THE IMPACT OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR ON OWERRI(1969-2023)

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this work was carried out by **OLIVE ONYINYECHI EBUZOR** in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, Benin City.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to God Almighty for his support and guidance throughout my stay in the university from 100level to my Finals and to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Apostle Ebuzor for their love, prayers and support throughout my years of schooling in the University of Benin.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

War is an organized large-scale conflict between countries or national, ethnic, or other sizable groups, usually involving the engagement of military forces. As a form of conflict, it is a part and parcel of life and it can be said that just as peace is as old as the humankind, war is as old as creation. Conflicts are disagreements between individuals, groups and even sometimes nation states. In the case of nation states and ethnic groups, a mismanaged conflict may lead to actual warfare. Thus, conflict could be regarded as a fore-runner to actual warfare. Evidently, war disrupts society by causing massive displacements of people, devastation of economies and interruption of societal programme.

A civil war is a conflict between groups within a single country, like the American Civil War between the north and south. Most wars are fought between different countries. However, in a civil war, a country has become divided, and factions within the country are battling each other. Therefore a civil war is a war between organized groups within the same state or country in which the aim of one side may be to take control of the country or a region, to achieve independence for a region, or to change government policies.[1]

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The Nigerian Civil War (6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970), also known as the Nigerian–Biafran War or the Biafran War, was a civil war fought between Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state which had declared its independence from

Nigeria in 1967. Nigeria was led by General Yakubu Gowon, while Biafra was led by Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka "Emeka" Odumegwu Ojukwu[24]. Biafra represented the nationalist aspirations of the Igbo ethnic group, whose leadership felt they could no longer coexist with the federal government dominated by the interests of the Muslim Hausa-Fulanis of Northern Nigeria[23].

The conflict resulted from political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions which preceded the United Kingdom's formal decolonization of Nigeria from 1960 to 1963. Remote causes of the war in 1966 included a military coup, a counter-coup, and anti-Igbo pogroms in Northern Nigeria while amongst the immediate causes was the Aburi accord. Control over the lucrative oil production in the Niger Delta also played a vital strategic role, and was a factor in the strong French support for Biafra[9]. In Nigeria and its surrounding region, long-standing regional stresses ethnic competitiveness, educational inequality, and economic imbalance being the most prominent again came to the fore in a controversial census during 1962–1963. In an attempt to stave off ethnic conflict, Nigeria's Mid-West region was created in 1963 by dividing the Western region.

Despite this division, the country still was segmented into three large geographic regions, each of which was essentially controlled by an ethnic group: the west by the Yoruba people, the east by the Igbo people, and the north by the Hausa-Fulani people. Conflicts were endemic, as regional leaders protected their privileges; the south complained of northern domination, and the north feared that the southern elite was bent on capturing power. In the west the government had fallen apart in 1962, and a boycott of the federal election of December 1964 brought Nigeria to the brink of breakdown.[18]

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess the impact of the Nigerian civil war on Owerri.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows;

i. To present the historical origin and geography of people of Owerri before the Civil War;
ii. Examine the war in Owerri and the strategies adopted by the people during the Nigerian Civil War;
iii. Assess the impact and survival of the Owerri people during and after the Nigerian Civil War.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the impact of the Civil War on the Political and Socio-Economic life of Owerri in Imo State from 1969 to 2023.The choice of 1969 as the takeoff date of this study is historically important because this marked the beginning of the Nigerian Civil War on Owerri which ended in January, 1970. On the other hand, the terminal period of the study in 2023 is significant as for the past 54 years, Nigeria continues to confront multiple threats within and across the territory towards its unity, with insecurity deepening in northern and southern parts of the country till date. Therefore, the country is characterized by the struggle to reestablish its lost identity.

The major research areas are these towns in Owerri: Uratta, Emekuku, Emii, Egbu, Agbala, Naze, obidiezena, Ihittaogada, Ulakwo, including Communities like Umuchima and Ebikoro Communuties which suffered immensely during the Nigerian Civil War.

Significance of the Study

This study will enrich the growing corpus of literature on the Nigerian Civil War, thereby advancing the historiography on the Nigerian Civil War. It will be further

beneficial for further historical research on Owerri especially on the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on the Owerri people as a significant theater of the Civil War. This is because the research will provide an insight into the historical study of the socio-political and economic life of the people. So, this study intends to investigate the impact of the Civil War on Owerri people, as what remains to be studied is the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on Owerri people who were greatly affected by the war especially the women to avoid being treated as part of the neglected aspects of the civil war on Igboland.

