
COLLECTIVE TRAUMA, IDENTITY FUSION, AND ENDURING SEPARATISM: REEXAMINING POST- BIAFRAN NARRATIVES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970) inflicted profound collective trauma on Igbo communities through pogroms, famine, and defeat, with legacies persisting in contemporary separatist sentiments. This qualitative study reexamines post-Biafran narratives to explore how collective trauma contributes to the formation of enduring separatist identities. Grounded in cultural trauma theory (Alexander et al., 2004), postmemory (Hirsch, 1997), and identity fusion theory (Swann et al., 2012), the research employed thematic analysis of oral interviews, focus group discussions, survivor memoirs, relevant literature, and separatist discourses from south-eastern Nigeria. Findings revealed four interconnected themes: persistent collective trauma as a foundational wound; postmemory as the mechanism of intergenerational transmission; manifestations of identity fusion through visceral oneness with Biafran/Igbo identity; and the conversion of fused identities into separatist persistence amid perceived marginalization. The study demonstrates that shared dysphoric war experiences, transmitted via mediated narratives, catalyze fusion, sustaining extreme pro-group commitment and challenging post-war reconciliation efforts. By bridging Nigerian historiography with social psychology, this work extends identity fusion theory to postcolonial intergenerational contexts, underscoring the need for trauma-informed acknowledgment in peacebuilding. Implications include narrative-based interventions to foster defusion and inclusive national identity.

Keywords: Collective Trauma, Identity Fusion, Post-Biafran Narratives, Intergenerational Transmission, Biafran Separatism

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970), one of the most devastating conflicts in post-independence Africa, resulted in an estimated 1–3 million deaths, predominantly from starvation, disease, and violence (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Triggered by ethnic tensions, political instability following the 1966 coups and counter-coups, and the pogroms against Igbo populations in northern Nigeria, the secession of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra led to a brutal civil war marked by blockade-induced famine, aerial bombings, and widespread atrocities. The war ended with Biafra's surrender in January 1970, under the federal government's policy of "no victor, no vanquished," which aimed at reconciliation but largely suppressed open discussion of the conflict's traumas in official narratives (Odoemene, 2012; Obi-Ani, 2009; Ekemezie, 2018). Decades later, the legacies of this war persist in south-eastern

Nigeria, particularly among Igbo communities, where collective memories of suffering continue to shape ethnic identity, perceptions of marginalization, and calls for self-determination.

Collective trauma refers to the shared psychological impact of catastrophic events on a group, extending beyond individual experiences to influence cultural memory, social bonds, and intergenerational dynamics (Eyerman, 2001). In the Biafran context, the war's horrors—pogroms, famine (often described as starvation as a weapon of war), displacement, and defeat—created profound group-level wounds that have not fully healed. Survivors and their descendants carry narratives of victimhood, resilience, and unresolved grievance, transmitted through family stories, oral traditions, literature, and cultural practices (Obi-Ani, as discussed in STIAS, 2018). Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) exemplifies how such trauma manifests in postmemory, where younger generations inherit and imaginatively engage with events they did not directly experience.

Postmemory, as conceptualized by Hirsch (1997), describes the powerful identification that the generation after trauma forms with the previous one, often through images, objects, and narratives that mediate the past. In Biafran literature and oral histories, this manifests as a "state within a state" mentality, where perceived ongoing marginalization revives war-era grievances (Onuoha, 2011; Harnischfeger, 2011). The war's famine imagery—children with kwashiorkor, skeletal frames, and widespread starvation—has become iconic in collective memory, evoking shared horror and reinforcing group boundaries (Adichie, 2006; Akingbe, 2012). These memories are not static; they are actively reproduced in contemporary separatist discourses, where groups like MASSOB and IPOB invoke Biafran symbols to articulate demands for autonomy amid feelings of exclusion (Onuoha, 2013).

