorre (1972) on the other hand, noted that "the Mid-Western Ibos who had been, through no desire of their own, dragged into the eye of the storm were to be buffeted mercilessly for the rest of the war." Cynically, this act of battle deception was exhibited against non-combatants. Had the people had a little intelligence report on the federal troops' plan of action, they may have sought safety by any means possible. While Bird and Ottanelli (2017, 19) are of the view that the Mid-West invasion was a disaster for the Mid-Western Igbo, it is also their opinion that even amid the violence, it is clear that not all the federal troops took part in or supported the killings. However, some of the soldiers in a show of professionalism or revulsion at what was happening acted with genuine kindness and compassion to the people (Bird & Ottanelli, 2017). It is important to point out that deception in the

war and the massacre that followed were executed, sometimes, by chance.

Deception in battle during the NCW was not limited to the Asaba theatre. Ibu (2015, 79) has noted that deception was employed by the men of the 3rd Marine Commando (3MCDO) against the Biafran troops in the battles of Obubra, Ugep and Oban in present day Cross River State of Nigeria, and was characteristic of the battles in the area up to 27 February, 1968, when Obubra and Ugep were liberated by the federal troops. In accounting for deception in the battles, it is on record that the federal troops 'made use of the military strategy of mass attack, envelopment and tactical manoeuvres to achieve its objective. It employed the strategy of manoeuvre and attrition simultaneously' (Ibu, 2015). Thus, in the process of trying to manoeuvre the adversary in the bid to get to its desired mission target and achieve its objective, the 3MCDO faced whatever obstacle it encountered enroute to Obubra, Ugep and Oban. Like Mao Zhedong's ideology on deception in battle where he admonished forces to employ deception and diversion by creating uproar elsewhere and striking elsewhere, 3MCDO in the Obubra, Ugep and Oban areas had a patrol team that carried out daily patrol and constantly harassed the Biafran troops at Oban and Shelled their positions while the main infiltrating stealth force under the command of Alabi Isama advanced through the jungle with their arms and ammunition (Ibu, 2015). Deception thus became a veritable diversionary tactics for the 3MCDO in the liberation of Obubra, Ugep and Oban in the Cross River area during the Nigerian Civil War.

While deception was employed as battle tactics in Asaba leading to the Asaba massacre, and in the battles of Obubra, Ugep and Oban leading to the liberation of the area by the federal forces, deception was equally employed in the Afikpo area of the Nigerian Civil War by the federal troops, equally resulting to scores of mass killings in parts of Afikpo such as Amankwo, Ibii, and Enohia/Kpoghirikpo among others. Having begun in July 1967, it was not until April, 1968 that the civil war got to Afikpo (Otu 2017 & Itiri 2019). An oral source has observed that following the aerial bombardment of Afikpo by the Nigerian Air Force, the people of Afikpo and the Biafran troops could not resist the invasion

of Afikpo by the federal troops. He added that nobody cared any longer to defend himself or his family during the federal troops' attempt to occupy the area. All the people could do was flee and some of those who could not flee were gathered and shot to death. These were mainly the aged people most of whom had been told and believed that surrendering to the federal troops would be a saving grace (Ekuma 2017). It is on record that Afikpo experienced large-scale killings of civilians during the war that at Amankwo village, hundreds of men were reportedly buried alive (Harneit-Sievers, Ahuzuem & Emezue, 1997, 79).

In Ibii, an outskirt village of Afikpo, the people even after the invasion and fall of Afikpo in April 1968 lived for long without experiencing the war or the presence of the federal troops. However, Ibii was attacked by the federal troops in April, 1969(Ologwu, 2017). Because the area fell much later than other communities within Afikpo, it harboured many who sought safety in the area as refugees. With life almost normal prior to the invasion of Ibii, an eyewitness submits that the people believed that the federal troops consequent upon entry into the area would not harm or kill them. The source further added that on the day Ibii was invaded by the federal troops, specifically men of 1 Division of the Nigerian Army, the people even after shouting one Nigeria came under indiscriminate gunfire attack from the federal troops (Egwu, 2017). This attack as Egwu (2017) recalled was more than once. In his words,

> when the war got to Ibii, people tried all they could to ensure their safety. With the federal troops' attack on our land, we resorted to sleeping in the bushes for safety and sometimes returning to our homes but sleeping with one eye open. We were in the bushes when the federal troops entered and burnt our village. This was in April 1969. They came again for the second time after we had tried to fix our land and homes with life returning to normal again. They took some of the livestock we had in our lands. When we returned to our village after the attack, there were 27 dead bodies of able-bodied young men

> who were killed by the federal troops. Additionally, the elderly in the society who were unable to flee were also killed by the federal troops.

