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ARTICLE

Visual Propaganda and Biafran National Identity: Artists Constructing a Nation During Wartime

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Abstract

The secessionist state of Biafra enacted a propaganda campaign that simultaneously built support for its war of independence (the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970) and fostered nationalism. Integral to this effort, although understudied, were the currency, stamps, posters, and cartoons artists produced while working for the government. Putting these materials in dialogue with print and radio propaganda, and the Ahiara Declaration (the culminating treatise of Biafran nationalism), this article demonstrates how visual propaganda actualized a nation, constructed national identity, positioned Biafra as a foil to an irredeemable Nigeria, and defined a citizenry. Through the materials they created, artists shaped Biafra's national consciousness.

Résumé

L'État sécessionniste du Biafra a adopté une campagne de propagande qui a simultanément renforcé le soutien à la guerre d'indépendance (la guerre civile nigériane, 1967-1970) et encouragé le nationalisme. La devise, les timbres, les affiches et les caricatures produits par les artistes lorsqu'ils travaillaient pour le gouvernement faisaient partie intégrante de cet effort, bien que sous-étudiés. En mettant ces documents en dialogue avec la propagande écrite et radiophonique et la Déclaration d'Ahiara (le traité culminant du nationalisme biafrais), cet article démontre comment la propagande visuelle a actualisé une nation, construite l'identité nationale, positionnée le Biafra comme un faire-valoir d'un Nigeria irrécupérable et définie une citoyenneté. À travers les matériaux qu'ils ont créés, les artistes ont façonné la conscience nationale du Biafra.

Resumo

O Estado secessionista do Biafra encetou uma campanha de propaganda que serviu dois propósitos em simultâneo: obter o apoio para a guerra da independência (Guerra Civil da Nigéria, 1967-1970) e promover o nacionalismo. Como parte integrante deste esforço, ainda que pouco estudados, contaram-se as moedas, os selos, os pósteres e os cartunes produzidos por artistas ao serviço do governo. Ao colocar estes materiais em diálogo com a propaganda impressa e radiofónica, bem como com a Declaração de Ahiara (o tratado último do nacionalismo biafrense), este artigo mostra de que modo a propaganda visual concretizou uma nação, construiu uma identidade nacional, posicionou o Biafra como modelo contrastante com uma Nigéria irremissível e definiu um corpo de cidadãos. Através dos materiais que criaram, os artistas deram forma à consciência nacional do Biafra.

Keywords: Biafra; Nigerian Civil War; nationalism; propaganda

On June 1, 1969, to mark the second anniversary of the secessionist state of Biafra's existence in the midst of a war for its survival, its head of state Emeka Ojukwu gave his seminal Ahiara Declaration, broadcast over Biafran radio and distributed in pamphlets at home and abroad. The address attempted to outline Biafra's revolutionary ideals. Ojukwu declared Biafra the first truly decolonial African state since its borders did not align with colonial demarcations, and positioned it as a bulwark against neocolonial forces. He also outlined a quasi-socialist vision, in which the people ultimately held political power within an egalitarian society. The Biafran revolution, which he explained, "came into being ... when we proclaimed to all the world that we had finally extricated ourselves from the sea of mud that was, and is, Nigeria," stood for self-determination, human rights, and a united patriotism (Ojukwu 1969, 27).

Despite Ojukwu's lofty claims, Biafra's wartime reality told a different story. By the time of the speech, Biafra was reduced to a tiny territory suffering severe food shortages and a refugee crisis. Just over seven months later, Biafra surrendered in January 1970. While scholars have offered various interpretations of the Ahiara Declaration (Okwu 2016; Daly 2020b), Jago Morrison has described it "not as a program of a viable state" but a gesture toward—and even a memorialization of—an imagined Biafra (2005, 11).

Biafra had seceded from Nigeria in May 1967. After two coups within a period of six months, in January and June 1966, successive military regimes had taken over Nigeria's leadership. In part spurred by the death of their leaders in the first coup, people in Northern Nigeria perpetrated a series of massacres against people from the East, particularly against those of the Igbo ethnic group, which led to thousands of deaths and the displacement of around 250,000 people, who fled East to escape (Gould 2012, 47–48). Following this violence, Ojukwu pushed to decentralize the government's power to create a confederate structure between Nigeria's four regions and the federal government, led by Yakubu Gowon, who had come to power in the second coup. Talks between Gowon and Ojukwu eventually failed and Biafra declared its independence. Gowon initially called for a "police action" against the breakaway state, but he soon declared the conflict a war after initial Biafran victories. The vast majority of the conflict was fought in Biafra and the Nigerian government steadily regained territory, which resulted in the mass

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displacement of Biafrans as they attempted to evade incoming troops. Nigeria also blockaded Biafra, which forced a famine upon its people.

In the build-up to and during the war, Eastern artists and writers who had put their creative efforts towards fostering a Nigerian cultural sphere less than a decade earlier now avidly supported and worked towards Biafran independence. The massacres had driven many of them out of Nigeria's Northern and Western regions and to the East. These returnees experienced a crisis surrounding their place in Nigeria and a disillusionment with its political structures. Uprooted from their academic and government jobs because of the massacres and the war, artists, writers, and intellectuals joined Biafra's civil service and took on important roles to try to build the Biafra that Ojukwu described in the Ahiara Declaration. They directed, managed, and created Biafra's national and international propaganda. Much of what they produced during Biafra's short life attempted to will this imagined nation into existence.

The extent of intellectuals' participation in the government and their willingness to produce and disseminate propaganda reflects the urgency surrounding the development of Biafran nationalism and the widespread support Biafra had from its intelligentsia class. Academics, writers, and artists shaped and furthered a government agenda to an unprecedented extent in Nigerian history and at a level Nigeria has not experienced since. By breaking free from a corrupt and oppressive state that refused to protect them, Biafrans saw themselves as undertaking an anti-colonial struggle. Artists' participation in this fight can be understood as adhering to the Fanonian idea that "the conscious, organized struggle undertaken by a colonized people in order to restore national sovereignty constitutes the greatest cultural manifestation that exists" (Fanon 2004, 178). Moreover, in Fanon's conception, forging not just a nation but also a national consciousness is to partake in the creation of culture at the highest level: the successful outcome of anti-colonial conflict dismantles the oppressor and creates a new humanity. Visuals in service of Biafra had the potential to "make a new world through art" (Staal 2019, 8). The stakes could not have been higher.

This article examines the images artists produced to foster this new Fanonian culture by ensuring national sovereignty and ushering in a national consciousness. Working in the Ministry of Information and the Propaganda Directorate, they were integral parts of Biafra's propaganda machine. As a fledging and contested nation, Biafra had to manufacture its national myths, memories, and culture overnight. It did so with impressive alacrity because of the way it utilized its war for independence to instill these important components of national consciousness. Propagandistic messaging pertaining to the war contributed greatly to encouraging nationalism, so propaganda was an essential tool in the complementary projects of the war effort and nation-building. Chinua Achebe, who devoted himself to the Biafran cause and co-wrote the Ahiara Declaration, put it thus: "How would we win this war and begin the creation of a new nation with the qualities we seek?" (Achebe 2012, 143). Biafra's propaganda strategy reflects John Hutchinson's assertion that armed conflict opens up opportunities for the state to fashion a unique national identity, consolidate this identity through a process of self-differentiation with the enemy, and generate social rituals that provide a sense of commonality (2017, 50).

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Applying Hutchinson's theory of war and nationalism to Biafra's visual propaganda, this article tracks how the materials artists produced helped actualize a nation, construct a national identity, characterize an enemy, and build a citizenry. Weaving in the Ahiara Declaration, which was in many ways the culminating treatise of Biafran national consciousness, it tests Hutchinson's assertion and demonstrates how national consciousness can be constructed and nationalism can be disseminated through visual propaganda. I argue that artists, through the visual materials they produced—which included currency notes, stamps, posters, and cartoons—cohered a Biafran national identity.

