The Nigerian Civil War remains controversial due to the absence of a nationally accepted narrative. More importantly, beyond the battlefield, there was a (mis)information war between the federal military government and Biafra that continued to shape the knowledge production about the war. Reciprocal dismissal of reports as propaganda by the belligerents permeated the war period and had implications in obscuring facts about the war. Jonathan Derrick’s *Biafra in the News* is a reminiscence of the Nigerian Civil War as seen from West Africa’s London news desk at the time and an analysis of the veracity of these reports in the light of new evidence. Despite volumes of books published, as early as 1969, on different aspects of the war by diverse stakeholders, *Biafra in the News* is in a class of its own; it is a work of validation and rebuttal, “a book full of words of praise and blame” (p. xv).

Derrick gives a broad sweep of significant events on Biafra in eight unequal chronological chapters written in a public-friendly style. The first two chapters, “Nigeria: Build-up to the Crisis” and “1966: The Year of Self Destruction,” present a background to the actors, events, and reactions that culminated in Biafran secession. The third chapter, “The Break-up,” explores the Aburi Accord, which was meant to de-escalate the tension between the conflicting parties, its transgression, and the eventual declaration of the Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra. The following four chapters examine different phases of the war, covering starvation, retreats, diplomatic recognition of Biafra, propaganda wars, arms sales, relief airlift, protests, and demonstrations. The last chapter, “Nigerian Victory and Reconciliation,” recounts Biafra’s surrender, rehabilitation, and reconciliation and the systemic postconflict neglect of the Igbos in the Nigerian polity. Specifically, Derrick zooms in on the controversial issues that have plagued the history of the war, such as Biafran propaganda and starvation; French arms supply;
the role of journalists, aid workers, and the clergy in the war; British arms sales; and relief airlift.

Derrick uses a variety of sources to validate his claims on genocide, famine, and the roles of national governments and relief agencies. His analysis relies on articles and editorials, the bulk of which were published in *West Africa*; books and memoirs on the war; private conversations; and a few archival documents. Interestingly, Derrick oversaw the readers' letters page throughout the war (1967-70). He had the opportunity to read most of the letters that conveyed people's reactions to events in Nigeria, including those that did not make it to print (pp. 26-27)—all these shaped Derrick's rounded analysis of the Nigerian Civil War.

Derrick refutes the ideas of Pro-Nigerian supporters in London, “still sometimes heard even today,” suggesting that the “Biafrans were manipulating and deceiving the world through the reports of starvation” (p. 142). He argues that the global sympathy that followed the report of starvation in Biafra was not propaganda or a “PR operation; it was the facts that horrified the world” (p. 145). He further argues that the inflated reputation of Markpress, a Geneva-based PR firm as the coordinator of the global publicity of the Biafran famine, is unfounded. The reports of journalists, aid workers, and the clergy who visited Biafra created global awareness and humanitarian support for Biafra. In fact, “Biafran authority had not wanted the famine condition reported in the world's press ... they had wanted to show that they were coping” (p. 142).

Derrick also addresses the claim that the federal troops carried out genocide. He clarifies the difference between war crimes and genocide; war crimes include mass killings, but differ from genocide, planned “mass murder of a people with the aim of complete or overwhelming destruction of that people” (p. 179). In the case of Nigeria, Derrick states that many massacres, though not defensible, do not make a genocide. While recognizing the atrocities of federal troops, he argues these were war crimes but were not genocide (p. 179). On the other hand, Derrick admits there were cases of atrocities by the Biafrans on the minority groups of Biafra. He also confirms the French arms supply to Biafra through the Gaulle-Foccart operations via Ivory Coast and Gabon (pp. 172-176).

Unlike most retrospective works, Derrick avoided the trap of presentism. He based his analysis of Nigerian policies and the causes of the war on the events and reactions of the period and did not import contemporary developments to explain the past. For instance, Derrick notes that religious plurality is not a cause of civil strife, irrespective of the claim to the contrary during the war and Nigeria's current unrest in northern Nigeria. However, Derrick's use of partisan words such as “sheer nonsense” and “assassins” in describing the alleged involvement of British staff in the May attacks on Easterners and the January Fifteenth coup plotters, respectively, may undermine his declared disinterestedness, especially when read by a biased reader (pp. 50, 41). Notwithstanding, *Biafra in the News* is a dispassionate book about the Nigerian Civil War.

Derrick summarizes Biafra, touching virtually every aspect of the Biafran nation and its war effort. Derrick familiarizes his readers with the politics and processes of news production about Biafra. For instance, Derrick regrets missed opportunities, such as the Asaba Massacre, in reporting facts about the war and misleading descriptions of events. What about other reporters and editors who are silent about their misdeeds and whose articles scholars still quote? Scholars responding to Derrick's call for a “large-scale historical project” on the Nigerian Civil War should be cautious about overreliance on newspaper and magazine sources without corroboration and validation (p. 314).

In all, *Biafra in News* primarily validates the Biafran famine and French clandestine arms sup-
ply to Biafra, while refuting that the federal troops 
carried out genocide, as well as the claim that 
Markpress led the global publicity of the Biafran 
famine. While *Biafra in the News* is presumably 
written for the popular audience, it is invaluable 
to scholars investigating different aspects of the 
Nigerian Civil War. This is a good read; readers 
will find it rewarding.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at 
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