Chapter 11
Metaphors for Nation and War in Chinua Achebe’s Memoir

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ABSTRACT
Chinua Achebe’s memoir, There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra, caused quite a stir in the Nigerian polity when it was published in 2012. This chapter, therefore, examined the metaphors used by the author to construe the concepts of nation and the (Nigerian civil) war in the memoir. Theoretical insights were drawn from Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Primary metaphor theory and Conceptual blending theory to analyze the metaphors identified. Two central metaphors were used by the author to construe the concept of nation, namely, the DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY and the SCAPEGOAT metaphors. Metaphors for war included WAR AS NIGHTMARE, AS A TRIANGLE GAME, and AS A SERIES OF VIOLENT CRIMES respectively. The metaphor system highlighted in this chapter indicates that bad governance, corruption and ethnic politics were critical to the failure of Nigeria’s first democratic experience (1960-1966) and the resultant civil war of 1967-1970.

INTRODUCTION
In the long list of books on the Nigerian civil war, Achebe’s (2012) memoir- There was a country- A Personal History of Biafra- sits on top, not necessarily as the best narrative of the event, but as relatively recent, and one that caused quite a stir in the Nigerian polity, and unfortunately as the last book of the author. The book, on the one hand, narrates the story of Achebe, and on the other hand, details the larger narrative of the Nigerian Nation-state from amalgamation, through Colonial Era, Independence, Post-independence, the Civil War and recent happenings. The book reflects on the relationship between the Igbo ethnic group and the rest of the Nigerian nation-state. Furthermore, a large part of the memoir, specifically Parts 2 and 3, deals with the issue of the Nigerian civil war.

The objective of the chapter is to identify the conceptual metaphors used to construe the target domains of nation and war in Achebe’s memoir. The motivation for this is immediately obvious, even from the title of the book, as the question of nationhood (especially of Nigeria) and the realities and atrocities
of (the civil) war, and how these realities truncated the healthy growth of Nigeria are the preoccupation of the writer, among other things. Achebe, in an attempt to narrate the story of Nigeria, and relate his personal experience of the civil war, engages some metaphors, which provide conceptual scaffolding for his narrative. To achieve the aim of the chapter, theoretical insights are drawn from Conceptual Metaphor Theory and to provide further theoretical justifications for the metaphors identified, particularly the dysfunctional family and scapegoat metaphors; the contribution relies on Primary Metaphor theory and Conceptual Blending theory. The motivation for combining the three theories is to provide for a more ‘comprehensive treatment of linguistic and conceptual phenomena’ (Grady et al., 1999, p. 120) identified in the data.

This chapter keys into the objective of the current volume as it examines the issues that led to the failure of Nigeria’s first democratic experience (1960-1966) and the start of Nigerian civil war (1967-1970). The issues include corruption and the ethno-religious crisis that characterized the Nigerian first republic (1960-1966), the coup and counter coup that further deepened the ethnic mistrust that had trailed Nigeria from its birth, the continuous killings and persecution of the Easterners in the then Northern region and the failure of the leadership of the day to rise above their ethnic identity towards fostering a one Nigeria agenda. These challenges contributed to the failure of the country’s first democratic endeavor, and pushed the nation to the brink of total collapse. It is the position of this chapter that an understanding of these issues, which have still continued to dog the path of the country’s current democratic enterprise, from a historical perspective will enable the people and leadership of Nigeria to appreciate the deep-rootedness of these issues and motivate them to confront the challenges head on. It is only when this is done that the current democratic experience can be consolidated.

BACKGROUND

Achebe and the Early 1960s

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was Nigeria’s, nay, Africa’s foremost novelist and credited as the founding father of modern African Literature, particularly because of his first novel Things Fall Apart, published in 1958. Beginning with Things Fall Apart and through all his other fictional as well as non-fiction works, Achebe’s vision of a culturally conscious and integrated Nigerian national identity has always been clear and consistent. The materials and motivations for Achebe’s writing have been the pristine nature of the African cultural milieu prior to the advent of colonialism, the cultural and political domination and confusion of the colonial era, and the corruption and leadership failure that have characterized postcolonial Africa. These issues are given a more forceful, personal touch in his memoir.

The period preceding Nigeria’s independence in 1960 was one of pure ecstasy and high expectations for political and socio-economic transformation of the young country. But this was not to be as corruption and ethno-religious politics soon became the norm. For instance, political parties were formed along the three dominant geopolitical regions of the West (Action Group), East (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) and North (Northern People’s Party), which took control of the federal government and formed a coalition with the Igbo dominated NCNC. The NPC also had the largest seats in the parliament and had Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister. All these indicated that the North was on its way toward