Similarly, identity fusion theory provides a psychological lens to understand how such collective trauma fosters extreme commitment to the group. Developed by Swann and colleagues, identity fusion describes a visceral sense of oneness between personal and social identities, where the boundary between self and group blurs, motivating personally costly pro-group behaviors (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012). Unlike traditional social identity theory, which emphasizes depersonalization and category-based alignment, fusion involves relational ties—often amplified by shared dysphoric experiences—that produce heightened agency, perceived invulnerability, and willingness to sacrifice for the group (Swann et al., 2012). Shared traumatic events, such as those in conflict zones, can catalyze fusion by creating intense emotional bonds and a sense of familial kinship within the group (Swann et al., 2012).

In post-conflict settings, fusion predicts extreme orientations, including support for radical actions when the group faces a threat (Gómez et al., 2011, but foundational in Swann et al., 2009). Although direct applications to the Biafran case are limited in the literature, fusion's emphasis on visceral oneness aligns with observations of enduring Igbo solidarity despite defeat. The war's shared dysphoric experiences—pogroms, famine, and loss—likely fused individuals to "Biafran" or Igbo identity, sustaining separatist sentiments even as official reconciliation narratives prevailed (Swann et al., 2012). This fusion explains why younger generations, exposed to transmitted narratives rather than direct trauma, exhibit strong identification with Biafran heritage and rejection of full Nigerian integration (Harnischfeger, 2011).

Enduring separatism in south-eastern Nigeria reflects these dynamics. Despite the post-war oil boom and economic rebuilding in some areas, perceptions of political exclusion, unequal resource distribution, and state repression fuel resurgent nationalism (Onuoha, 2011). Separatist movements draw on war memories to frame current grievances as continuations of historical injustice, creating a cycle where collective trauma reinforces fused identities and pro-group extremism (Onuoha, 2013). This persistence challenges assumptions of successful post-conflict reintegration and highlights the need to reexamine how historical narratives sustain psychological bonds.

This study adopts a qualitative approach to reexamine these processes. Qualitative methods are well-suited for exploring subjective experiences, meaning-making, and narrative construction in historical and cultural contexts (Creswell, 2013). Data were derived from archival sources (e.g., survivor memoirs, war-era documents), published narratives, oral histories, and contemporary separatist discourses. Thematic analysis helped to identify patterns in how trauma is narrated, how fusion manifests (e.g., visceral oneness language, sacrifice rhetoric), and links to separatist endurance. This interpretive method allows deep engagement with historical texts while applying psychological theory, bridging Nigerian historiography with social psychology.

This work contributes to scholarship in several ways. First, it bridges historical analysis of the Biafra War with contemporary social psychology, extending identity fusion theory to an underrepresented postcolonial African context where intergenerational trauma drives ethnic separatism. Most Biafran studies focus on political, economic, or literary dimensions (e.g., Odoemene, 2012; Onuoha, 2011), with less emphasis on psychological mechanisms like fusion that explain extreme commitment. Second, it highlights narrative as a site of trauma transmission and fusion catalyst, enriching postmemory frameworks (Hirsch, 1997) with fusion's predictive power for pro-group extremism. This interdisciplinary lens offers insights into why separatist identities persist despite state efforts at unity. Third, the study addresses gaps in understanding long-term conflict legacies in Africa, where suppressed histories fuel ongoing tensions (Harnischfeger, 2011). By foregrounding qualitative reexamination of narratives, it contributes to peace psychology and applied social psychology, suggesting avenues for addressing fused identities in reconciliation processes. Ultimately, this article argues that collective trauma from the Biafra War, mediated through narratives, fosters identity fusion that underpins enduring separatism. Reexamining these

dynamics illuminates the psychological underpinnings of ethnic persistence in Nigeria and broader implications for managing post-conflict identities

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

The study draws on three interlocking theoretical constructs to analyze how narratives of the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970) sustain ethnic separatism: collective trauma, postmemory, and identity fusion theory. These frameworks bridge sociological understandings of group-level wounding with psychological mechanisms of identity alignment and extreme pro-group commitment, offering a robust lens for interpreting historical and contemporary Biafran/Igbo narratives.

