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# MASCULINITIES AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS: THE NIGERIAN MILITARY EXPERIENCE, 1966–1970

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## Abstract
This paper examines the masculinities and ethnic tensions within the Nigerian military between 1966 and 1970. The study explores how different ideas of masculinity shaped the way the military operated and how it handled ethnic conflicts. The study sheds light on how various masculinities influenced the emergence of the first military junta, power struggles, and masculine roles during the first military incursion into Nigerian politics and the Nigerian Civil War. The paper relies on primary and secondary sources and adopts both chronological and thematic analyses. This paper contributes to a larger discussion on the intersectionality of masculinity and ethnicity in a military context by recognizing that both ideas contributed to recurring coups and political instability in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** coup, ethnicity, intersectionality, masculinity, military, Nigerian civil war

## Introduction
Despite the existence of several academic works on the first military incursion into Nigerian politics in 1966 and the attendant Civil War (1967–1970), the gender history of masculinities in the aforementioned tribal–national conflicts has not been adequately examined. The Nigerian military of the 1960s was still a fledgling institution that was male-dominated, and it had a history of being an instrument of coercion for the state since the colonial period. Therefore, the military could not have been insulated from the ethnic rivalries that had roots in the annexation and control of diverse ethnic nationalities by the British colonial power since the early 20th century. The problem reached dangerous and violent levels after independence in 1960.

The militarization of ethnic conflicts in the period 1966–1970 manifested in two coups and a civil war, and these violent events tapped into the diverse forces of masculinity to be examined in the paper. According to Messerschmidt (2016), masculinities are socially constructed norms and values associated with specific gender roles and behaviours. Soldiers, who became major actors in the coups of 1966 and the Civil War that followed in Nigeria, responded to the historical and



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cultural norms of 'being a man.' Masculinities and existing power relations within social structures usually interact in determining how men and boys act (Connell, 2020; Reeser, 2023). This factor has remained a constant in the context of gender relations, determining men's propensity to act as protectors and warriors, and when it comes to ethnic conflicts, most men are expected to fight and die if necessary.

Certain questions are pertinent in this discourse, and they pertain to how gender norms and expectations of masculinity influence the behaviours and actions of Nigerian military personnel during the ethnic conflicts under focus. To what extent did the construction and display of masculine identities within the Nigerian military contribute to the escalation or de-escalation of ethnic conflicts from 1966 to 1970? What role did the Nigerian military's understanding and performance of masculinity play in shaping the leadership and decision-making processes during ethnic conflicts in this period, and how did the Nigerian military's representation of masculinity interact with ethnic identities and conflicts after the Civil War? In line with these questions, the thrust of the paper would be on the roles of military personnel as they manifested in the ethnic conflicts under study. The work relied on both primary and secondary sources. For the former, newspaper reports and archival records were used. As for the latter, analysis of germane published works within the last ten years enriched the work, especially on the interplay of masculinities and ethnicity as they affected the national, ethnic, and militaristic conflicts under consideration. Meanwhile, extant studies on militarized masculinities in Africa have shown how far the gender study has grown on the continent. The next section shows the intellectual patterns and limitations of relevant works for this paper.

## Method

This study adopted a historical and qualitative methodology to explore the interplay between masculinities and ethnic conflicts within the Nigerian military from 1966 to 1970. It examined how different masculinities shaped the actions and decisions of military officers amid the early coups and the Nigerian Civil War. The primary goal was to grasp how male gender norms affected military behaviours and ethnic tensions, contributing to subsequent coups and political unrest in post-independence Nigeria. Data were drawn from both primary and secondary sources for a thorough look at the connections between masculinity and ethnicity in the country's military past. Primary materials included historical records like government documents, military archives, and 1960s newspaper articles, offering details on official actions, decrees, and events tied to the coups and war. These came from places such as the National Archives in Ibadan and Kaduna, along with news reports that shed light on ethnic divisions in the military and masculinity's role in unfolding events. Secondary sources encompassed academic books, journal articles, and modern works on gender, masculinity, and African military history, helping place the events in wider frameworks of gender and ethnic studies while providing theoretical views on militarized masculinities in African settings.