Believe that surrendering to the federal troops or the shouting of one Nigeria when before the federal troops would save one from being killed was largely deceptive. Thus, many of those who followed this practice ended up being killed. However, it also saved many from danger.

While the war was declared over and said to have ended, many of the war refugees in their hiding places did not believe the authenticity of the information regarding the war coming to an end. In the Afikpo area, when news of the end of the war and the cessation of hostility began to circulate, there were those who doubted the authenticity of the information. Thus, they feared the announcement was a trick employed by the FMG and federal troops to lure the remaining people targeted for execution. For this, it took several days and the presence of war refugee returnees for them to believe the war was over (Harneit-Sievers, Ahuzuem & Emezue, 1997, 80). Be that as it may, the fears expressed by the people turned out to show an element of truth when at the initial end of the war, in the Enohia/Kpoghirikpo area of Afikpo, a good number of people were gathered, summarily executed and their bodies burnt by the federal troops (Ugwube 2017 & Ewah 2019, 71-82). Thus while the war was declared over, there were still disguised killings of unarmed Biafrans.

While attacks and killings of unarmed civilians characterised the NCW, it is argued that the killing by the federal forces in the Afikpo area was necessitated by the reprisal attacks, the killing of the federal troops and the intense guerrilla warfare that was carried out against the federal troops in Afikpo by the Biafrans (Harneit-Sievers, Ahuzuem & Emezue, 1997, 79). This guerrilla warfare no doubt also applied in other theatres of the NCW and may have elicited the same or similar response from the federal troops.

Deception in the Abagana Theatre of Operation, March 1968

At the Abagana theatre of operation during the NCW, the tactics of deception featured as fake intelligence from Biafra to the federal troops of the 2 Division of the Nigerian Army. In the bid to invade and occupy Onitsha, the Commander of 2 Division and his troops were to advance about 14 miles from Abagana to Onitsha with its logistics; food and munitions (Madiebo, 1980, 222). To achieve this advance and objective, the federal troops met with serious resistance from the Biafran troops. After heavy battle engagement between the belligerent forces, the Biafran troops succeeded in pushing the federal troops two miles back to Abagana but were out of ammunition which brought their morale very low (Madibeo 1980) as any push from the troops of 2 Division of the Nigerian Army may spell doom to the Biafrans. The situation of the Biafran troops was, however, not known to Murtala Muhammed, the commander of 2 Division.

To buy time, the Biafrans while waiting for the supply of ammunition with which to combat the federal troops who had been confined for about three weeks at Ifite Ukpo Junction, outskirts of Abagana, released fake intelligence to the federal troops. According to Madiebo (1980, 222),

> on the 13 of March, 1968, in our confidence completely unsupported by ammunition or other essential equipment, the Ministry of Information, acting on someone's instructions played for the enemy Second Division through powerful loud speakers, some recorded threats. In this broadcast, the enemy was told that he was completely surrounded preparatory to annihilation, unless he withdrew back to Northern Nigeria immediately… This broadcast must have driven Colonel Muhammed mad for the following day he let loose with all he had on our troop.

Without verifying the intelligence, the Commander of 2 Division (Colonel Murtala Muhammed) in the bid to move away from danger instead ran into grave danger. Tensed, the commander on the 31st of

March, 1968, pulled all he had; men and material and made way for Onitsha. As recorded by John de St. Jorre (1972, 189),

> a supply column carrying munitions and petrol and minimally escorted by two armoured cars had been sent down from Enugu to Murtala's hard-pressed force in Onitsha. It was close to Abagana and moving slowly due to bad roads and fear of mines when it ran straight into the ambush. The first few shots set a petrol tanker ablaze near the head of the column-disastrously tightly packed with only a few yards between each vehicle-and the flames spread like a bush fire backwards, enveloping the rest of the convoy. Nearly all the drivers and their escorts were killed, every single truck was destroyed, and vast quantities of ammunition and other supplies were lost.