The Federal Government of Nigeria would equally benefit from this research work as it would provide thoughts on policy formulation to address the lingering ethnic rivalry and political imbalance plaguing the Nigerian political system. It is hoped that the work will be beneficial to aid agencies in the execution of humanitarian in the crisis ridden areas, especially in the care of the war victims. This work will also help individual readers to appreciate and encourage self-oriented survival strategies. This work is micro-focal, thus presenting a voice from below, distinct from the generalizations in the general literature that glosses over the grassroots dimension of the Nigerian Civil War.

Methodology

The study is a historical research which utilized primary and secondary sources in gathering data for the study. This study is examined and analyzed using archival data preserved by the government as well as up to date journals, literature review articles and books. Articles were also found manually from references of the selected articles, which much helped the researcher to save time while searching for sources of information and data for the study.

However, it was difficult to locate the exact articles for the study because of limited synonymous words related to this study. As a result, much time was spent searching the right articles and reading the abstracts.

Primary Sources: The primary data was gathered through archival materials and oral interviews by soliciting responses from witnesses of the Nigerian Civil War. The respondents were drawn from within and outside Owerri LGA. Owerri is the major subject of study with a comparative analysis of other communities. The respondents include both men and women, especially some ex-military personnel who participated in the war within the study area.

Secondary Sources: The secondary sources are drawn from articles in journals, newspapers, magazines, published and unpublished materials, internet materials and library materials that center on the subject matter. The research is aware of the weaknesses of each of the sources. On the whole, with an interdisciplinary approach the research has been able to utilize the qualitative method of data collection for the presentation of the outcome of the study.

Literature Review

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In the course of study, several extant works which contain relevant information in our area of study were consulted. Some of the works were useful by providing a background information to this study, others had obvious limitations and remain mere reference materials to the present study. It describes, summarizes, evaluates, clarifies, and

integrates the previous research works. Such extant literature indicates that the Nigerian civil war spanned a period of 30 months. Throughout this period of war, scholars have written volumes on the subject in varying degrees of relevance.

In Chukwuma Osakwe and Lawrence Udeagbala's article titled: "Owerri in the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970"[6], provide a detailed chronological account of the Federal troop operations in the South Eastern Region from Calabar, Umuahia and Owerri which became a special target. In this regard, they opine that the capture of Owerri would guarantee the victory of the Federal military Government, and for the Biafran forces, the defence of Owerri would ensure the safety of Ojukwu and the sovereignty of Biafra. However, they stress the devastating nature of the battle in Owerri while laying claim to the argument of genocidal plan especially with the indiscriminate bombing targeted on the civilian population[7]. This article captures significant events in the Nigerian Civil War and its devastating effects especially in Owerri but no reference was made to the Owerri women who also suffered greatly during the period of the war.

In Chinua Achebe's book titled: *There was a country. A Personal History of Biafra*[2], he discusses the pre-independent and post-independent atmosphere of Nigeria which was characterized by crisis. These crises and the military coups of 1966 eventually led to the civil war which Achebe refers to as "the dark days"[2]. The author describes the conflict as an infamous one for its savage impact on the Biafrans. This was characterized by starvation and death as a result of the blockade of the region from every external link. Achebe upholds that the gravity of disaster and dehumanizing effects of the war on the

Igbo cannot be less than a planned and programmed genocidal attempt on the region by the Nigeria military troop. The author believes that neither Gowon nor Ojukwu were the right leaders for that desperate time as the both failed to make appropriate and wise decisions throughout the conflict and missed several opportunities when compromise could have saved the day. This work relates to this present study as it records the change of the last administrative seat before the end of the war, from Umuahia after it fell to Owerri which eventually fell.

Mr. Siollun in his book titled: *Nigeria Is Haunted by Its Civil War*, portrays that the conflict's legacy continues to hold the country captive, half a century later[4]. It simultaneously brings the country together and pushes it apart. He states that in the early aftermath of the war, the country appeared to be unified and reconciliation was remarkably rapid despite the war's shocking human tragedy. He argues that the government declared a general amnesty for wartime combatants, refused to punish either those who led the secession or those who suppressed it and did not give medals to any soldiers who fought in the so-called Brothers' War.[21] Asserting that in the rush to "forgive and forget" after the war, Nigeria skipped key questions about its purpose, its form and its destiny. Barely a year goes by without an Igbo author publishing a book about the war. One of the most successful African novels of the past 15 years, *Half a yellow sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, tells the story of the civil war from a distinctly Biafran perspective[26].