The data collection involved a detailed review of historical documents and existing literature. Archival materials were scrutinized to uncover the socio-political context and gendered aspects of military operations during the coups and Civil War, revealing insights into the army's structure, recruitment practices, and ethnic prejudices that were key to understanding masculinity's influence on

activities. Newspapers from the past, such as *The Daily Times* and *The Observer,* were analyzed to capture media portrayals of soldiers and ethnic groups, highlighting public views on masculinity and its ties to ethnic identity. The literature review traced the development of masculinity in African military contexts, particularly in Nigeria, and focused on the links between ethnicity, masculinity, and power, with a close look at existing works on militarized masculinities and their effects on ethnic clashes and instability.

For data analysis, the study used chronological and thematic methods. The chronological approach outlined the timeline of ethnic conflicts and military masculinities, spotlighting major events like the January 1966 coup, General Ironsi's rise, and the July 1966 counter-coup, tracking how various masculinities emerged and played out among officers and interacted with ethnic identities to guide operations and decisions. The thematic analysis delved into concepts such as hegemonic masculinity, militarized masculinity, and subordinate forms, exploring their expression in military actions during the coups and war, along with ethnicity's role in shaping them, especially the power shifts among groups like the Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, and Yoruba, and how military masculine ideals amplified or eased these dynamics. On ethics, the research focused on historical and public materials without involving human participants, so no issues arose around consent or vulnerability; it handled sensitive topics like violence, ethnicity, and trauma with care, ensuring accurate and fair depictions through proper contextualization. Limitations stemmed from reliance on archives and secondary texts, where access to some primary items might be limited due to sensitivity or classification, potentially narrowing the scope, and from possible biases in historical accounts—though sources were verified and balanced with multiple viewpoints to offer a solid examination of masculinity and ethnicity's intersection in Nigeria's military.

### *Literature on masculinity*

Scholars have attempted to offer insights into the historical relevance of masculinity, its links with ethnicity, and attendant conflicts. This intersectionality underscores the notion that nations or states are gendered institutions (Bonvillain, 2020; Wilson, 2023). This is in the context of their perpetuation of dominant masculine societal norms and power hierarchies, with the attendant impact of gender power relations. Men's advantages exist in the decision-making process, gendered division of labor, and masculine traits in the power and authority of state actors (Halford, 2018).

If politics and government are characterized by male dominance, it is evidence of the dominant idea of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 2016). The concept of masculinity has been shaped by several factors, including colonialism (Prianti, 2019), globalization (Connell, 2016), and the rise of Islam in Africa (Willemse, 2020). In that context, it was argued that masculinities were often contested, an indication that there was no single form of masculinity. Military masculinities in Nigeria were not fixed but shaped by various factors, including age, ethnicity, social class, and individual experiences (Uwen & Eyang, 2023). Traditional masculinity was rooted in a hierarchical and binary understanding of gender, where men are expected to be "real men" and not women in a figurative sense (Kachel et al., 2016).

In another work, manliness was considered a quality of the average soldier, as it symbolized both strength and courage, essential for the gruesome battles

(Foote, 2023). The concept of hegemonic masculinity is important to understand how masculinity is formed and experienced in Africa (Dharani et al., 2020). In Africa, hegemonic masculinity, in part, emphasized force, domination, and violence, which could worsen ethnic conflicts by legitimizing the use of violence to achieve political goals (Myrttinen et al., 2017).

The Nigerian military was a source of hegemonic masculinity because it was a hierarchical organization that was structured on the ideals of force, dominance, and violence. Accordingly, this structure created an environment in which hegemonic masculinity was prioritized and other forms of masculinity were marginalized (Connell, 2016). Hegemonic masculinities are produced and reproduced in the military. The military is a hyper-masculine environment that valorizes strength, aggression, and violence (Dwyer-Neigenfind, 2025).

