

# Abstract: Forgotten wars: The conflict about Biafra 1967-1970

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The conflict about the Nigerian region Biafra (1967-1970) is the topic of this paper which also traces the characteristics from the colonial past until today. Former Biafra has not been forgotten, although the meanwhile more than 20 millions of Igbo of the 21<sup>st</sup> century do not strive for a state of their own any longer. General Gowon's policy was not to take revenge on the defeated and not to punish them, and this has presumably put a stop to further tides of refugees and possibly has prevented a Diaspora of Igbo. The deep sores left by the conflict more than 40 years ago in Nigeria, however, heal slowly, and recovery is difficult. Many Igbo of Nigeria still feel underprivileged today. Modern Nigerian literature reflects the trauma the Biafra conflict meant for hundreds of thousands. The most famous representative of Nigerian literature is Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka of the Yoruba tribe. In 1967 he had been arrested by Nigerian authorities because he had spoken up for reconciliation of the two parties in the civil war. During his stay in prison, which lasted for nearly two years, he wrote his *Poems from Prison*, which made him renowned all over the world and, together with political pressure from the West, resulted in the release of Soyinka after 22 months of solitary confinement. In 1986 Soyinka, as the first representative of African literature, was granted the Nobel Prize. Even today many people in Nigeria still model themselves on their tribe and their ethnic group rather than on the state, which in the end is a home country determined by foreigners for so many different ethnic groups in the Niger region. The former national director for culture, the historian Garba Ashiwaju, who died in 2000, tried to explain in an interview why tribalism still exists: *"The individual must fall back on his own ethnic group, he has no choice. The state is too weak; it does not offer protection to him. Europe needed more than 150 years to develop trustworthy civil servants. Only when we have established such governmental structures the individual will be able to say, I am not Yoruba, Hausa or Ibo, but a Nigerian!"*