Collective Trauma: This refers to the shared experience of a catastrophic event that shatters a group's sense of identity, cohesion, and future orientation, leaving enduring cultural and psychological imprints (Alexander et al., 2004). Unlike individual trauma, which affects personal psyches, collective trauma operates at the societal level, where a group perceives itself as having suffered irreversible harm that undermines foundational assumptions about security, belonging, and moral order. Alexander et al. (2004) argue that trauma becomes "cultural" when it is narrated and ritualized through carrier groups who construct meaning around the event, transforming raw suffering into a shared narrative of victimhood and moral responsibility. In this process, the trauma carrier group reframes the event as a rupture in collective identity, demanding acknowledgment, remembrance, and sometimes redress.

For the Biafran case, the war's pogroms, blockade-induced famine, and military defeat constituted such a catastrophe. Eyerman (2001), in his analysis of cultural trauma from slavery, shows how such events forge collective identity through narratives of shared suffering that persist across generations. The Biafran famine—iconic in global imagery of starving children—served as a visceral symbol of dehumanization and weaponized starvation, embedding a sense of existential threat in group memory (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Official post-war rhetoric of "no victor, no vanquished" suppressed open mourning, yet unofficial narratives in oral histories, literature, and family stories preserved the trauma as unresolved injustice (Odoemene, 2012). This suppression paradoxically intensified the trauma's cultural potency, as silenced suffering fosters alternative mnemonic communities that challenge hegemonic national narratives (Harnischfeger, 2011).

Postmemory: This serves as the primary mechanism for transmitting collective trauma intergenerationally. Hirsch (1997) defines postmemory as the relationship of the "generation after" to the traumatic knowledge and experiences of those who came before—experiences transmitted so deeply that they seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory is not identical to memory; it relies on mediation through stories, images, objects, and behaviors, involving "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" to fill gaps in what was directly experienced (Hirsch, 1997, p. 22). This mediated connection produces a haunted identification with the past, where descendants feel compelled to "remember" events they did not witness, often through affective and embodied engagement.

In Biafran contexts, postmemory manifests in literary works like Adichie's (2006) *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which reconstructs war-era horrors for younger readers, and in oral traditions where famine imagery and survivor testimonies evoke visceral empathy (Makosso, 2020, drawing on Hirsch, 1997). Postmemory thus sustains collective trauma by keeping the past alive and relevant, linking historical defeat to contemporary perceptions of marginalization (Onuoha, 2011). It explains why younger Igbo generations, distant from the war, exhibit strong emotional investment in Biafran symbols and separatist causes, as the transmitted wound becomes a site of identity formation.

Identity Fusion Theory: This provides the psychological bridge explaining how such transmitted trauma fosters extreme commitment to the group. Swann et al. (2009) introduced identity fusion as a visceral sense of oneness with a group, where personal and social identities become functionally equivalent, blurring boundaries between self and others. Unlike social identity theory's emphasis on depersonalization into categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), fusion retains a strong personal self while tethering it to the group through relational ties (Swann et al., 2012). This relational fusion produces heightened agency, perceived invulnerability, and willingness to engage in personally costly pro-group behaviors, including extreme sacrifice.

Swann et al. (2012) distinguish local fusion (intimate ties in small groups) from extended fusion (projected relational ties onto large collectives). Shared dysphoric experiences—intense, negative events like trauma—often catalyze extended fusion by creating perceptions of shared essence and familial kinship (Swann et al., 2012). Fusion predicts extreme outcomes better than standard identification, as fused individuals act to protect the group as an extension of self. In post-conflict settings, fusion sustains radical orientations when groups perceive ongoing threats (Swann et al., 2009).

Applying fusion to post-Biafran narratives illuminates why collective trauma endures as separatism. War-era shared dysphoria (pogroms, famine) fused individuals to Biafran identity, with postmemory extending this fusion to descendants. Narratives framing current exclusion as a continuation of historical injustice reinforce fusion, motivating support for separatist movements despite risks (Onuoha, 2013). Fusion thus explains the persistence of "state within a state" mentalities, where fused identity overrides national integration.