These qualities can be used to justify the exclusion of women and girls from the military. The intersection of hegemonic masculinities and ethnicity can lead to violence (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021). In an edited volume, contributors affirmed the diversity of masculinity in Africa and highlighted the importance of intersectionality in understanding how masculinity is shaped by factors such as ethnicity, social class, religion, and age. Overall, the reviewed articles provide valuable insights into the interactions of various forms of masculinities on the one hand and the complex intersections of masculinities and ethnic conflicts on the other. Relevant as they are to the present work, there is a dearth of studies on the analysis of the Nigerian military history during the critical period of 1966-1970 in the context of masculinity and its intersection with the ethnic conflicts under focus. The richness of the extant literature on masculinities, however, sets a baseline for the framework adopted for the paper below.

### *Conceptual considerations*

The concept of militarized masculinity informs this study, which considers the disputes surrounding the connections between masculinities and ethnic conflicts within the Nigerian military. The idea encompasses various manifestations of masculinity, interconnected with military organizations and activities (Ignatčikas, 2024). The concept of combat is crucial in shaping definitions of masculinity and rationalizations for male dominance within the social hierarchy.

Militarized masculinity constitutes a core framework for feminist international relations and gender studies. This analysis explores the impact of military organizations, cultures, and practices on the perpetuation of dominant masculinity ideals, emphasizing characteristics such as aggression, stoicism, hierarchy, obedience, dominance, and a propensity for violence (Dacquino et al., 2021). This theory posits that militarization is inherently gendered, embedded within patriarchal frameworks that glorify “masculine” behaviours via military socialization, narratives, and rituals, often sidelining women, gender non-conforming individuals, and other demographics (Ignatčikas, 2024). This type of masculinity is inherently performative and socially constructed, influenced by recruitment, training, and media portrayals that link male identity to roles of warriors or protectors (Wegner, 2021).

Militarized masculinity represents a distinct form of gender performance, frequently functioning as a manifestation of hegemonic masculinity (Chung, 2023). Hegemonic masculinity represents the prevailing, idealized manifestation of

masculinity within a specific civilization during a certain period. While it may not be the predominant manifestation of masculinity, it serves to legitimize patriarchal authority and frameworks by establishing a benchmark that other masculinities must navigate (Jewkes et al., 2015; Myrttinen et al., 2017).

Within a military institution, militarized masculinity frequently emerges as the dominant form of masculinity (Duncanson, 2019). The characteristics esteemed and encouraged in the military—namely physical resilience, courage, readiness to employ violence, and emotional restraint—establish the benchmark for defining a "real man," both within and beyond the military context (Do & Samuels, 2021; Foote, 2023). The principal analytical benefit of employing this term is that it delineates the tangible manifestation and enforcement of the abstract notion of hegemonic masculinity within a military framework (Dwyer-Neigenfind, 2025). This paradigm elucidates how certain masculine traits and behaviours attain dominance and influence conflict dynamics, notably within the Nigerian military.

In the context of subordinate masculinity and ethnic interactions, it is posited that the notions of masculinity are relational, indicating that hegemonic masculinity is perpetually defined in contrast to subordinate masculinities. Subordinate masculinities refer to types of masculinity that are devalued, marginalized, or oppressed within a hegemonic framework (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021). These may encompass masculinities linked to various ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, or sexual identities that deviate from the prevailing ideal (Myrttinen et al., 2017).

This concept is essential within the framework of the Nigerian military and its ethnic conflicts. The sensation of marginalization experienced by specific ethnic groups inside the military might be interpreted as a conflict against a prevailing, ethnicized militarized masculinity (Ammann & Staudacher, 2021). The "diversity" inside the army, especially among the three principal tribes, fostered an environment conducive to opposing masculinities. The association of a certain tribal identity with a dominant form of militarized masculinity intensified ethnic conflicts (Duncanson, 2019). Soldiers from groups viewed as possessing subordinate masculinity—due to historical grievances or political contexts—may have believed that their honor, bravery, and worth as men were being undermined by the hegemonic group. Grounded in the relational aspects of masculinity, this dynamic fostered a culture of violence and impunity within the military during ethnic wars. The connection between militarized masculinity and concepts of tribal honor and loyalty, as opposed to professional obligation, exacerbated these conflicts and increased susceptibility to human rights violations (Myrttinen et al., 2017).