Much has been written, during and after the conflict, about Biafra's propagandistic skill and its dual ability to boost support for the war and Biafran nationalism. In fact, propaganda was so important that observers described the conflict as two wars: armed conflict and the "war of words" (see de St. Jorre 1972). As this phrase suggests, academic interest has coalesced around Biafra's utilization of radio and print propaganda (see Stremlau 1977; Anthony 2010; Doron 2014; Omaka 2018).

Radio was Biafra's weapon of choice in the propaganda war. Because Biafra remained isolated throughout its short existence, propagandistic radio bulletins on Radio Biafra and Voice of Biafra became the primary means Biafrans received their (often falsified) news. Features that were carefully managed and written by intellectuals (Chukwuma Azuonye, interview, Boston, March 16, 2017) promoted official talking points. Moreover, because not everyone had a radio and batteries were scarce, Arua Omaka has argued that people listened to the radio in groups and formed a "listening community" (2018, 562). Biafran radio was remarkably effective at promoting a national consciousness while cultivating shared rituals.

The press also played an integral role in circulating the Biafran government's agenda. Print media's role as "ideological mouthpieces" (Adebanwi 2016, 130–31) intensified in the lead-up to Biafra's secession and during the conflict. The government ran the newspaper *Biafra Sun*, and the periodicals *Biafra Time* and *Biafra Newsletter*. Privately operated newspapers in Biafra's cities echoed official propaganda in their reporting and editorials. Many continued publication well into 1969, even after their cities fell, ensuring a national reading public of literate Biafrans received the necessary messaging throughout the war.

While an examination of print and radio allows for an understanding of an "imagined community" à la Benedict Anderson, Till Förster cautions that this focus on the textual and verbal omits "the power of images and pictures in the discursive formation of nationalism" (2012, 42). Indeed, the conflict was recognized as a war of images as well (Meisler 1969). An important but overlooked third prong in Biafra's propaganda output, visual materials were part of Biafra's nation-building strategy from the beginning. The 1966 massacres featured prominently in Biafra's creation of a national consciousness, and images of the atrocities committed were crucial to generating a shared identity among proto-Biafrans. For example, the booklet *Nigerian Pogrom Crisis 1966* presented the story of the massacres through graphic photographs showing the brutalization experienced by Eastern Nigerians, positioning soon-to-be Biafra as a peaceful promised land. (Heerten 2021, 1454–57). During the war, the reach of visual materials enhanced and filled in that of radio and the press. Political cartoons appeared in newspapers

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and periodicals complementing articles and editorials' messaging. The audience was primed to understand the interplay between image and text due to Eastern Nigeria's vibrant chapbook culture (Inyang 2018). However, not everyone could read print propaganda and you had to pay for it—posters advertised *Biafran Newsletter* at the cost of one shilling. And, the radio only had programs at certain times a day and could be jammed by Nigeria (Omaka 2018). In contrast, viewing posters was free at any time and they were plastered on buildings, walls, and trees (Paul Igboanugo, interview, Enugu, September 1, 2017). Auberon Waugh, a pro-Biafran journalist, reported that posters adorned the walls of Biafra's cities (Movement for Colonial Freedom: n.p.). Biafra's Appraisals Committee, which measured propaganda's effectiveness through public opinion polls, found that 40 percent of Biafrans received their information from printed materials, which included posters, but admitted that posters "do not reach the nooks and corners for all to see" (Appraisals Committee 1968, 9). For those they did reach, however, they seemed to have an impact. Etiido Inyang has found that posters often became "instant collectibles" that people would take to hang in their homes and offices (2018, 32). Images could also migrate into different media for more visibility. Reproductions of posters were included in the *Biafra Time* magazine and successful cartoons were turned into handbills for further circulation (Inyang 2021b, 361–63). Visual materials were accessible to a wide urban audience.

However, images produced in Biafra have been relegated to the margins of the study of Biafran propaganda, at times appearing to support claims about radio, print, overall nation-building strategies, or international perception (Doron 2011 and 2014; Daly 2020a; Heerten 2021). There are a few studies on Biafran currency that discuss its circulation and symbolism (Symes 1997; Owen 2009; Andreev 2022), and recently Inyang has turned to the iconography of Biafran stamps (2021a). Indeed, Inyang's scholarship, as the first to systematically examine the visual propaganda of the Nigerian Civil War, demonstrates the centrality of images to Biafra's propaganda campaign (see especially 2018 and 2021b). These bodies of literature remain separated and do not discuss posters and cartoons in relation to stamps and currency, but here, I consider them together as a holistic visual program. I further add to existing scholarship by explicitly positioning these materials within a framework of war's intersection with nation-building. Putting visual analysis of this imagery—sourced primarily from a largely unpublished archival collection—in dialogue with print and radio propaganda, this article gives a comprehensive understanding of Biafra's attempt to foster a national identity, the war effort, and patriotism among its people.

Artists in the Graphics Department and Audio Visual Unit

To establish a foundation for this line of inquiry, an examination of the types of materials artists produced and their modes of production is necessary. Artists worked across Biafra's civil service departments, but predominantly found employment in the Ministry of Information's Graphics Department and the Propaganda Directorate's Audio Visual Unit. Both of these offices moved constantly as Biafra's capital cities relocated after they fell to Nigerian forces.

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The Graphics Department had twenty-three artist staff members, including Chuks Anyanwu, a prominent graphic artist and cartoonist, and B. O. Njelita, then an undergraduate. The department's overall purview was publicity and propaganda, and they made posters, pamphlets, charts, maps, cards, and book covers (Okereke 1979, 30). Artists had forty-eight hours to complete each job order, which came from the department's management. Once the preferable design was agreed upon, a single artist expanded the thumbnail into a layout and then sent it back to the art director for a final round of feedback before the finalized image was produced using one of the department's two printing presses: an offset press and a silk-screen press (Okereke 1979, 30).

Artists in the Graphics Department felt galvanized by their opportunity to contribute to the Biafran war effort. The 1966 massacres followed by the war had deeply affected their lives. Njelita, for example, spent the first year of his higher education at Ahmadu Bello University in Northern Nigeria but had to transfer to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in the East because of the riots. His displacement from the North followed by the interruption of his studies at his new university because of the war is indicative of how violence disrupted the traditional career and educational avenues available to artists. Working in propaganda units gave them the dual opportunities of continuing to create art and contributing to their new nation. They were so dedicated that, according to Graphics Department superintendent Fred Okechukwu, they often worked overtime without expectations of pay (Okereke 1979, 33). Moreover, artists enjoyed a feeling of community and fellowship as they worked toward a shared vision of the future.

The Audio Visual Unit in the Directorate of Propaganda created posters, pamphlets, greeting cards, brochures, cartoons, calendars, and the illustrated monthly magazine *Biafra Time* (Okereke 1979, 36). Its staff included the now well-known artists Obiora Udechukwu, Bons Nwabiani, and Paul Igboanugo. Like Njelita, Udechukwu and Nwabiani transferred to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka from Ahmadu Bello University after their first year in order to escape the violence in the North. Similar to the Graphics Department, the Audio Visual Unit's work was fast-paced to reflect the newest propaganda strategies and messaging. The director met regularly with the heads of the Propaganda Directorate and the Ministry of Information to stay up to date. In order to finish the desired materials in time, artists often worked long hours, sometimes as late as 3:00 a.m. (Udechukwu, interview, Canton, March 4, 2017). To produce a poster, they made mock-ups and designs, determined the color and lay-out, and then transferred it to the printer, who created the stencils and printed the finished product (Igboanugo, interview, 2017).