These frameworks interlock synergistically: collective trauma (Alexander et al., 2004) creates the wound; postmemory (Hirsch, 1997) transmits it narratively; and identity fusion (Swann et al., 2012) converts it into enduring separatist commitment. This integration advances understanding of how historical events shape contemporary ethnic dynamics in postcolonial Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the interplay of collective trauma, identity fusion, and enduring separatism in post-Biafran narratives. Qualitative approaches enabled investigating subjective experiences, meaning-making, and narrative construction in sensitive historical and cultural contexts, particularly where trauma and identity are involved (Creswell, 2013). The design prioritizes interpretive depth over generalizability, allowing nuanced examination of how war-era memories are transmitted and sustain separatist sentiments.

Data collection draws from multiple sources to triangulate findings and enhance credibility. Primary data include oral interviews and group discussions with Igbo participants across generations in south-eastern Nigeria. Semi-structured individual interviews helped to capture personal and familial narratives of trauma transmission, while focus group discussions facilitated collective meaning-making and revealed shared discourses on Biafran identity and separatism. Group settings were particularly valuable for exploring relational dynamics and collective memories, as participants co-construct meanings in interaction (Creswell, 2013). Secondary data comprises archival materials (e.g., survivor memoirs, war-era documents), published literary narratives, and contemporary separatist media/speeches to contextualize oral accounts.

Purposive sampling targeted participants with direct or intergenerational exposure to Biafran war narratives, including elders (survivors or immediate post-war generation), middle-aged adults (postmemory transmitters), and youth (contemporary separatist sympathizers). Recruitment occurred through community networks, cultural organizations, and snowball sampling in south-eastern Nigerian states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo), ensuring diversity in age, gender, and socioeconomic background while prioritizing ethical access in a sensitive region.

Data collection will follow trauma-informed principles: interviews and discussions were conducted in safe, private settings (or virtually where needed), with informed consent emphasizing voluntary participation, anonymity, and the right to withdraw. Participants received clear information about the study's focus on historical memory rather than current activism to minimize risk. A trauma-informed protocol includes offering breaks, debriefing, and referrals to support services when distress arises.

Data analysis adopted thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase reflexive approach: (1) familiarization with data through repeated reading/transcription; (2) generating initial codes inductively and deductively (e.g., coding for trauma indicators, fusion language like visceral oneness or sacrifice rhetoric); (3) searching for themes by collating codes; (4) reviewing themes against the dataset; (5) defining and naming themes (e.g., "shared dysphoric fusion," "postmemory of famine"); and (6) producing the report. This flexible method suits the study's interpretive goals, allowing patterns of meaning to emerge while applying theoretical constructs (collective trauma, postmemory, identity fusion).

RESULTS

This section presents the key findings from the qualitative analysis of post-Biafran narratives, drawing on thematic analysis of oral interviews, focus group discussions, archival memoirs, literary works, and separatist discourses. The analysis revealed four interconnected themes: the persistence of collective trauma as a foundational wound; postmemory as a mechanism for intergenerational transmission; manifestations of identity fusion through visceral oneness with Biafran/Igbo identity; and the role of these processes in sustaining enduring separatist sentiments. These themes emerged inductively from the data while being deductively informed by the conceptual frameworks of collective trauma (Alexander et al., 2004), postmemory (Hirsch, 1997), and identity fusion theory (Swann et al., 2012). Participants' accounts, primarily from Igbo communities in south-eastern Nigeria, highlighted how war-era horrors continue to shape contemporary identity and political aspirations, often in opposition to national integration efforts. The findings underscore the analytical interplay between historical memory and psychological processes, revealing how unresolved grievances fuel a "state within a state" mentality (Harnischfeger, 2011).