The author upholds that the history written not by the war's winners but by its losers has become yet another means of division. There was no official narrative of what

happened, nor an appraisal of lessons learned from it. This article tends to explore the ignorance of the government and the grievances of the war victims in relation to this present work but fails to examine the economic and political legacy of the war on Owerri women which is the main thrust of the present study.

Ibrahim Haruna in his book titled: *The Nigerian Civil War: Causes and Courses*[5], analyses the historical development of the Nigerian Civil War, by tracing its remote and immediate causes. According to the author, the root causes of the war can be traced to the policy of indirect rule and the 1914 amalgamation[18]. He argues that this policy exalted ethnicity which became an inherited legacy by the post-independence politics of Nigeria. Hence, it was politics characterized by tribal and regionalistic interests. He observes that the Nigerian Civil War was a culmination of crises that bedeviled the nation, ranging from the Kano riot, Gboko uprising, the Western region election crisis, the coups of 1966 and the declaration of the Republic of Biafra by Ojukwu[5]. Thus, this article is in correlation with this study as it examines the causes of the civil war.

Similarly, in Adrianna Simwa's article titled "Nigerian Civil War effects on the economy of Nigeria"[9] She states that the war outcomes still echo in the present as the Nigerian civil war effects are still present in the life of all citizens as the war brought about a staggering number of deaths and disabled people. She argues that there are two kinds of aftermaths which are those which slow down the economy right away such as the shutting down of educational establishments, the majority of industrial plants stopped functioning, unemployment leading to starvation, increase in the level of crimes, constant marauding of ravaged entrepreneurs, prices immensely increased, millions of children

became orphans, and those that are they are still “alive” and keep worsening the economic situation such as the Gross Domestic Product and trade was smashed by the direct aftermaths, large streams of refugees left Nigeria, the health condition of the nation worsened. She further opines that the dissatisfaction with life prompted riots and criminal activities, lawlessness became a norm of life and to sum it up, the government couldn’t immediately change the situation for the better as it will take decades to stabilize GDP, trade, and law[9]. This article captures the explicit events toward the negative impacts of the Civil War but made no reference to Owerri which was greatly affected by the war.

Abubakar Atofarati in his article titled “Nigeria Civil War: Causes, Strategies and Lessons Learnt”[8], explores the link between colonialism and the Nigeria Civil War by exposing the causal variable. He argues that colonial economic interests beclouded the moral conscience of the people without recourse to the unity of the country. Such consideration made the unity of Nigeria elusive for the only thing the people had in common which was the name of their country since each side had different administrative set-up. Atofarati therefore concludes that, the Nigeria Civil War was a war of reintegration and reunification of the country, anchoring his argument on the creation of the 12 new states by General Gowon[8]. On the contrary, what the author calls reintegration through state creation was rather a territorial expansion of the country. It is obvious that the state creation preceded the war and could not have aimed at reuniting the nation. Notably, he gives an imbalanced lesson of the war by focusing on the ineffective military strategies and failures with no lesson for the civilian population who were part of the war tragedies.

Similarly, Benjamin Maiangwa in his article titled, "Revisiting the Nigeria-Biafra War. The Intangibles of Post-War Reconstruction"[10], focuses on the causes of the war tracing them to ethnicity and economic interest, especially oil[8]. He linked the State creation with the Federal Military Government's quest to control the nation's oil wealth on the Eastern region. Contrary to Atofarati's view which rather emphasizes reunification, Maiangwa argues that the war was for survival.[11] Using the pogrom which was targeted on the Easterners in northern Nigeria as an illustration, the article justifies the claim of the war and the cause for the secession of Biafra. He also mentions that the post-war policy (3Rs) was faulty in its entirety[19] stressing that the failure of the implementation of this policy created a "trans-generational transmission of trauma", among the Igbo.

He anchors his argument on the notion that the agitation of young Igbo people contesting their "place" within the Nigerian state was largely the result of the absence of adaptive solutions to their transmitted trauma from the post-war reconstruction policies[12]. He opines that the policies were anti-Igbo on these bases Abandoned Property Decree, Twenty Pounds Policy of Compensation of the Igbo and the Indigenization Decree. This work captures an aspect of this present study as it examines the failures of the post-civil war policy(3Rs) on Owerri people.