The Audio Visual Unit experienced a paucity of materials (Okereke 1979, 37), a result of Nigeria's economic blockade. Moreover, as it moved from the capital cities of Enugu to Aba to Umuahia, equipment had to be abandoned. Artists creatively used what they had at their disposal: they dipped sticks in ink to apply to the backs of cartons that they used for paper, and they mixed emulsion paint with ink for pigment to screen print the posters (Okereke 1979, 38). By the time the unit relocated from Umuahia to Umuaka-Orlu towards the end of the war in 1969, they used a secondary school as their office (Igboanugo, interview, 2017).

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In Obodo-Ukwu, the site of their last headquarters, they had access to only one Stetna lithographic press in a field and printed posters in the open air (Udechukwu, interview, 2017). These adverse working conditions did not stifle artists' creativity or commitment, and in fact, it seemed to have heightened their camaraderie. They often socialized during breaks and mingled regardless of age and status, discussing ideas, sharing production techniques, and inspiring each other (Okereke 1979, 38).

Orders for materials and their subjects came from upper-level management, but artists had creative leeway in how they interpreted these directives. As Udechukwu's published wartime sketches demonstrate (see Okeke-Agulu 2016), they experimented with how to most effectively convey the themes they were tasked with promoting. For inspiration, they drew from the dynamic history of anticolonial political cartooning in Nigeria, with Ayo Ajayi and Akinola Lasekan as important precedents (Okereke 1979; Inyang 2018), as well as posters from World War I and II, the Spanish Civil War, and the Chinese Revolution (Inyang 2018 and 2021b; Inyang and Nnamdi 2019; Davies 1995). These conflicts' underlying propagandistic messages, and the media used to disseminate them, overlapped with Biafra's and provided examples with proven effectiveness to draw from.

Biafran propaganda materials remain largely unattributed. The collaborative structures and fast-paced environments of the Graphics Department and the Audio Visual Unit meant that artists almost never signed their work. Many maintained individual practices, drawing and painting to the best of their abilities with limited supplies and constant movement, but this was also seen as a tool to help the Biafran cause. Artists sent their wartime art—depicting scenes from the 1966 massacres, emaciated refugees, and air raid victims (many of the same themes found in propaganda)—to West Germany to be part of an exhibition co-organized by the seminal modern artist Uche Okeke and pro-Biafran journalist Ruth Bowert to raise funds for Biafra. Artists also joined creative groups that aimed to foster a distinctly Biafran cultural sphere through poetry, the visual arts, and theater. The categories of "art" and "propaganda" were blurred; both were seen as necessary and overlapping facets of Biafran nation-building. As Okeke wrote in an essay that accompanied the German exhibition, national survival was a prerequisite to creative output (Okeke and Bowert 1969, n.p.). With an eye towards this future, the artists' goal in propaganda units was to construct the Biafran nation by promoting nationalism and cultivating a national consciousness in viewers.

Currency and Maps: Creating a Multi-Ethnic Nation

As an emerging nation, Biafra had to quickly manufacture and promote its statehood and prove that it had a viable existence. In line with Hutchinson's assertion about war and nationalism, it used the context of armed conflict to do so. An example of this was through its currency, designed by the artist Simon Okeke and released by Ojukwu in January 1968.[1] Although the creation of new banknotes was actually a rushed response to Nigeria's own roll out of new naira

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to economically undermine Biafra, Biafran press and radio trumpeted Biafra's currency as representing its "final break" with Nigeria (*Biafra National Newstalks* 1968, 107). With the goal of having this currency circulate in large numbers, exchanging hands as evidence of an independent economy and the authority of the Biafran government (Owen 2009, 580), the banknotes' everyday use helped to solidify nationalist symbols and national heritage.[2] Okeke pulled from different histories and traditions to create a visual vocabulary that articulated Biafran nationhood. His currency designs are examples of an artistic project fully integrated with Biafra's nation-building program.

First issued were the one pound and five-shilling notes. In 1969, a second set followed with a redesign and the addition of several more denominations (ten shillings, five pounds, and ten pounds), as well as three pence, six pence, one shilling, two and a half shillings, and one crown coins. All of the notes and almost all of the coins featured the rising sun and the palm tree. The sun appeared on Biafra's flag and the national anthem was called "Land of the Rising Sun." Interpolating in these various forms, the rising sun was a metonym for the Biafran state. The palm tree represented Biafra's palm oil production, its second most important export after petroleum oil, which was also featured on Biafran currency with an oil refinery on the ten-shilling note.

On the back of the first issue of the one-pound note (Figure 1), Okeke's imagery brings together different cultural and political insignia. Most prominently, he includes the Biafran coat of arms, which repurposed that of the former Eastern Region. It is flanked by two leopards in the rampant pose, in pointed distinction to the two horses that flank Nigeria's. The leopard has been an important symbol of leadership in Eastern Nigeria since the civilization at Igbo-Ukwu in the tenth century (Cole and Aniakor 1984, 23). Furthermore, the eagle in the coat of arms clutches an elephant tusk, a component of title holders' regalia. Thus, an emblem of the modern nation state rooted in European heraldic traditions is shot through with symbolism that resonates with the way the Igbo people historically represent political power. To reiterate the importance of indigenous culture to conceptions of the nation, the banknote includes an ornate version of the

Figure 1. Back of Biafra's one pound note (first issue), designed by Simon Okeke, 1968. Image courtesy of Henry Ibekwe.

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Figure 2. Back of Biafra's five shilling note (first issue), designed by Simon Okeke, 1968.

ceremonial staff a title holder uses to invoke his ancestors. The five-shilling note (Figure 2) similarly forged a link between Biafra's present and perceived past by including a manila that rings its "5/-" label and a patterned background featuring cowrie shells, both precolonial forms of currency. These symbols place the region's historic economy in a continuum with that of the present nation state.

The evocation of cultural heritage to inform a modern identity was one that aligned with Okeke's artistic sensibilities. As a student at the Nigerian College of Art, Science, and Technology (now Ahmadu Bello University), he was a member of the Zaria Art Society from 1959 to 1960. The Society, which included Uche Okeke, Demas Nwoko, Yusuf Grillo, and Bruce Onobrakpeya, developed an artistic framework members called "Natural Synthesis," which sought to merge Nigerian cultural forms and styles with European ones. At the cusp of Nigerian independence, these young artists envisioned "Natural Synthesis" as creating the foundation for an artistic identity appropriate for their new nation (see Okeke-Agulu 2015). Now, with the promise of Nigeria broken for Biafran artists, Okeke channeled the tenets of "Natural Synthesis" into creating a Biafran national identity.

Okeke's five-shilling note also references the Biafran people: the back features four young women who represent four ethnic groups in Biafra: Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, and Annang (Okereke 1979, 90). Biafra was often characterized as an Igbo nation in the Nigerian and international press, and the privileging of the Igbo majority, which was approximately two-thirds of the population (Daly 2020b, 41), sometimes surfaced in Biafran material culture as evident by Okeke's use of Igbo cultural symbolism in Biafra's national currency. For the most part, however, Biafran propaganda worked against this conflation since Biafra saw itself as a multi-ethnic state. The government-issued booklet *Introducing Biafra*, which outlined the new nation's identity, emphasized the connectivity between the multiple ethnic groups in the region. It detailed their cultural similarities and the centuries-long ties between them, creating a mythic past of inter-ethnic cooperation and harmony (Government of the Republic of Biafra 1967, 11–17). Ojukwu reiterated this message in the Ahiara Declaration, stating "All Biafrans are brothers and sisters bound together by ties of geography, trade, inter-marriage

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and culture and by their common misfortune in Nigeria and their present experience of armed struggle ... there is no justification for anyone to introduce into the Biafran Fatherland divisions based on ethnic origin ... To do so would be unpatriotic" (1969, 39). Defining Biafra as a multi-ethnic state and not an Igbo nation was a priority for the government, especially since its oil producing areas were in the coastal region where peoples such as the Ibibio, Efik, and Annang were indigenes.