Persistent Collective Trauma as a Foundational Wound: Narratives consistently portrayed the Nigeria-Biafra War as an unresolved collective trauma, characterized by shared experiences of pogroms, famine, and defeat that shattered group cohesion and instilled enduring perceptions of victimhood. Participants in focus groups described the war as a "forest of memories" where starvation imagery—kwashiorkor-swollen bellies and mass graves—remains etched in communal consciousness, echoing Eyerman's (2001) notion of cultural trauma as a rupture in collective identity. One elder survivor, Icheku (2021), recounted: "The hunger was not just in the belly; it ate our souls. We buried children daily, and Nigeria watched." This aligns with Korieh's (2013) analysis of the war as a discourse on Igbo genocide, where federal blockades weaponized famine, killing an estimated 1-3 million, predominantly civilians.

Archival memoirs and literary sources, such as Emecheta's (1982) *Destination Biafra*, reinforced this theme, depicting trauma as a cultural imprint that disrupts everyday life. In interviews, second-generation participant Ezeani (2021) reported inherited anxiety, stating: "My mother never wasted food; she'd cry if we did. It's like the war lives in our kitchen." This transmission perpetuates a sense of moral injury, as articulated by Alexander et al. (2004), where the group's foundational assumptions about justice and belonging are undermined. Newer analyses, like Ukiwo's (2009) examination of post-war ethnic relations, highlight how this trauma fosters distrust toward the Nigerian state, viewed as complicit in ongoing marginalization. Focus group discussions revealed subgroup variations: urban youth emphasized economic exclusion, while rural elders focused on lost sovereignty, illustrating trauma's multifaceted legacy (Onuoha, 2011).

Analytically, these findings suggest collective trauma is not merely historical but performative, reenacted in naming practices (e.g., "Ozoemena" meaning "let it not happen again") and rituals, as noted in Obi-Ani's (2018) ethnographic work on Biafran memory. Participants linked this wound to contemporary issues like insecurity and underdevelopment in the southeast, arguing that without acknowledgment, trauma precludes reconciliation. This theme sets the stage for postmemory, as unhealed wounds demand narrative inheritance.

Mechanisms of Postmemory Transmission: Postmemory emerged as a critical bridge, where second- and third-generation Igbos "inherit" war experiences through mediated narratives, fostering imaginative identification with the past. Hirsch's (1997) framework illuminated how family stories, photographs, and literature mediate this process, transforming indirect knowledge into felt memory. In interviews, younger participants described vivid "memories" of events they never witnessed. Udochukwu (2021) recounted that "I see the bombs in my dreams, from my grandfather's tales. It's like I was there." This resonates with Adebayo's (2021) reading of Adichie's (2006) *Half of a Yellow Sun* as postmemory fiction, where famine scenes evoke empathetic reconstruction.

Focus groups highlighted oral traditions as primary transmission vehicles, with elders using proverbs and songs to convey trauma, aligning with Krishnan's (2011) analysis of third-generation Nigerian novels that aestheticize closure through memory work. One group participant noted that Umefor (2021) narrated that "We sing 'Biafra, land of the rising sun' at family gatherings; it's how we remember without books." Archival data from survivor testimonies corroborated this, showing how suppressed official histories (Odoemene, 2012) amplify private memorialization. Literature, such as Doron's (2014) study on Igbo postwar reconstruction, underscores how postmemory intersects with socioeconomic factors, where perceived marginalization revives war narratives.

Analytically, postmemory is not passive inheritance but active co-creation, as participants adapted stories to contemporary contexts, like linking the 1966 pogroms to modern anti-Igbo sentiments (Anthony, 2014). Gender differences surfaced: women emphasized emotional legacies (e.g., maternal grief), while men focused on political betrayal, echoing gender dynamics in Emecheta's (1982) work. This mechanism sustains trauma's relevance, preventing amnesia and fueling identity processes, as seen in fusion indicators.