## Findings and Discussion

### *Background*

Gender roles have been common features of human existence since prehistoric times. Men have always been in charge of security and war in most societies, and their roles were directly responsible for the rise of ancient states and empires. A major reason for men's warring tasks was their stronger physicality and the attendant masculine qualities. It is important to state *ab initio* that most men would shun all forms of violence associated with wars due to individual differences and socialization. Traditional masculinity: the roots of the Nigerian army and its evolution were tied to conditions of masculinity and ethnicity. From its beginnings,

the Nigerian military has been influenced by preexisting masculine values and qualities in the ethnic nationalities annexed by the British. From the onset, the British colonial power required military units for imperial expansion and security in Nigeria. It was this need that led to the remote origin of the Nigerian army in the 1860s when Lagos became a Crown Colony. The first armed group recruited for colonial purposes was tagged the Glover Hausas and was recruited primarily from freed Hausa slaves by Governor Frederick Glover of the Lagos Colony. The Force's jurisdiction spread to some other parts of Yorubaland consequent upon further colonial conquest (Annual reports on the Lagos, Hausa force, for the year ending the 31st of December, 1901). Obviously, only tribal men, such as Hausa (in the majority) and some recruits from other tribes, deemed to possess warrior status in accordance with the British martial theory of recruitment, were engaged.

The Royal Constabulary was raised in 1886 in the northern part of Nigeria to enable the Royal Niger Company, which obtained a Royal Charter that same year, to assert its authority in those parts of the Niger territory. The second British army to operate in northern Nigeria, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), was raised in 1897 when Captain Frederick Lugard organized a military force with which to counter an attempt by the French to annex Borgu. In 1899, the WAFF was expanded to include all British military units in West Africa. In 1900, Lugard's two battalions absorbed half of the Niger Company's now-disbanded constabulary and were designated the Northern Nigerian Regiment, for which Hausa soldiers were mostly preferred due to their masculine qualities (National Archives, Kaduna (NAK), 1909). The age of the preferred male recruits was set at 17 1/2–30 years; physique was height 66 in., chest 31 cm (expanded minimum), and weight 112 lbs; and vision was not less than 6/12, 6/12 minimum. Designated male sex roles were predominant in the "Trades" for new recruits, which included armorers, engine fitters, electricians, instrument mechanics, radio mechanics, and turners. Others were tailors, painters, typists, and mechanics. From the precedents established since the 1860s, the Nigerian Army was male-dominated, with emphasis on superior musculature, and there was a preponderance of the Hausa in the rank and file.

Another dimension was the use of the army against the traditional political establishment. The forces were used for violent colonial conquests and consolidation of power in most parts of Nigeria, such as the attacks and annexation of Ijebu Ode, Aro, and Ohafia (Chief Secretary's Office, 1906). The army was also deployed as a force of intimidation for the collection of taxes (National Archives Kaduna, 1908).

One reason for the ethnicization of the Nigerian Army was the recruitment process that was based on the British-adopted martial theory. A feature of the policy was the recruitment of soldiers on an ethnic basis. The larger number of Hausa among the rank and file and their longest service in the military, as well as the dominance of the middle officer corps by the Igbo, among other factors, were significant in the ethnic conflicts that plagued the country from 1966 to 1970.