Additional visual materials further promoted Biafra as a multi-ethnic polity. One poster (Figure 3) features a chain labeled with different ethnic groups surrounding the borders of a Biafran map. The ethnicities connect together to define the contours of the nation, which is colored green. While this may have been done to refer to Biafra's wealth, resources, and promising future—as the green on Biafra's flag symbolized (Achebe 2012, 151)—it also immediately calls forth Nigeria's green and white flag. Perhaps this was intended to transfer Nigeria's claim of being a multi-ethnic state—often emphasized in its propaganda to contrast itself with a hegemonically Igbo Biafra—onto Biafra itself. Nonetheless, while the poster declares that the ethnicities are "all Biafrans" and "all links in one chain," Biafra's reality was much more complex. Despite the vision presented in this poster, Okeke's currency, *Introducing Biafra*, and the Ahiara Declaration, Biafra never received widespread minority support. In an attempt to sequester rumblings of disunity or tension, these materials and Ojukwu's speech put forth an image of multi-ethnic consensus and buy-in.

The poster also reflects the importance maps had for the promotion of Biafran nationhood, since they were a way to visualize disputed national borders. While the chain remains unbroken in the image, Biafra's southeastern region—where the majority of non-Igbo people lived—quickly became captured and reabsorbed into Nigeria. The remainder of Biafra that existed during much of the war was the Igbo heartland, a landlocked region in the middle of the original Biafran territory. These reduced borders never appeared in propaganda images. While people felt the loss of territory in their daily lives, as they moved to escape the incoming Nigerian army, the maps that they encountered in posters, calendars, and other materials presented the Biafra with its original borders that would exist after the successful war effort. Much like the Ahiara Declaration, these maps represented the ideal rather than the reality.

Victims and Refugees: Creating an Identity

Hutchinson claims that war gives a state the opportunity to construct a national identity, and the primary way that Biafra sought to establish a common identity amongst its citizens was by evoking shared suffering. Propaganda in all media called forth the memory of the 1966 massacres to establish an origin point for the country and position Biafrans as victims of a Nigerian genocidal policy against them. The images of massacre victims were the fulcrum around which Biafra explained its existence, and the visage of the emaciated refugee became representative of the entire Biafran populace.

On the whole, Biafrans saw themselves as the victims of violence and injustice so extreme that it caused them to break away from Nigeria. Met with no

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Figure 3. "All Biafrans," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

protection or apology from the Nigerian government for the 1966 massacres, they saw no other alternative than secession in order to protect themselves. As Obiora Udechukwu has said, "The people who supported Biafra were ... saying it was wrong to slaughter innocent people (interview, Canton, December 16, 2013). The massacres not only caused the deaths of thousands of people, but they also

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Figure 4. First Independence Anniversary Stamp featuring the headless corpse, 1968. Image courtesy of Henry Ibekwe.

caused extreme trauma for the hundreds of thousands of survivors who fled and the relatives and friends to whom they returned. However, the violence and displacement, according to John de St. Jorre, were not enough to provoke wholesale secession: "It was only when their horrific detail had been hammered home in a pervasive and gifted propaganda campaign ... reinforcing fears of mass killing and forging a solidarity unprecedented in history, that the East was ready to pull out and to fight for its newly won independence" (1972, 104). Materials like *Nigerian Pogrom Crisis 1966* did much to stoke secessionist sentiment. Within the book's pages, a photograph of a decapitated corpse appeared as a testament to the massacres' brutality. This shocking image circulated around the East in the months leading up to the war and achieved an iconic status within the budding Biafran consciousness.

During the war itself, images—including the headless corpse—in various media kept the memory of the massacres fresh. For example, the headless corpse was the subject of a popular play performed by the Armed Forces Entertainment Group. When Biafra celebrated its one-year anniversary, the headless corpse was again revived to stir the Biafran imaginary. *The Leopard* (the magazine for Biafra's armed forces) featured it on its front page with the headline proclaiming, "Digging Up the Past? Yes!" (1968, 1), and the article below told the soldiers that the body "was probably your own relation." Indeed, the headless corpse became a synecdoche for all massacre victims in an anniversary stamp designed by Simon Okeke (Figure 4).[3] The stamp, produced to circulate in Biafra and internationally, foreshortens the corpse's body and legs so that the arm and hand jut out into the viewer's space. A mound invoking a tomb rises above, drenched at the top in red that turns into speckles to mirror the rivulets of blood on the body. This red is further carried into Biafra's flag, which symbolizes the blood of the massacre victims (Achebe 2012, 151). Through this symbolism, the death and

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victimization that catalyzed Biafra's declaration of independence is directly linked to the continued existence of the nation.

Out of the five stamps in the first anniversary collection to which this one belonged, three brought viewers back to the 1966 massacres (Inyang 2021a, 1219). This emphasis reflects the way that Biafra used stamps, which Inyang has described as "quintessential repositories of national histories" (2021a, 1215), to solidify national narratives and consciousness. Launched the same day as Biafra's currency, the stamps were meant to testify to Biafra's status as a nation with a working infrastructure. On a symbolic level, they reinforced the banknotes' nation-building iconography by putting forth an identity rooted in a shared tragedy suffered by proto-Biafrans.

The trauma at the heart of Biafra's existence also appeared in propaganda posters. In "Thank You ... Fight On" (Figure 5), soldiers run across a field, the rising sun breaking over the horizon, spurred by a throng of men and women identified as representing "the voice of 30,000 Biafrans massacred in the pogrom." Linking the massacre victims to the rising sun and to the soldiers through the use of yellow, the poster presents the massacres, Biafra, and the war as a continuation of events. The conflict is positioned as a righteous fight to avenge those who have been killed and to protect those who are still alive. Moreover, the use of the word "pogrom" makes an overt reference to the persecution of the Jewish people and the creation of Israel, a parallel that was made by Biafrans and their supporters, most prominently by Tanzania's president Julius Nyerere in a public recognition of Biafra in London's *Observer* in April 1968 (reproduced in the Biafran press and heralded on its airwaves). Biafra, as conceptualized and promoted by this poster, is the promised land where its people can live free of oppression.

The massacres and Nigeria's brutal method of waging war, which included starving Biafrans through a blockade and targeting markets and hospitals in air raids, became framed almost immediately as genocide. The Ministry of Information published multiple booklets detailing Nigeria's genocidal policy against Biafrans and constantly aired broadcasts on the subject (see Appraisals Committee 1969). Indeed, Roy Doron (2014) has shown that a primary objective for propagandists, as they stated in their internal documents, was to convince Biafrans that the war was one of survival. The conflict was steadfastly positioned and whole-heartedly believed to be a struggle not only for the existence of the nation, but also for the people within it.

The poster "Gowon Hates You!" (Figure 6) makes the Nigerian threat visceral. In this black and white image, a severely injured man covered in bandages emerges from a blast, one arm in a sling and the other holding a crutch. His bandaged head and face frame a grimace. He explicitly recalls the maimed and bandaged people featured in *Nigerian Pogrom Crisis 1966.* The poster's text lays the blame of the man's—and by extension Biafra's—suffering squarely on General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's Head of State, who was ruthlessly villainized in Biafra's press and propaganda. It addresses its viewers so that they can recognize Nigeria's so-called war for unity as genocide and understand that they were targeted for persecution.