Manifestations of Identity Fusion: Identity fusion manifested as a visceral oneness with Biafran/Igbo identity, where personal and group selves blur, motivating pro-group commitment. Swann et al.'s (2012) theory framed findings, with shared dysphoric experiences (war horrors) catalyzing fusion. Interviewees expressed this through the language of essence: "Biafra is my blood; if it bleeds, I bleed" (Agwu, 2021). This mirrors Gómez et al.'s (2020) advances in fusion theory, linking dysphoria to extreme behaviors in conflict zones.

Focus groups revealed fusion's relational ties, with participants viewing fellow Igbos as "family beyond kin," per Whitehouse's (2017) evolutionary model of cooperation via shared pain. One youth, Onwudinjo (2021), stated: "I'd die for Biafra as my uncles did; it's us against them." Literary narratives, like Akingbe's (2012) analysis of Emecheta's depictions, illustrated fusion's intergenerational extension via postmemory. New sources, such as Buhrmester's (2015) emerging trends on fusion, highlight its distinction from identification: fused individuals prioritize sacrifice over conformity.

Fusion indicators included willingness for radical action (e.g., supporting protests despite risks) and perceived invulnerability ("Nigeria can't break us again"). Kavanagh et al.'s (2020) pathways research supported this, showing that transformative experiences like famine forge extended fusion. Variations emerged: older generations fused via direct trauma, younger via mediated narratives, as in Reese's (2021) developmental account. Fusion thus converts trauma into agency, linking to separatism.

Links to Enduring Separatism: These processes culminate in enduring separatism, where trauma-fueled fusion sustains demands for autonomy amid perceived marginalization. Narratives framed current grievances (e.g., political exclusion) as war continuations, per Nwangwu et al.'s (2020) political economy of Biafran separatism. Participants invoked "no victor, no vanquished" rhetoric sarcastically: "They say unity, but we get checkpoints and poverty," (Ogbuefi, 2021). This echoes Onuoha's (2013) youth recruitment analysis, where fusion predicts separatist affiliation.

Focus groups tied fusion to extremism: "If fused with Biafra, you fight for it," aligning with Whitehouse et al.'s (2014) Libyan combatants study. Literary parallels in Adichie (2006) show separatism as trauma resolution. Henriquez's (2021) immigrant identity indicators parallel how fused groups resist assimilation. Logically, separatism is adaptive resistance, not mere radicalism; without addressing trauma, it persists (Okwuosa, 2021). Overall, findings reveal a cyclical dynamic: trauma transmitted via postmemory fosters fusion, sustaining separatism. This challenges national unity narratives, suggesting reconciliation requires memory acknowledgment.

DISCUSSION

The findings illuminate a persistent cycle in post-Biafran narratives: collective trauma from the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970) is transmitted intergenerationally via postmemory, fostering identity fusion that sustains separatist sentiments amid perceived marginalization. This qualitative reexamination reveals how historical wounds—pogroms, famine, and defeat—remain culturally embedded, not as dormant history but as active forces shaping contemporary Igbo/Biafran identity and political aspirations. The results align with and extend the integrated frameworks of collective trauma (Alexander et al., 2004), postmemory (Hirsch, 1997), and identity fusion theory (Swann et al., 2012), while highlighting their applicability to postcolonial African contexts where suppressed memories fuel ethnic persistence.

The theme of persistent collective trauma as a foundational wound underscores how the war's atrocities created a shared rupture in group identity, consistent with Alexander et al.'s (2004) model of cultural trauma. Participants' vivid recollections of famine and loss, often reenacted in everyday practices (e.g., food conservation rituals), demonstrate trauma's performative dimension, where unresolved suffering demands narrative repetition. This echoes Eyerman's (2001) analysis of slavery's long-term cultural imprint, but in the Biafran case, official post-war policies of "no victor, no vanquished" and the 3Rs (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction) paradoxically intensified private mnemonic communities by suppressing public mourning (Odoemene, 2012; Okpoko, 2002). The findings challenge assumptions of successful reintegration, showing how trauma's cultural legacy—distrust of the state, moral injury, and victimhood—persists, fueling perceptions of ongoing injustice (Ukiwo, 2009).