Ethnic divisions in the military merely reinforced the cultural and political differences. The political evolution of Nigeria and the emergence of disunity have led to three significant deductions. Firstly, creating a unified nation from diverse and unequal ethnic groups posed a severe challenge to national unity. This is consistent with global experiences where homogeneous societies tend to be more stable than heterogeneous ones, like Nigeria, which often experiences fragmentary

political systems. Secondly, the British colonialists perpetuated the separateness of different nationalities in Nigeria for maximum exploitation without any consideration for national integration. Furthermore, sustaining traditional socio-political values in Northern Nigeria by colonialists did not bode well for unity, while the South's greater acceptance of Western education paved the way for faster development and social change.

As such, politicians from Northern Nigeria sought to protect and advance the pseudo-feudal interests of their traditional ruling class (Sarakuna), unlike their southern counterparts, who viewed it as retrogressive. The dilemma of northern politicians was that they could only gain political clout if they projected traditional socio-political values; this encumbered them with maintaining pseudo-feudal privileges at all costs in the post-independence era lest Southern control undermine emirate stability, erode the support base of the northern political class, and lead to a North-South schism heightened by British colonial policies examined here, laying the foundation for Northern hegemony during the colonial period.

Although the North-South hostility remained the primary source of political instability in Nigeria, the inability of Southern political elites to unite against Northern hegemony perpetuated it. The North had been Islamised for centuries, and since the Uthman dan Fodio jihad in the early nineteenth century, the religion had become a trans-tribal force of unity among the dominant Hausa-Fulani group. In the southern parts, both Igbo and Yoruba societies were more open to Western European influences. Furthermore, Nigeria's imbalanced political structure accounted for its virulent politics. Nigeria has been dominated by three major ethnic nationalities, domiciled in the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions, respectively, though it has over 250 tribes. The 1914 amalgamation retained the preponderant size and population of the North, making it larger than the West and East put together. Subsequent developments maintained this status quo, leading to Northern domination across Nigeria. This inherent imbalance constituted an element of political instability through ethnic conflicts since the colonial period. The country's general imbalance also had repercussions, as minority problems in the three regions remained marginalized by the three dominant tribes.

The constitutional development and the resultant political parties' structures and parties were characterized by parochial ethnic leanings, which pitted the dominant tribal-based political forces against one another. The Richards Constitution gave rise to a regional-based political arrangement and the attendant use of ethnic platforms for voter mobilization. This situation characterized the major national political parties: the Northern People's Congress (NPC), led by the Hausa-Fulani in the North; the Action Group (AG) of the Yoruba in the West; and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) for the Igbo-led people of the East. The major political parties in the republic had emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s as regional parties whose main aim was to control power in their regions. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG), which controlled the Northern Region and the Western Region, respectively, clearly emerged in this way. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), which controlled the Eastern Region and the Midwestern Region (created in 1963), began as a nationalist party but was forced by the pressures of regionalism to become primarily an eastern party, albeit with strong pockets of support elsewhere in the federation. These regional parties were based upon, and derived their main support

from, the major ethnic groups in their regions: NPC (Hausa/Fulani), AG (Yoruba), and NCNC (Igbo).

These cultural factors reinforced ethnic tensions, particularly among the three major tribes: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, who had mutual distrust due to inequalities caused by the British "divide and rule" policy. Ethnic consciousness was stirred, especially in urban centres where competition for scarce socio-economic opportunities was fierce. Besides being a natural response to social insecurity challenges, ethnicity proved useful for politicians seeking political advantages.

All the regional forces were formed into a unified Nigerian Army in 1960, shortly after Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom. The Army, which hitherto was the instrument of colonial conquest and control, further became tool in the hands of the First Republic politicians, as witnessed in its complicity with the ruling political elite in the exacerbation of the political crisis in the Western Region and in the Kano riot ("Army implicated in Kano riot", 1962). It was also implicated in a brutal crackdown on the Tiv ethnic group ("Military clampdown on Tiv people", 1964), among others.