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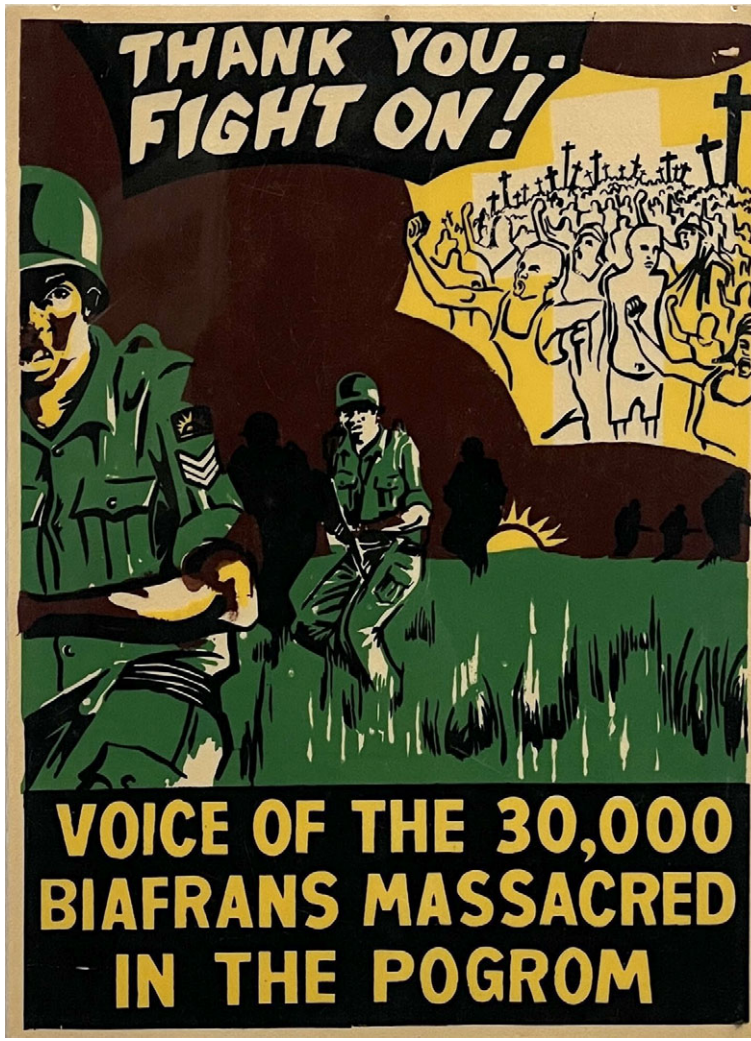

Figure 5. "Thank You | Fight On!," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern–Bowert Archives, Iwalewa–Haus, University of Bayreuth.

This strategy of directly appealing to the viewer was often utilized in artist-produced propaganda. In another poster, in eye-catching yellow and blue and featuring a lone emaciated child, text boldly proclaims, "Orphaned? Nigerians did it!" (Figure 7). Designed to elicit an emotional response, the question evokes massacre and air raid victims in viewers' minds. Working in tandem with this, the image of the young boy embodies the suffering of the starving populace. His elongated arms and angular shoulders emphasize his boniness. As the curvilinear lines around his abdomen indicate, he has a swollen belly, a sign of kwashiorkor. This disease caused by malnutrition plagued Biafran children, and the boy's listless gaze, sunken eyes, and gaunt cheekbones underscore his condition. Such

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Figure 6. "Gowon Hates You!," Poster, n.d. John De St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972).

a child was a common sight for Biafrans, and looking at him within the context of the poster's question led viewers to understand how he is doubly victimized—he lost his parents to pre-war violence and now might die himself due to Nigeria's wartime policies. Going through their own wartime travails, Biafrans would identify with the boy, the deceased parents, or both, furthering national consciousness by creating the awareness that they were all victims of Nigerian cruelty.

No one was untouched by suffering, and Biafra became a nation of refugees as people fled wartime violence and tried to remain in Biafra. Artists, often displaced themselves, proliferated images of refugees through posters. As Ernest Renan asserts in his musings on nationalism, "Suffering in common unifies more than joy does" (1990, 19) and refugees became the faces of this common suffering. They were visual shorthand representations of wartime hardship, since almost all Biafrans could relate to their plight. The iconicity of the Biafran refugee is most explicit in Obiora Udechukwu's poster "Help ... The Biafran Mother and Child," in which a woman stands in front of the Biafran yellow sun with her baby swaddled on her back (Figure 8).[4] The mother's shoulders jut up angularly and Udechukwu makes her collar bones clearly visible despite the rest of her body being in shadow, attributes that signify her extreme hunger. Yet, he imbues her with a stoic quality as she marches on. He further combines this with words calling for support: she and her child reflect Biafra's current reality—but it does not have to be permanent. Public opinion polls show that Biafrans understood the need to sacrifice for the war effort (Appraisals Committee 1968, 13). The poster underscores that viewers' suffering was in the service of a promising future, symbolized by the radiating sun.

The North, Nigerianism, and Neocolonialism: Creating an Enemy

From a national identity of communal suffering at the hands of a genocidal enemy, it was easy for Biafran propaganda to cultivate an "us vs. them" mentality

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Figure 7. "Orphaned? Nigerians Did It!," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

towards Nigeria. Independence was positioned as not only necessary for survival but also as a way for Biafrans to overcome Nigeria's flaws. These included the "backwardness" of an entire region, weak government, and disunity. Biafra, painting Nigerian society and politics as beyond redemption, claimed it was determined not to repeat Nigeria's mistakes and presented itself as a modern foil to Nigeria's regressionism. This strategy aligns with Hutchinson's assertion that national identity is solidified during wartime through its differentiation with the enemy. Moreover, Biafra characterized Nigeria as a pawn in Britain's neocolonial

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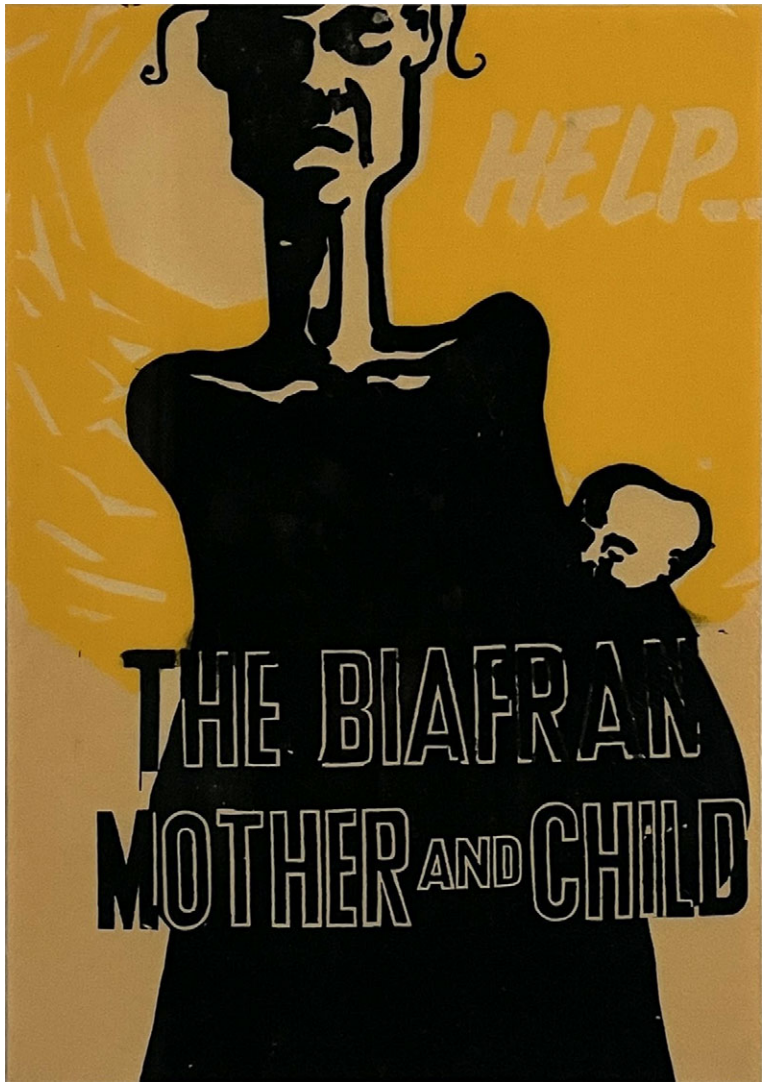

Figure 8. "Help | The Biafran Mother and Child," Attributed to Obiora Udechukwu, Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

ambitions, and thus declared itself as an anticolonial beacon on the African continent.