The unverified broadcast made by the Biafrans to Murtala and his troops as the evidence revealed, spelled doom for the commander, his division and Nigeria at large. Tensed, Colonel Murtala Muhammed in the attempt to escape the perceived danger and avoid a repeat of the casualty that befell his division in the Niger River crossing, was erroneously lured into moving away from the area; a move that led to the Abagana onslaught against the federal troops by the Biafrans. This operation and disaster which have been variously referred to as the 'Abagana Ambush,' has recently been reconstructed. Although there was an element of deception in the Abagana operation, the sequence of operational movement has been accounted for (Osakwe, 2020). It is possible the Abagna operation as well as the Niger River Crossing disasters may have happened by chance as friction in war is inevitable.

Propaganda as Deception in the Nigerian Civil War

Another aspect of deception as a war strategy in the NCW was the use of propaganda by both sides of the war. Propaganda has been conceptualised as 'the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perception, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist' (Jowette

& O'Donnell, 1992 in Anthony 2010, 41-42). The Biafran leadership thus resolved to shape the international community's perception of happenings in Biafra. It was considered one of the ways by which Biafra could survive the war. Surviving the war and maintaining her newly declared independence, and winning the war and ensuring the indivisibility and corporate existence of Nigeria were paramount goals that must be achieved by Biafra and Nigeria respectively, either by legitimate or illegitimate means. Emerging victorious through whatever means did not matter as far as the objective was met. As Childs Daly has noted 'coping by fraudulent or deceitful means came to be socially acceptable in a way that it had not been before' (Daly 2017, 135).

Discourses on propaganda in the NCW have not addressed propaganda as part of deception. However, propaganda in the civil war could be interpreted about the extent to which it characterised the civil war as part of the war strategy. Being a deceptive war strategy, propaganda was employed by both adversaries and while Biafra made efforts to sell both factual and purported war facts and figures to the world to attract international sympathy and turn major powers and countries of the world against Nigeria, the FMG was largely defensive. To achieve this which was deployed in two phases; locally and internationally the Biafran leadership established the Directorate of Propaganda; a makeshift from the Ministry of Information which she inherited from Nigeria (Anthony 2010, 43), and partnered with a foreign-based press for the internationalisation of the war. Balogun (1973, 94) records that

> one major arm of secessionist strategy during the civil war involved the extensive use of propaganda to win outside support and bring about international intervention on its side to end the war. The Biafran leadership calculated that if enough sentiment could be whipped up in its favour, the Nigerian government might well find itself unable to pursue the war to a successful conclusion and that the secessionist cause would then triumph by default in the ensuring stalemate. It was a strategy that came very close to achieving its

> success, for Biafran propaganda, skillfully orchestrated by the Geneva-based public relations firm Markpress . . .

Soon, the international community was agog about dehumanising imageries of the suffering of Biafrans especially children as other international media press followed suit. Highlighting on the extent to which the reports were carried, Ola Balogun (1973, 96) observed that

> innumerable articles provided fantastic death tolls that continued to be inflated week after week, accompanied by gruesome pictures of starving babies. Writing in the British Observer as early as 23 June 1968, one Mathew Rosa estimated that three million people were starving to death in Biafra. The Guardian of the 8 of July went one step further with an editorial entitled 'three thousand everyday' in which it stated: 3,000 Biafrans, mainly children and old people, are now dying of starvation everyday, and the rate goes up by compound interest. Two million will probably die unless massive relief gets through in the next few days.

This was corroborated by Niven (1970, 158). As was the case, the reports went on and on that it is innumerable to be wholly captured here. Nevertheless, the reports, be it propaganda or not generated sympathy and attracted international humanitarian intervention for Biafra (Okpara 2019, 61-62). It also stirred reactions in the outside world as "millions of people from different nationalities believed the propaganda and accused their home government of supporting genocide against Biafra by supplying arms to be used in the whole scale slaughter of Biafrans (Niven 1970, 160).

Following the implications of the hue and cry emanating from the Western Press against Nigeria in the war, the FMG saw the need for international observer teams to monitor the war. To this end, it tried so hard to deny whatever allegations and propaganda that were being leveled against her across the globe by Biafra with the actual happenstances being grouped alongside. To defend herself against the

accusations of genocide and effectively counter Biafra's 'propaganda machine', the FMG resolved and invited a number of countries and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as international observers to monitor the conduct of federal troops in the theatres of operation (Balogun 1973, 100). This counter strategy worked effectively in favour of Nigeria as OAU favoured the corporate existence of the country. This move by Nigeria was in no little measure deceptive as the FMG unarguably worked hand in hand with these observers. In fact, all the allegations of atrocities and genocide leveled against Nigeria by Biafra and which Sir Rex Niven (1970, 159) described as a myth were in the end, dismissed. Additionally, the Canadian Press on 14 January, 1970, reported thus

> Brig Gen. John Drewry, a Canadian military observer in Nigeria, has reported that the physical condition of Biafran refugees is much better than was feared. The substance of the report was given to the Canadian House of Commons today by the External Affairs Minister Mitchel Sharp. Gen. Drewry visited four towns in the former Biafran region and found no evidence of any atrocities (Canadian Press, 14/1/1970).