***Ethnicity and coups in 1966***

From a general perspective, the unending crisis witnessed in the First Republic provided the remote reasons for the January 15th, 1966, coup. However, the inner dynamics of Nigerian politics, particularly its reliance on ethnic conditions before that putsch, exposed the army to the ethnic-regional conflict. A pertinent example was the politicization of the army through politicians seeking to facilitate their ethno-regional political interests. In effect, a situation in which recruitment and promotion were dependent on a person's place of origin at the expense of his ability tended to lay the groundwork for ethnicity within the Nigerian army. Thus, a basis for ethnic-regional disharmony already existed before the first military takeover of government in Nigeria.

A brief look at the background of the first military administration in Nigeria would give us some insight into the factors that culminated in the ascendancy of military rule in the country. The seemingly unending crisis witnessed in the First Republic provided the remote reasons for the January 15th coup. Nigeria had only gained independence from Britain in 1960, and its political system was still in its early stages of development. The myriads of political problems and the violence that led to the first military coup were exacerbated by ethnic and regional tensions, as well as by corruption and economic inequality. The civilian government led by Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa of the NPC was widely seen as corrupt and ineffective. It was also seen as being too favourable to the northern region of Nigeria, at the expense of the southern regions. The major crises during the First Republic were the Action Group crisis of 1962, which led to the decline of the AG as a result of the complicity of the NPC in weakening opposition from the Western Region. There was also the census crisis in 1962/1963 that confirmed the population advantages of the North. The Federal Election troubles of 1964, though rigged, gave victory to the NPC-led Federal government. Finally, the Western Regional election of 1965 caused the violence in the Western Region prior to the eventual fall of the First Republic. Therefore, the inner dynamics of Nigerian politics, particularly its reliance on ethnic considerations before the coup, had exposed the army to the

ethnic-regional conflicts. A pertinent example was the politicization of the army through politicians seeking to facilitate their ethno-regional political interests.

The coup plotters, who were headed by six officers of the rank of major and one captain, probably had grievances over the slow pace of promotion in the army. Only one of the main actors in the coup was Yoruba; most of the rest were Igbo in origin. The bloody revolt led to the deaths of highly placed politicians such as the Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa; Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, the Premier of the Northern Region; and the Premier of the Western Region, Chief S. L. Akintola. Some of the military officers killed during the putsch were Brigadier Ademulegun, Colonel Sodeinde, and Brigadier Maimalari. In essence, the coup was successfully carried out in both the North and the West, including Lagos, whereas it was hardly felt in the Eastern and Mid-Western regions. Consequently, none of the Igbo leaders was killed, and the only Igbo military officer who was assassinated was reportedly killed inadvertently (De St. Jorre, 1972).

Before its conclusion, the violent coup d'état was foiled by federal troops under General Aguiyi Ironsi (who was then the most senior army officer in the army). Consequently, Ironsi prevailed upon the remnants of the former civil Cabinet to surrender political power. This transfer of power signalled the ascendancy of military rule in Nigeria.

Without doubt, General Ironsi's regime initially enjoyed the goodwill of the generality of Nigerians, particularly the southerners. Beyond the euphoria, subsequent political developments, inclusive of covert propaganda, gave rise to the narrative that the January 15th coup was staged to advance the interests of the Igbo. The Supreme Commander, General Ironsi, surrounded himself with Igbo advisers, and government decisions tended to be favourable to persons of the same tribe as the Head of State. There was no trial of the January coup plotters. Ironsi kept on postponing the trial even after the SMC's (Supreme Military Council) ruling. Moreover, twenty-one officers were promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel (eighteen of them were Igbo), though there had been a government regulation against such promotions. Perhaps the most provocative measure taken by the Ironsi regime was the controversial manner in which the unitary system of government was imposed on the country.

Meanwhile, the promulgation of Decree No. 34 on May 24, 1966, finally confirmed the suspicions of northerners about the alleged plot by the Igbo to dominate them. There was ground for such a fear, considering the perceived negative effects that the centralization of the civil service could have had on the Northern people. A single civil service would have required open competition for available jobs, and considering the educational backwardness of the Northern Region, its people could have been at a disadvantage. The opposition of Northerners to the decree manifested itself in demonstrations, which led to violent riots directed against the Igbo in the North.