The main perpetrators of the 1966 massacres were people who belonged to the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. That they are largely Muslim, while Eastern ethnicities are predominantly Christian, gave the Biafran government license to give the conflict a religious dimension (see Omenka 2010). In the "Thank You ... Fight On" poster, a cross forms the background of the group of massacre victims. This detail would not have been lost on a Biafran viewership: the dead are Christians, and it implies that Nigeria's alleged genocide against Biafrans is

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religiously motivated. A similar strategy appears in the anniversary stamp, in which a cross rises from the left side of the mound behind the decapitated corpse, identifying Biafra as a Christian nation. In the Ahiara Declaration, Ojukwu positioned Biafra as "one of the few African states untainted by Islam," which he described as a menacing force that had steadily expanded across Africa and evolved to function "not just as religious but as a cover for [Arabs' and Muslims'] insatiable territorial ambitions" (Ojukwu 1969, 12–13). This Islamophobia had been festering since the build-up to the war. Even though Nigeria was led by a fellow Christian (Gowon), Ojukwu and Biafran propagandists sometimes characterized the conflict as having jihadist elements.

Even before the war, visual materials consolidated an emerging national consciousness that was committed to simultaneously combatting a Northern region bent on the East's destruction and cultivating a political vision distinct from the ills of Nigeria. In April 1967, the *Nigerian Outlook* (soon renamed the *Biafran Sun*) ran an image of a multi-ethnic coalition of Easterners, proudly displaying their identities on placards and wearing Western-style clothes, driving away a terrified man wearing an *alasho* (a Hausa turban) and the robes of an emir (Figure 9). Here, a proto-Biafra is already cementing itself as a progressive Christian nation responding to Islamic and Northern aggression. At the same time, Biafra is positioned as dispelling negative Nigerian attributes. The robed Northern elite represents the political hegemony that Biafrans saw as having completely corrupted the promise of independent Nigeria.

During the conflict, more images reinforced this type of messaging. Because of their roles in the massacres, the entire culture of the Hausa-Fulani was vilified over Biafran airwaves and in newspapers. A radio broadcast for the Biafran radio program "To Talk of Many Things" describes the Fulani as a power-hungry but weak people who used "subversive tactics" to build an empire. They had been able to manipulate all the "lazy and unpatriotic people such as the Yoruba and Hausas" to gain control of Nigeria, but stood no chance against Biafra, since "Biafrans have all it takes—moral, spiritual and material—to counter the machinations of the Fulani" ("Subversion in the Expansion of Fulani Power" n.d.). These statements and their corresponding visual materials promoted stereotypes. A pernicious cartoon signed by Chuks Anyanwu for the internationally circulated *Biafran Newsletter*, for example, draws upon the stereotype of Northerners as largely uneducated by having a man wearing a Hausa cap and robes rue Biafra's secession in poor English. Following strategies utilized by propaganda in previous twentieth-century conflicts, particularly World War I and World War II, these stereotypes dehumanized the enemy and encouraged viewers to define themselves in opposition to them.

In conjunction with these anti-Northern messages, the media called for Biafrans to eschew negative social and political traits, which it called "Nigerianism." In the Ahiara Declaration, Ojukwu had an entire section dedicated to "Shaking off Nigerianism," which included political corruption, putting oneself before one's country, inept leadership, and institutional weaknesses. Propaganda characterized the Nigerian government as having no real authority, and furthermore, oppressing and attacking its own citizens. Radio broadcasts portrayed Gowon as a leader in name only who was waging a genocidal war without the people's consent. Radio

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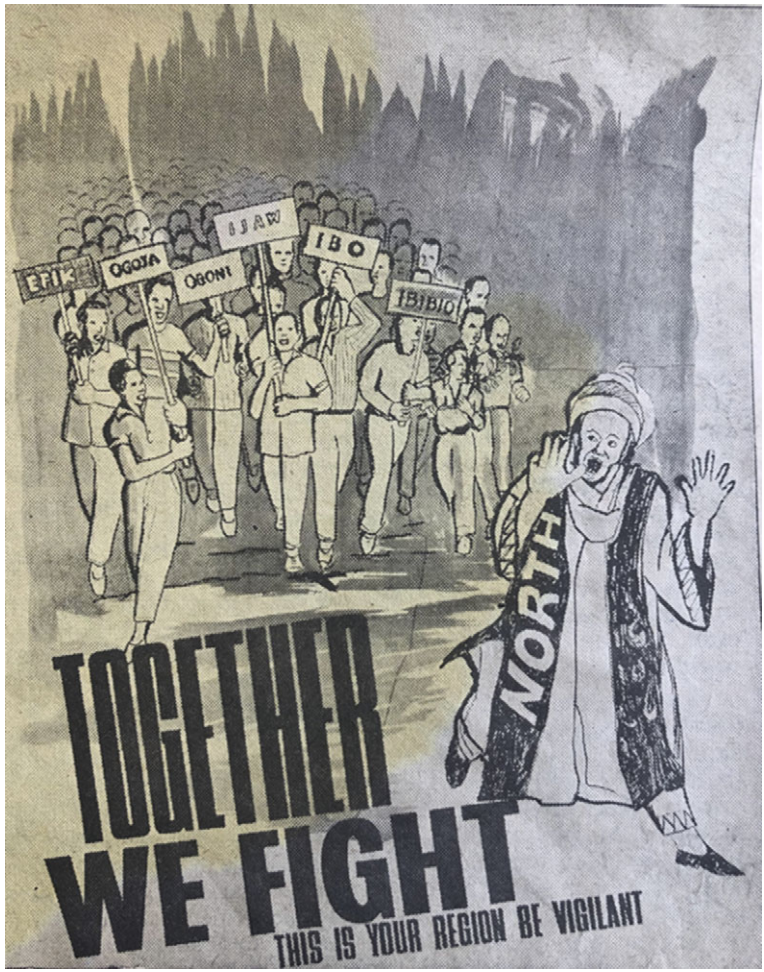

Figure 9. "Together We Fight," Nigerian Outlook, April 6, 1967.

bulletins and newspaper articles reported on riots in Northern and Western Nigeria that resulted in hundreds of deaths (*Biafran National Newstalks*, n.d.; *The Mirror* 1969). Nigerianism had led to the crumbling of the nation, a process that continued even as Nigeria fought for unity.

In contrast to Nigeria's disfunction, internal violence, and fractured nationalism, Biafran media emphasized that the Biafran war of independence was spurred by the will of its people, and Biafrans were firmly behind their leader. But as the conflict dragged on and Nigeria regained territory, it tried to coax Biafrans back by dropping leaflets that promised safety and stability in a reunited Nigeria. Biafran propagandists had to combat these overtures and convince their war-weary people that these assurances were nothing more than a perpetuation of Nigeria's deceit. In one poster (Figure 10), a stream of men, women, and

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Figure 10. "To Hell with Enemy Fake Promises!" Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

children decry Nigeria's "fake promises" and continue to stand united against the enemy. The Biafran people, this poster conveyed, need to remain resolute against Nigerianism in all of its forms. Moreover, the figures are not emaciated refugees; they are a robust and multi-ethnic group (a man in the foreground wears a hat common in Biafra's coastal minority region). They visualize the text's claim that "Biafra still provides for all" as a functioning multi-ethnic state that cares for its citizens, which ran counter to Biafra's reality of reduced borders and reliance on humanitarian organizations to feed its people. But through the yellow accents, the poster makes a connection to the rising sun, the symbol of becoming for the Biafran nation.

