

## INTERROGATING THE ROLE OF PETROLEUM RESOURCES IN CIVIL CONFLICT: THE NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR IN PERSPECTIVE

Ihediwa Nkemjika CHIMEE\*

---

**Abstract:** Petroleum has been identified as a major source of wealth for the countries that have it; it is also a potential source of conflict and restiveness for the hosts. It has been linked to major conflicts in many parts of the world where it is found, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. Not only that it agitates interests internally, it attracts external and multinational attentions that convulse the polity. The discovery of oil in Nigeria, completely “anesthetized the thought of the political leaders, blurred their visions, corrupted their minds and allowed them to drown in the devil’s excrement.” At independence, the prospect of Nigeria becoming a leading economy in Africa was high, but this hope was blurred with the sequences of political fall-outs six years after her independence. The military coup of January 15 1966 and the subsequent Civil War that rocked the foundations of that nascent democracy reshaped the contours of political and economic calculations. The Nigeria-Biafra War has been studied in many dimensions, but serious attention has not been given to the role of petroleum in orchestrating and deepening that conflict. Both contenders in the Civil War wanted to have control of the resources emanating from petroleum exploitation in the Eastern part of the country, which was also the theatre of the war. Her erstwhile colonial master Britain and her petroleum magnet Shell British Petroleum, entered into that conflict to protect British petrolic interests, thereby warding off other contending powers that would have entered the conflict on the side of the secessionists. The paper intends to examine the many facets in which Petroleum energized and deepened the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War.

**Rezumat:** Lovitura militară din 15 ianuarie 1966 și Războiul Civil care i-a urmat au zdruncinat fundamentele acelei democrații născânde din Nigeria, schimbând cifrele calculului politice și economice. Războiul Civil sau Războiul Nigeria-Biafra a fost studiat în mai multe dimensiuni, dar încă nu a fost acordată o atenție suficientă rolului petrolului în orchestrarea și adâncirea conflictului. Ambele tabere din războiul civil doreau să dețină controlul resurselor emaneate din exploatarea de petrol din zona de est a țării, care era de asemenea și teatru

---

\* PhD student, Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, chimee2002ng@yahoo.com

de război. Marea Britanie și magnatul britanic al petrolului Shell British Petroleum au fost implicate în acest conflict încercând să portejeze interesele britanice asupra petrolului prin îndepărtarea altor puteri care ar fi putut interveni în ajutorul vreunei tabere. Acest articol intenționează să analizeze multiplele fațete prin care petrolul a energizat și adâncit Războiul Civil Nigeria-Biafra.

**Keywords:** petroleum, Africa, Nigeria-Biafra Civil War, Shell British Petroleum

---