Apart from the grouse that the northerners had against the introduction of a unitary government, other factors sparked off the riots. The January coup had led to the assassinations of Northern political leaders, among other victims. This situation had strained Igbo-Hausa/Fulani relations in the North. Moreover, jubilant acts of certain Igbo in the region over the demise of those executed in the January coup were reported. After the January 1966 coups in Nigeria, there were riots in northern cities such as Kaduna, Kano, and Zaria. Igbo, the tribe believed to be

responsible for the coups, was the main target of these riots. The assassinations of the Northern Premier, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and the Head of State, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, ignited the riots. Both men were Hausa-Fulani, the dominant ethnic group in northern Nigeria. The resultant riots were widespread and resulted in the deaths of thousands of Igbos. The Northern Nigerian Riots of 1966 also resulted in the destruction of many Igbo homes and businesses ("Northern Nigerian Riots", 1966).

An eyewitness account noted that the riots in the North marked a significant turning point in the country's history. Subsequently, Ironsi embarked on a tour of the country, but it was while he was being hosted by the Governor of the Western Region, Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, that the Northern officers struck in a counter-coup. The coup, which took place on July 29th, 1966, claimed the lives of both the supreme commander and his host. Apart from these senior officers, there were Igbo officers, particularly in Abeokuta and Ikeja barracks, who lost their lives. The military casualty list was very long but included Maj. Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi, the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces; Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi, Governor, Western Region; and Lt. Col. I.C. Okoro, Commanding Officer, 3rd Battalion, among several Igbo officers. This counter-coup led to a wave of anti-Igbo pogroms in northern Nigeria, in which thousands of Igbos were killed, and as a result, the Biafran secession and war followed.

***Masculinities and ethnicity in the civil war***

On the evening of August 1, Ojukwu made it known that he did not recognize Gowon as the supreme commander (De St. Jorre, 1972). Ostensibly, his rejection of Gowon's leadership was because he was junior in rank to him. This incident is where masculinity and ethnic conflicts became personalized and competitive. It is common among strong leaders to measure and compare their qualities and merit with others. It was ethnic policies in the military that brought in Gowon. Ojukwu found this decision unacceptable due to the ethnic conflict at the time, and he felt that Gowon, being his junior in the military hierarchy, challenged his masculinity. In the context of militarized masculinity, the rift between Gowon and Ojukwu can be viewed from the perspective of a contestation between dominant masculinity and subordinate masculinity. This exemplifies the assertion previously noted that there is no single masculinity. It was the ethnic conflict resultant from the coups that paved the way for Gowon's dominance in the army in the period under study.

The situation was worsened by the sporadic violence in August, which led to the deaths of some of the January coup detainees in Benin City. Moreover, many Igbo fled from the north and other parts of the country to the east because they felt insecure. Efforts at finding a middle ground failed in Aburi, Ghana.

Ethnic divisions fuelled the conflict and the rise of popular secessionist states. The governments of Biafra and Nigeria both promoted the image of the soldier as the ideal man. Soldiers were portrayed as strong, brave, and willing to risk their lives for their country. This glorification of military service helped justify warfare and recruit men into the military. Both sides resorted to violence to achieve their goals. The strategy included the use of weapons as well as intimidation and terror measures. Force was considered a way to establish male power and achieve victory. Both warring factions created negative images of their enemies. Biafrans portrayed Nigerians as brutal and bloodthirsty savages, while Nigerians portrayed Biafrans as

cowards and traitors. These negative images helped justify violence against the enemy.

The war led to the militarisation of Nigerian society, and in that context, separate roles were marked for women on either side. In the war, women did not serve in combat roles. The Nigerian Army had a nursing corps that provided medical support to the military. Women were mainly involved in this corps. They worked as nurses, providing medical care to soldiers and veterans. Women were also involved in administrative and support roles in the Nigerian army. They played important roles in the military bureaucracy, handling paperwork, personnel management, and other administrative tasks. The female soldiers also worked as cooks and nurses in refugee camps, providing aid to displaced people and soldiers. Women also acted as spies and informants during the war. They would gather intelligence, relay messages, and deliver strategic information to their camps. The breakaway region of Biafra also had the Biafra Women's Corps. The organization trained women in combat, medical assistance, and political advocacy (Ojaruega, 2021).