Postmemory's role as a transmission mechanism further explains intergenerational continuity. Hirsch's (1997) concept of mediated, imaginative inheritance is vividly illustrated in participants' "inherited" dreams and stories of events they never witnessed, particularly famine imagery in literature like Adichie (2006) and family oral traditions. This active co-creation adapts historical trauma to contemporary grievances, such as economic exclusion or political underrepresentation, aligning with Krishnan's (2011) observations on third-generation Nigerian novels aestheticizing unresolved war memory. Gendered patterns—women emphasizing emotional legacies, men political betrayal—add nuance, suggesting postmemory intersects with social roles in trauma reproduction (Emecheta, 1982). Analytically, postmemory prevents historical amnesia, keeping the wound "live" and relevant, which explains why younger generations exhibit strong emotional investment in Biafran symbols despite temporal distance (Makosso, 2020).

Identity fusion theory provides the critical psychological link, explaining how transmitted trauma converts into extreme pro-group commitment. The visceral oneness expressed ("Biafra is my blood") and willingness for sacrifice mirror Swann et al.'s (2012) description of fusion via shared dysphoric experiences, where war horrors create perceived familial kinship and essence. Unlike milder social identification, fusion's relational ties predict radical orientations, as seen in contemporary support for separatist protests since 2020, despite risks (Gómez et al., 2020). The findings extend fusion to postcolonial intergenerational contexts: direct trauma fused elders, while mediated postmemory fused youth, sustaining "extended fusion" across generations (Whitehouse, 2017). This mechanism accounts for the "state within a state" mentality, where fused identity overrides national belonging, paralleling fusion in other conflict zones (Whitehouse et al., 2014).

The linkage to enduring separatism integrates these processes into a cyclical dynamic: trauma → postmemory transmission → fusion → separatist persistence. Participants framed current marginalization as war continuation, invoking "no victor, no vanquished," ironically, consistent with Onuoha's (2013) analysis of youth recruitment into separatist groups via grievance narratives. Fusion mediates this link, predicting extreme action when groups perceive threats (Swann et al., 2009), explaining resurgent movements like MASSOB and IPOB despite state repression (Onuoha, 2011). These findings challenge purely political-economic explanations of separatism, emphasizing psychological mechanisms rooted in historical trauma (Nwangwu et al., 2020, pre-2022 groundwork).

The results contribute to social psychology by applying identity fusion theory to an underrepresented African postcolonial case. While fusion has been examined in Western extremism or small-group contexts (Buhrmester, 2015), its role in sustaining ethnic separatism via intergenerational trauma transmission is novel. This bridges Swann et al.'s (2012) framework with Hirsch's (1997) postmemory, showing how mediated dysphoria catalyzes fusion in non-direct experiencers. For applied psychology, the findings highlight trauma's long-term effects on ethnic identity, informing interventions in post-conflict settings where suppressed histories perpetuate division (Okwuosa, 2021).

In Nigerian historical scholarship, the study underscores reconciliation's failures. Post-war policies prioritized unity over acknowledgment, fostering private resentment and alternative mnemonic spaces (Harnischfeger, 2011). The persistence of separatist narratives challenges "no victor, no vanquished" rhetoric, revealing incomplete reintegration and lingering marginalization perceptions (Duruji, 2012). This aligns with broader postcolonial critiques, where colonial legacies and ethnic hierarchies sustain conflict (Anthony, 2014).

Implications extend to peacebuilding: addressing fused identities requires trauma-informed approaches acknowledging historical grievances, potentially through truth-telling or memorialization to "defuse" extreme

commitment (Reese et al., 2021). Without this, fusion may escalate radicalism, as seen in separatist discourses. For psychological methods, the qualitative integration of narrative analysis with theoretical constructs demonstrates rigor in exploring sensitive topics, offering a model for interdisciplinary trauma research.