In Iweze D.O and Anyanwu's article titled "Post-Nigerian Civil War Community Reconstruction Strategies in Anioma Western Igboland"[22], explore the dynamics of community self-help reconstruction strategies adopted by the Anioma people in the post-civil war era, asserting that the survival instinct of the Anioma people motivated the adoption of communal self-help activities. They opine that these

community development approaches in collaboration with governments and international agencies helped to improve their post-war conditions in Anioma. They believe the promulgators of the 3Rs (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration), to some extent lacked genuine commitment and political will in the implementation of the post-civil war reconstruction programme, as Igboland is still in therefore being properly reconstructed.[10] The programme was implemented in a manner that reflected the pattern of marginalization and injustice to the Igbopeople who were exposed to military operations and killings.[19] This article explores an intriguing aspect of this study on the post-civil reconstruction programme of the government, but differs from this study as its focus is on the Anioma people. There is a need to examine the impact of the war on Owerri people.

In Pat Utomi's article titled "Honest Conversation Would Have Prevented Civil War", argues that the Nigerian Civil War that claimed about two million lives was completely unnecessary.[13] Utomi opines that honest conversation would have avoided the tragic incident, that the Nigerian civil war was completely unnecessary and the path of progress that the country was traveling could have continued.[14] Speaking further, Utomi decries the presidential system of government the country currently operates, on a four-year single term basis which is modeled after the United States does not work to promote the good initial intentions as many of the decisions taken as a country then to prevent what went wrong have actually taken us back as a people. The idea of a presidential system is to select one person who is literally owned by all but what has happened unfortunately is the creation of a bloated expensive political process that really does not work to advance

the good that the people want[13]. This article is in correlation with this present study as he examines the efforts made to reconcile Nigerians which have had limited impact because they were not consistently pushed by the authorities. However, his work differs from this study in terms of focus and geography as he focuses on the Prevention of the Nigerian Civil War and the Political Structure of Nigeria.

Obi Iwuagwu, in his article titled: "Food Shortages, Survival Strategies and the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria during the Nigerian Civil War"[15], examines the role of Igbo food economy during the war. He opines that the Nigerian Civil War has several consequences on the Igbo economy especially on the disruption of food production system in Eastern Nigeria. He attributes this to the influx of refugees, total economic blockade, mobilization of men and materials for the Biafran army, military operation resulting in population displacement and the capture of food surplus areas of the Cross River basin.[16] Accordingly, this situation and its attendant challenges were followed by a response or strategies for survival. Thus, the food shortage caused by the war led to new discoveries and incorporation of new crop species into the Igbo food economy. The view of Obi Iwuagwu captures an aspect of this study, especially on the hunger survival strategies, even though it was from the macro-economic dimension. Thus, this study is set to contextualize this aspect of the war into the Owerri North war experiences.

In Paul Obi-Ani's work titled: *Post-Civil War Social and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland*[19], states that the reconstruction policy of incorporating the Igbo into the Nigerian fold by Gowon was a mere official pronouncement that was not put into practice. He further explains that the Igbo are being marginalized in the political affairs

of the nation, asserting that the 3Rs reforms of Gowon were not of great benefit to the Igbo as the policies declared after the war were meant to dominate the Igbo. The author maintains that the post-civil reconstruction program was a "double-edged sword" which further increased the suffering of the Igbo after the war.[20] The Igbo greatly suffered during the war as the number of deaths was huge. This book is relevant to the present study as it examines the impact of the Nigerian Civil War especially on Owerri, where records show about 46 people died in the Owerri General Hospital of Hepatitis during and after the war.[19] However, this book differs from this study in scope and focus, as it focuses on the post-civil war social and economic reconstruction of Igboland, while this study focuses on the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on Owerri people.

In Madiebo's work titled: *The Nigerian revolution and the Biafran War*[17], presents an account of the events of the Nigerian civil war, 1966-70 states dispassionately why army officers toppled the civil government in the cause of stability, and the considerable civilian support they received; and the ensuing riots and counter-coup, in the name of reunification, which led to a civil war claiming some three million lives. He presents eye-witness accounts, and from an insider-perspective tells the story of how and why the Biafrans fought the war for almost three years under blockade and in isolation from the outside world, aiming to rectify much perceived misinformation about the war published outside Africa. As a retired Biafran general, his work is based on his account of the segmented part of the war unlike this study which focuses on the broad scope of the civil war on Owerri.