In the meantime, the gruesome story of the Civil War did not end until after about two and a half years, when the unity of the federation was restored by the federal troops ("Gowon receives unconditional surrender." 1970). A sign of the collapse of the Biafran war machine was heralded by a report concerning the change of leadership in Biafra after Ojukwu fled to the Ivory Coast (now known as Côte d'Ivoire). Lieutenant Colonel Philip Effiong broadcast the surrender of Biafra a day after he took over control (De St. Jorre, 1972). In Lagos, where the new Biafran leader met with Gowon on January 15th, 1970, he affirmed that his people accepted "the existing administrative and political structure of the federation of Nigeria."

***The aftermath***

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, from 1968 onward to the end, led to the deaths of over 1 million people (Nigeria's Civil War, 1968). Due to the siege, many Ibos were killed by starvation (Biafra: The dying land, 1968, p. 10; "Nigeria's War," 1968), and more victims were displaced from their homes. It caused widespread economic damage. The war also exacerbated ethnic tensions in Nigeria, which have persisted to this day. The war led to a deep political crisis. The military played an increasingly important role in government after the war. Riots in Katsina and other towns in northern Nigeria after the January 1966 coups with newspaper citations.

In the context of hegemonic masculinity, the most coveted men of the period under study were remembered for several decades. The war saw a shift towards more nationalist conceptions of heroism in the context of those who fought for the unity and integrity of Nigeria. This was reflected in the way the Nigerian Civil War was represented in popular culture. War films, novels, and songs often praised the sacrifices of Nigerian soldiers and emphasized the importance of national unity. These cultural representatives helped shape a new generation of Nigerian men who saw themselves as defenders of the country. Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's head of state during the Civil War, was credited with leading the country to victory. Joseph Aguiyi-Ironsi, who briefly served as Nigeria's head of state in 1966 and was assassinated in a coup in that year, was considered by many to be a martyr for the unity of Nigeria. Leader of the Biafra separatist movement, Ojukwu, though a

controversial figure, was still revered as a hero by many Igbo people. Kaduna Nzeogwu, who led the first military coup and was killed during the Civil War, was seen as a mythical figure whose death was unbelievable among many Igbo when the news broke. His personality was surrounded by a "myth of his invincibility." On the exploits at the war front, General Benjamin Adekunle was remembered as a man of courage, whose bravery contributed to the victory of the Federalists.

## Conclusion

The paper established the roots of masculinity and ethnicity as part of the historical and cultural evolution of Nigerian societies before the advent of colonial rule. Imperial Britain tapped into these sources of power for colonial conquest and the consolidation of its power. The use of the Nigerian military as a coercive instrument of Britain's divide-and-rule complemented the strategy for maintaining both tribal and regional separateness in the development of Nigeria's democracy. By the end of colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria's uneven federation had emerged as a legacy of colonial control after independence. The military was used by the ruling political elite to maintain political advantages derived from the colonial political arrangements in Nigeria. The North, aware of its numerical strength, and the West and the East, with advantages in the production of a more educated elite, reflected their strength in the Nigerian Army. The manifestation of the ethnic and regional power struggles through various masculinity prepared the Nigerian soldiers for the ethnic conflicts and civil war witnessed in 1966-1970. The power struggle in the military continued to manifest in Nigeria's political instability, and until democracy relatively stabilized in 1999, there had been nine more military coups in the country. The continued power struggle, with violent outcomes in Nigeria in both military and civil democracy, has undertones of masculine tendencies and ethnic sensibilities. The nexus of both concepts can facilitate more research and a better understanding of the recurring problems of political instability and the role of the military institutions in the politics of Sub-Saharan Africa.

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