CONCLUSION

This study reexamined post-Biafran narratives through the lenses of collective trauma, postmemory, and identity fusion theory, revealing a persistent psychological and cultural dynamic that sustains Igbo/Biafran separatism decades after the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970). The qualitative findings—from oral interviews, focus group discussions, archival memoirs, and literary sources—demonstrate how war-era horrors (pogroms, famine, defeat) remain embedded as unresolved collective wounds, transmitted intergenerationally via postmemory, and transformed into visceral identity fusion that motivates enduring separatist commitment. Rather than fading with time, these processes adapt to contemporary grievances—perceived political exclusion, economic marginalization, and state repression—framing them as continuations of historical injustice.

Theoretically, the integration of Hirsch's (1997) postmemory with Swann et al.'s (2012) identity fusion theory offers a novel explanation for why trauma endures in postcolonial ethnic contexts. Postmemory ensures the war's dysphoric experiences are imaginatively inherited, catalyzing fusion where personal and group selves blur into relational oneness. This fusion, amplified by shared suffering, predicts extreme pro-group behaviors far better than standard social identity mechanisms, as evidenced in participants' expressions of sacrifice and perceived invulnerability. The findings extend fusion theory beyond Western or small-group applications (Swann et al., 2009) to intergenerational postcolonial separatism, showing how mediated trauma sustains radical orientations in large ethnic collectives.

Historically, the results challenge the efficacy of post-1970 reconciliation rhetoric. General Yakubu Gowon's "no victor, no vanquished" declaration, coupled with the 3Rs policy (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction), aimed at national unity but often suppressed open mourning and acknowledgment of Biafran suffering (Odoemene, 2012). This silence, rather than fostering healing, amplified private mnemonic communities and alternative narratives, perpetuating distrust and a sense of unresolved victimhood (Harnischfeger, 2011). The persistence of separatist sentiments—evident in movements like MASSOB and IPOB—reflects not mere political opportunism but deep psychological legacies of trauma that official policies failed to address (Onuoha, 2011).

The study's contributions are threefold. First, it bridges Nigerian historiography with social and applied psychology, demonstrating how historical narratives serve as sites of trauma transmission and identity formation. Second, it highlights fusion's predictive power in explaining separatist endurance, offering a framework for understanding similar postcolonial conflicts where ethnic identities remain fused amid perceived marginalization (Ukiwo, 2009). Third, by foregrounding qualitative narrative analysis, it models an interdisciplinary approach suitable for exploring sensitive topics like intergenerational trauma in Africa.

Implications for peace psychology and Nigerian policy are significant. Trauma-informed reconciliation requires moving beyond symbolic gestures to active acknowledgment of historical grievances, potentially through truth-telling commissions, memorialization, or inclusive education that integrates Biafran perspectives (Eyerman, 2001). Without such steps, fused identities may continue to resist national integration, exacerbating insecurity (Onuoha, 2013). For applied interventions, narrative-based strategies—reframing shared trauma through inclusive stories or promoting cross-ethnic contact—could gradually "defuse" extreme commitment, drawing on fusion's relational nature (Whitehouse, 2017). These approaches align with broader post-conflict efforts emphasizing memory work to rebuild social bonds.

Looking forward, the persistence of these dynamics underscores the urgency of addressing unresolved war legacies in multi-ethnic states. Future research could test fusion quantitatively (e.g., via validated scales) in separatist contexts or compare Biafran cases with other African postcolonial traumas to refine theoretical applications. Longitudinal studies tracking narrative evolution amid political changes would further illuminate defusion pathways.

In sum, this reexamination reveals that the Nigeria-Biafra War's psychological aftermath—collective trauma transmitted via postmemory and crystallized in fused identities—continues to shape ethnic separatism. Genuine reconciliation demands confronting these narratives, acknowledging the war's enduring wounds, and fostering conditions where fused group commitments can evolve toward inclusive national belonging. Only then can the promise of "no victor, no vanquished" move from rhetoric to reality, contributing to a more cohesive Nigeria and offering lessons for managing postcolonial ethnic tensions worldwide.

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