Okonkwo Chris Eze in his book titled: *The Nigerian Civil War and External Forces 1966-1970*[3], focuses on the link between colonialism, constitutional evolution in Nigeria and the civil war.[3] He argues that the colonial administrative system was ethnic and regionalistic in nature and as a result, the formations of political parties were geographically based. Evidently, this situation created political instability and the consequent agitations for independence by the minority ethnic groups which the author indicates was due to the infiltration of tribalism and ethnicity in the military and the Nigeria political system.[3] Thus, this study gives a historical foundation on the causes of the civil war focusing on colonialism but differs as it pays no attention toward the impact of the civil war on Owerri. This work fills a significant gap as it focuses and examines the historical records and contributions to the discussion on the Impacts of the civil war on Owerri North and Owerri women.

It can be seen from the reviewed works, that most of them focused on the Nigerian civil war in other towns and villages in Igboland, others looked at the Post Reconstruction Programmes in the Igboland, but no study has been specifically focused on the impact of the war on Owerri people who suffered and were greatly affected during and after the war. It is this gap in the history of the civil war that this study intends to fill.

Chapterization

Chapter One: Background of the study

This chapter examines the background of the study, observes the aim and objectives of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, methodology and literature review.

Chapter Two: Owerri Land and People before the Civil War

This chapter examines the geographical, historical and political background of Owerri before the war. It goes further to reveal the growth of the Owerri people in their social institutions and economic activities.

Chapter Three: Outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War on Owerri (1967-1970)

This chapter examines the background and outbreak of the civil war in Owerri. This chapter also assesses Owerri during the war.

Chapter Four: Impact of the Civil War on Owerri (1967-2021)

This chapter analyzes the various impacts and effects of the civil war on Owerri people. This chapter also examines the means of survival of the Owerri people after the war.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This is the concluding chapter which gives a general summary of the entire work and gives contributions on how the civil war was handled.

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CHAPTER TWO

OWERRI PEOPLE BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

Introduction

This chapter intends to discuss the Owerri people before the Nigerian Civil War. Owerri is the capital city of Imo State in Nigeria, set in the heart of Igboland. It is also the state's largest city, followed by Orlu, Okigwe and Ohaji/Egbema. Owerri consists of three Local Government Areas including Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West, it has an estimated population of about 1,401,873 as of 2016 and is approximately 100 square kilometres (40sq mi) in area.[4] The histories of many Igbo groups, as rich as they are have however, remained in the memories of individuals and groups as legends, folk lores, myths and oral tradition etc.

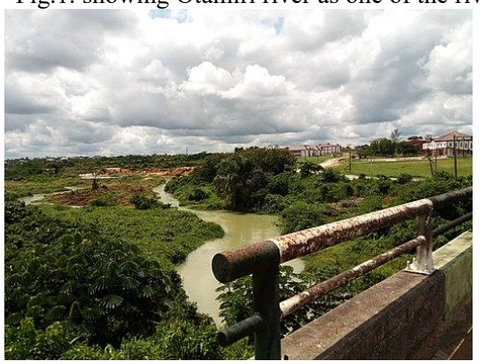
Interestingly though, as time goes by without any efforts to extract these histories from groups and individual memories and have them documented on pages of books, the possibility of their being lost is imminent.[5] This is so because age and time have a natural way of inducing loss of memory in man. Once this happens, society and individuals especially current and future generations of people whose previous generations were affected by the tragic event of lost memory become victims of lost histories. Indeed, the reasons for this scholarly investigation into the histories of Owerri and its people is to collect and document, for present and future references, the histories of the people of Owerri especially their migratory and settlement histories as well as the journey of Owerri from rudimentary stage in the era of colonialism to a full blown city as the capital of Imo State.[6]

Geographical Location of Owerri

Owerri is bordered by the “Otamiri River” to the east and the “Nworie River” to the south. The Owerri Slogan is “Heartland”.[32] Owerri is a land approached as you descend hills.There are two rivers:- Nworie on the West flank while Otamiri Is on the Southern flank. The two rivers influenced the culture of the people, Owerri people do not fish in Nworie River but do so in Otamiri River, they do not eat fish from Nworie River. The source of Nworie river had a deposit of Emerald a precious solid mineral but not in commercial quantity. There is also Lake Nwebere at Imo State University, Owerri.

Owerri people were subsistence farmers but have since abandoned farming when it became a State capital in 1976 and the arable lands acquired by government for other development projects.[2]

”Fig.1. showing Otamiri river as one of the rivers in owerri, imo State Nigeria”.



Source: *ResearchGate*. Retrieved 4 September 2023

"Fig 2. Map of Nworie River

Source: *ResearchGate*. Retrieved 2018-06-21.