Viewers could further reconcile their reality with the aspirations visualized by the poster because of consistent propagandistic messaging. As Douglas Anthony has explained, "The narratives combined to present the war as simultaneously a desperate battle for Biafra's survival and an occasion for the emergence of a visionary society threatened precisely because it dared to move boldly forward" (2010, 45). The cultivation of stereotypes and anti-Nigerianism furthered Biafra's characterization of itself as Christian, progressive, and just, in opposition to Islamic, reactionary, and corrupt Nigeria. And Biafra's acute suffering was because of its revolutionary promise. The Ahiara Declaration emphasized this line of thinking. Ojukwu portrayed Biafra as such a radical challenge to the world order that both sides of the Cold War divide, with their imperialist intentions, wanted to see Biafra fail. Moreover, he proclaimed, the world was willing to look the other way as Biafra asserted its right to self-determination since "white peoples ... are still far from accepting that what can

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be good for them can also be good for blacks" (1969, 11). In this fight against global racist structures, Biafra presented itself as finally fulfilling the anti-colonial ideal of a truly independent African state.

Biafra thus labeled its international enemies as neocolonial forces dedicated to ensuring the continuation the West's hegemony. In the poster "What the Enemy Wants ... Permanent Subjugation of Biafra" (Figure 11), a Euro-American man sits on a chair smoking a cigarette as two men coded as Yoruba and Hausa through their garments, headwear, and scarification look up at him obediently. In front of them lies a prone body. The nonchalant Euro-American man is positioned as the neocolonial overlord above the kneeling Nigerians who grovel for his approval. Nigeria is portrayed as a puppet of imperialism that follows the bidding of Western powers, even if it means killing fellow Africans. Colored with red, they all have blood on their hands.

Cartoons by the dozens reinforced similar ideas. In one by Chinwe Ezeani (Figure 12), one of two women artists who worked in the Audio Visual Unit, a demonic figure symbolizing Nigeria stuffs his pants with warheads.[5] Neocolonial fat cats representing the USSR and the UK approach "Nigeria" carrying huge satchels of military aid. "Nigeria," overconfident in its perceived military strength and international allies, holds up a gun in a victorious gesture. However, he gets hit smack in the forehead with an *ogbunigwe*, a homemade Biafran explosive device invented by the scientists and engineers in Biafra's innovative Research and Production Department. It is thrown by a small child holding the Biafran flag, the personification of the scrappy little country that dares to stand up to the superpower bullies and their pawn. In all, the cartoon sends the message that despite the military might and neocolonial intentions of Nigeria and its allies, Biafra has the gumption and resolve to succeed. When contrasted with their enemies in this way, Biafrans were able to see themselves with pride as the determined underdog in a righteous David versus Goliath struggle.

Revolutionaries and Patriots: Creating a Citizenry

Standing as a beacon against imperialist enemies, this revolutionary nation needed revolutionary citizens. As Ojukwu proclaimed in the Ahiara Declaration, "The Biafran Revolution is the People's Revolution. Who are the People? you ask. The farmer, the trader, the clerk, the businessman, the housewife, the student, the civil servant, the soldier, you and I are the people" (1969, 24). Every person from all social strata was conceived of as an important cog in the civic machinery that could make Biafra a reality. Moreover, Ojukwu outlined specific traits that the people of the revolution should possess: they should be patriotic, honorable, caring of others, truthful, responsible, brave, law abiding, conscientious, and progressive (1969, 50–51). Biafran citizens were defined as those who shared the same ideology and commitments (Daly 2020a and 2020b).

Importantly, these citizens did not merely need to exist but also needed to be able to visualize and recognize each other. Thus, propagandists had to disseminate models of these ideal citizens. They did so by promoting images of a Biafran citizenry that contrasted with "Nigerianism." While Nigerians were "weak,"

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Figure 11. "What the Enemy Wants…," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

"subversive," "lazy," and "unpatriotic," Biafrans were united, vigilant, community-oriented, and committed to programs that would lead to postwar self-sufficiency. These characteristics, combined with related wartime social rituals, forged a sense of commonality amongst Biafrans, which Hutchinson identifies as a crux of armed conflict's relationship with nationalism. Biafrans

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Figure 12. Chinwe Ezeani, cartoon, n.d. Image courtesy of Dr. Etiido Effiongwilliam Inyang.

could see themselves as bound together through a shared national consciousness and the shared task of supporting their nation.

After Biafra's independence, the government established the magazine *Biafra Time* to cultivate a national readership, designed and printed by the Propaganda Directorate's Audio Visual Unit. The magazine's first issue gave a full picture of the Biafran "imagined community:" four pages of letters to the editor proclaimed Biafrans' support for their country and its war effort; an article rehearses Biafra's journey to and fight for its independence, while introducing readers to regional administrators; theater arts, music, and sports sections give overviews of the important figures in these fields; articles detail Biafran gains in education initiatives and technological advances in wartime weaponry; another article explains Ojukwu's introduction of Biafran currency; and in a review, an academic discusses a recent book on international territorial law. The Biafra promoted in these pages is one that remembers its history and why it went to war, and whose populace ensures that it is at the cutting edge of technological and educational development and can maintain entertainment, art, and intellectual pursuits during armed conflict. And it is foremost a Biafra of fiercely patriotic citizens.

Nestled as an insert within the issue are reproductions of propaganda posters that present a vision of the dual citizen and soldier vigilance necessary for the continuation of this nation. The last poster in the series depicts a focused Biafran soldier towering over a manic yet diminished Nigerian soldier, so undisciplined that he casts his gun aside as he charges—an example of "Nigerianism"—accompanied by the text "Courage Endurance Win Victory" (Figure 13). While the "courage" and "endurance" are attached to the heroic Biafran soldier,

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Figure 13. "Courage Endurance Win Victory!," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

non-combatant viewers would have likely understood that these traits equally apply to them. Radio broadcasts, articles, and slogans urged Biafran citizens to remain strong in the face of wartime hardship and fear. Moreover, the text in the poster right before in the series reads "Bombs or no bombs / Shelling or no shelling / Biafrans must stay – to fight the foe." The order of these posters is not a coincidence. Together, they present a united front of soldiers and civilians equally dedicated to a win-the-war effort.

This connection between soldiers and citizenry is made explicit in the poster "Vigilance Goes with Victory" (Figure 14). Although the figure is that

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Figure 14. "Vigilance Goes With Victory," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

of a soldier with his gun at the ready, the text calls upon all Biafrans to "look out for the enemy." Biafran civilians are encouraged to identify with the soldier through the use of color. The green of the soldier's fatigues visually connects to the green of the word "victory," while the orange of his skin is the same as "vigilance" and the text box addressed to the general populace. While the soldier fights on the warfront, civilians keep the home front safe from Biafra's enemies, including saboteurs, the "agents" alluded to in the poster's text. A saboteur was anyone who undermined the Biafran war effort, and to be labeled one within Biafra's national consciousness was a grave insult (and quite dangerous). This nationalist tactic was highly effective, since it allowed the Biafran government to deflect blame for its military failures while implicitly enforcing social control.

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Figure 15. Chuks Anyanwu, "The Enemy's Shadow," Biafra Sun, July 13, 1967.

The threat of saboteurs was visualized by propagandists throughout the conflict. Within a month after Biafra's independence, Chuks Anyanwu was already calling for vigilance against this internal enemy through a cartoon of a saboteur as a well-to-do Biafran with a hidden agenda (Figure 15). On his way to work as a seemingly productive member of Biafran society, the man's shadow betrays him as an enemy agent. It emerges in the guise of a soldier to blight out the rest of the cityscape, insinuating that saboteurs can cause just as much damage as the Nigerian military. The cartoon emphasizes that a saboteur could be anybody, which underscored the need to be an ever-watchful citizen in order to identify one. These posters and the cartoon urging strength and vigilance with a promise of victory promote a national consciousness in which all Biafrans could claim important roles in the fight towards an imminent postwar era.