To justify how deceptive propaganda in the NCW was, Aneke argues that there were those who were of age during the war, experienced the horrors but were blinded by the intensive war propaganda on their sides of the war from knowing the facts about the war (Aneke 2007, xvii). When all is said, it is important to note that propaganda appears to have prolonged the war.

In accounting for the use of propaganda as deception in the NCW, it is important to note that Nigeria appears to have outwitted Biafra. Some factors may have combined to bring about Biafra's failure with the near-success propaganda machine. It is likely that Biafra may have shot itself in the foot when it established the Directorate of Propaganda. The mere existence of the directorate defined its purpose which may have been of advantage to Nigeria. Thus, every effort by Biafra to propagate and establish belief in acts of 'genocide' by the

federal troops against Biafra did not see the light of day. It was not until years after the war that the first case of genocide was established against Nigeria through the Oputa Panel; the report of which has yet not been published. It is the opinion of some people that the reason for the non-publication of the Oputa Panel report is owing to the enormity of the facts and evidence so tendered and established. However, Emma Okocha in 2012 published the ever first work on genocide in the NCW 'Blood on the Niger: An Untold Story of the Nigerian Civil War. Similarly, IC Ewah in 2019 published his work "The Last Genocide: Impact of the Nigerian Civil War in Afikpo", Other scholars and researchers have beckoned on these books with works on genocide in the NCW so far limited to Asaba and Afikpo.

Conclusion

Deception as a war strategy and tactic was employed in the NCW of 1967-1970 by both adversaries in two phases. First: as pre-war strategy (deceptive diplomacy before the war); and secondly, as war strategy and tactics, and as propaganda. As a war strategy, deception was greatly employed in the conduct of diplomacy and negotiations between the FMG and the Government of the Eastern Region before the war. While the parties to the crisis tried to negotiate a peaceful way out of the crisis the country was experiencing at the time, each had a hidden agenda in mind and was not being open to the other. When war ensued, deception as a war strategy was equally featured as propaganda. While propaganda was advanced by Biafra which had the Directorate of Propaganda in partnership with the Geneva-based public relations firm; Markpress, which was charged to sell true and purported war facts and figures to the world to discredit Nigeria in the bid to attract international sympathy, the FMG was committed to countering Biafra's propaganda and also debunking the realities of the war. Propaganda faulted the reality of the events and information regarding the war and in no little measure, prolonged the war.

Deception as war tactics in the NCW was deployed in the Asaba, Obubra, Ugep, Oban, Afikpo and Abagana theatres of operation in the Nigerian Civil War. In the battles of Obubra, Ugep and Oban, diversion

was employed by the 3MCDO in her advance and operations in the Cross River. In the Asaba area, deception was employed against unarmed civilians who were made to gather to welcome the troops of 2 Divisions of the Nigerian Army only to be summarily executed. In Afikpo, the troops of 3MCDO and the troops of 1 Division of the Nigerian Army employed the tactics of deception against the people who were made to believe that the shouting of 'one Nigeria' and surrendering to the federal troops would be a saving a grace.

The deception of war strategy and tactics in the NCW is significant for several reasons. One, as deceptive diplomacy, it contributed to bringing the war to bear. This is owing to the fact that in the conduct of the pre-war diplomacy, the parties to the war relied on deception as a means to achieving their goal. Secondly, propaganda as part of deception by Biafra and counter propaganda by Nigeria faulted the realities of the happenstances and information sold to the world regarding the war. Thirdly, as deception in battle, it was instrumental to the killings and mass murders committed against unarmed combatants during the war. Finally, the paper focused on analysing the strategy and tactics of deception that brought about mass murder and analysing deception and mass murder in the context of battles in the NCW. All in all, it is clear that in reconstructing military operations, deception as a factor must be given a place of prominence.

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