Biafrans were also encouraged to support their fellow citizens. While images of refugees forged a common identity through suffering, press and visuals promoted communal self-help. As multiple posters attest, "refugee week" programs encouraged people to come together to assist the less fortunate. In one such poster (Figure 16), a disembodied hand pouring a pap or milk-like mixture into the bowl of a dejected child invites viewers to imagine themselves as such a giver. Often, posters advertised specific fundraising efforts, likely released with other promotional materials. For example, a poster calling for clothing donations may have appeared concurrently with an announcement in the *Biafran Sun* for "Clothe the Refugee Week," in which the president of a refugee commission for Umuahia "urged all Biafrans to continue to do their best for their suffering brothers and sisters" (1969b, 2). Less than four months later, Ojukwu declared that the ideal Biafran acted as "his brother's keeper" in the Ahiara Declaration (1969, 50). Refugee week initiatives and their accompanying posters presented Biafrans with opportunities to be exemplary citizens while providing social rituals to take part in. It also helped viewers reconcile the largely aspirational visions of Biafra they saw in posters with their daily reality; if they could aid (or be aided by) their fellow Biafrans, everyone could collectively change Biafra

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Figure 16. "Refugee Week Biafra Help Feed the Refugees," Poster, n.d. Ruth Stummern-Bowert Archives, Iwalewa-Haus, University of Bayreuth.

from a nation of refugees into one of healthy citizens as visualized in Figure 10. Promoting charity within Biafra signaled that it wanted to pivot from defining itself through communal suffering to reimagining itself as a state at the vanguard of achieving true African liberation.

In January 1969, the government undertook a significant move towards its postwar future by launching the Biafran Land Army as part of the Emergency Food Production Program to combat the extreme food shortages Biafrans faced. Ojukwu celebrated the Land Army in the Ahiara Declaration, touting it as an example of "putting the revolution into practice" (1969, 49). He further told his people, as reported in the *Biafra Sun* (1969a, n.p.), that it would help combat Gowon's weapon of famine and must be met with an urgency paralleling a response to military aggression. Accordingly, the slogan "Operation Turn the Earth and Bury Gowon," variations of which appeared in artist-produced propaganda posters, accompanied the Land Army's roll-out. The Emergency

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Food Production Program encouraged all Biafrans to farm their own lands, and the Land Army recruited people between the ages of twelve and forty-five to work on land acquisitioned by the federal government with special attention paid to the creation of refugee farms (Okigbo 1969). It was a way for refugees to feed themselves and earn a livelihood while transforming from dependents of the state to productive workers that furthered the state's goals. The Land Army thus became a way to shift the narrative of suffering to one of self-reliance. By taking part in agricultural production, refugees and housed civilians alike could help their country be less dependent on foreign aid groups and move closer to true decolonial independence. As numerous posters demonstrate, the government enacted a strong push to educate its citizens about the Land Army and establish their common roles within it. This achieved mixed results; the Appraisals Committee found that just over half of Biafrans polled understood how Land Army food would be distributed (n.d.: 28–29), but it did penetrate Biafran national consciousnesses, as people could recall the program and its general goal decades later (Harneit-Sievers, Ahazuem, and Emezue 1997, 51–52).

Agriculture was positioned as a personal act of commitment to Biafra. One poster asks, "Are You a True Biafran?" and if so, to "Cultivate More Food for Survival." A visually uninteresting poster that merely portrays mounds of tilled earth, its punch comes from its blunt question and the implication behind it. Coupled with claims in the *Biafra Sun* (1969c, 4) that over 500 volunteers from one town alone joined the Land Army, it probably seemed to the poster's viewer that all "true Biafrans" were indeed signing up for the initiative. As the Land Army's mission made clear, it cut across Biafran professions and social classes—it was a truly pan-Biafran program. In its ideal form, it served as a common act of patriotism shared by all Biafrans, through which they contributed to the betterment of the imagined community.

Moreover, establishing the Land Army was an urgent issue for the Biafran government since growing food was seen as a way to combat the genocidal policy of Nigeria and its neocolonial allies. In one poster, bold text accompanies the lush leaves of melon crops proclaiming, "Britain and Nigeria want us to starve to death" and that "to fight this genocide" one must "grow more food." The enemy is defined and how to defeat this enemy is promoted: farming was a way for individual Biafrans to stand up to an imperialism bent on their destruction. Thus, in the national consciousness it emerged that a civilian who farmed to help feed his government and fellow citizens contributes just as much to the war effort and Biafra's survival as a soldier does.

This involvement was necessary for postwar nation building. Uche Okeke's poster "Farm Save Biafra" (Figure 17) presents a utopian vision of the Land Army and its potential.[6] Okeke was the main theorist behind "Natural Synthesis" (also practiced by Simon Okeke), and his art found inspiration in *uli*, a form of body and wall painting practiced by Igbo women (see Okeke-Agulu 2015, 184–96). In his poster, Okeke utilizes *uli*'s linearity and use of negative space to depict beans, a yam, an onion, corn, and bananas, among other produce. This abundant cornucopia gives viewers a goal to set their sights on: if Biafrans could successfully counter the Nigerian blockade by farming, Biafra could transform into a land of

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Figure 17. Uche Okeke, "Farm Save Biafra," Poster, 1969.

plenty with a thriving society. When the war was won and the Biafran state is consolidated, all Biafrans could say they did their part. This is the Biafra that the Ahiara Declaration envisioned.

Conclusion

It was not to be, however. Just as Biafra was beginning to change its image, the war came to an abrupt end. A little more than six months after giving the Ahiara Declaration, Ojukwu fled Biafra to seek asylum in Côte d'Ivoire. Biafra and its attendant images quickly collapsed thereafter. In fact, since it was dangerous to

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be caught with Biafran money and propaganda, many propaganda artists destroyed the creations they had in their possession after Biafra's surrender (Udechukwu, interview, 2017).

Still, the extant images they made tell us much about how these materials worked in tandem with radio and print propaganda to expediently fashion a Biafran national identity and a national consciousness. Artist-made propagandistic materials demonstrate the way that war and nationhood converge: through these materials, we can delve into how armed conflict opens up the space for the construction of a nation, formation of a national identity, consolidation of an enemy, and establishment of commonalities amongst a citizenry. It is also significant that artists dedicated their skills towards these processes to such an extent. They believed in the potential of the Biafran state, and they approached their work with urgency. The currency, stamps, posters, and cartoons they produced serve as testaments to this brief but prolific moment of image production in Nigerian history.

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Notes

1. It is generally known that Okeke designed Biafra's banknotes (Okereke 1979; Andreev 2022). Okeke traveled frequently to oversee the printing of these high-security materials at the Portuguese mint. On one of these trips in 1969, the plane crashed and killed everyone on board.
2. Biafran currency did not achieve widespread circulation due to small printing quantities and disruptions in shipments (Symes 1997). However, these notes were recognized, used, and valued by Biafrans (Achebe 2012).
3. Okereke (1979) and Inyang (2021a) have attributed Biafra's stamp design to Okeke.
4. This poster is attributed to Udechukwu because it forms the basis of an etching that he created in 1985.
5. This cartoon is attributed to Ezeani because it was in her personal portfolio, to which she gave Etiido Inyang access. I thank Dr. Inyang for sharing this image with me.
6. This poster is attributed to Okeke because it was included in a book published in conjunction with an exhibition of his work (see Ikwuemesi and Ene-Orji 2003).

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