Owerri is located in the south western part of Imo State, shared boundary on the north and north east with Mbaise and Ikeduru local Government Areas, on the south and south east with Ngor Okpala, on its west end was Ohaji/Egbema and Oguta Local Government Areas. It included the five clans of the original Owerri people of Umuonyeche, Umuororonjo, Oyima, Amawom and Umuodu. It also included some parts of Mbaitoli, Owerri West, Owerri north and the whole of Owerri Municipal Council. The entire land area of Owerri Capital Territory was fifteen Kilometers radius beginning from Owerri Municipal as its core area. In terms of Geography and climate, Owerri Capital Territory had boundaries with Owerri North Local Government and Owerri West Local Government. The area was located within the rain forest belt of Nigeria, with temperature of about 200c to 360c.[8] The area had two major seasons which were the wet season which began in April and ended roughly in October. The dry season which was the second season began mid October to March. The area's Texture type varied from the plaine lands to the hills and Wetland around Nworie and Otamiri River which flowed

across Owerri Municipality through Nekede and Ihiagwa. These two rivers were important land marks of Owerri.

The areas geographically described above have many landmarks and a few mineral resources. The area also was largely endowed with modern social infrastructures such as roads, pipe born water, electricity, schools, hospitals and tourism industries such as hotels, Odenigbo centre, and Mbari cultural centre. The entire Owerri was before colonialism in large expanse of agricultural field subjected to intensive self subsistence farming, with yields that were adequate to keep families going and little left for exchange. This area however began to witness the influx of migrant elements from within her neighbouring villages such as Mbaise, Mbaitoli, Uwala, Uwalu, Obinze, Nekede,[30] etc. However with the coming of colonialism in the later part of the 18th century, and the subsequent establishment of Shell D'Archy in the 1930s, the area was gradually being prepared to assume the status of a modern city. This preparation was crystallized in 1902 when, the seed of colonialism was formally planted in the area. Thus changing the socio economic and political landscape of Owerri. The entire event which culminated in the founding of Owerri Nchise quarters to a modern city, thus becoming the capital territory of Imo State.[5]

In the North, Orlu road leads to Amakaohia and Akwakuma communities. In the East, Okigwe road leads to Orji Community. In the West, MCC road off Wetheral to Obibi Uratta and Ihitaoha communities. In the South, Mbaise road leads to Egbu and Emekuku communities, while Aba road leads to Naze, Agbala and Ulakwo communities.[1] Owerri town is the chief trade centre (yams, cassava[manioc], corn[maize], and palm products)

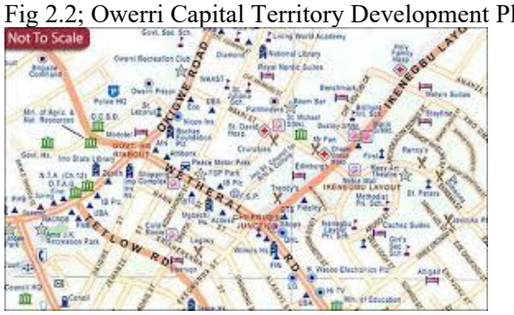
for a region of modified rainforest that also yields rubber for export. It is known for its handicraft centres. Although there is as yet little industrial development, one factory produces galvanized sheet iron. The town is home to the Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State University, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, and several secondary schools. It is also served by a general hospital. The town is located in one of the most densely populated areas of Nigeria and is inhabited by the predominantly Christian Igbo people.[3]

Many events in history culminated in the founding of Owerri as the seat of colonial government in 1902. These events included, the conquest of Owerri by the colonial army, the establishment of military garrison in Owerri in 1902 under the leadership of Major Henry L. Gallway, who had returned from a military expedition to "Arochuchukwu". It was in the same year that fourteen military constables were placed in Owerri to start a police command there. This was intended to maintain British presence in the area, not only as a conquered area, but as a semi administrative unit, waiting to be formally declared full administrative centre.[8] Consequently, and in pursuance of official declaration of Owerri as the capital territory in May 1902, the Consul-General, Sir Ralph Moore, pursuant to the Order-in-council, visited Owerri and proclaimed it a district headquarters and appointed Harold Monday Douglas, who was formerly at Akwete, the District Commissioner (DC) of Owerri District. In 1912, Owerri was made the headquarters of Owerri Province, which included parts of modern Imo, Abia, Rivers and Bayelsa States under the leadership of J.D. Maxwell. The old Division covered an area of about 1,085 square miles and was bounded on the north by the Okigwe Division, on the

east by the Bende and Aba Division, on the south-west by the Ahoada Division and on the north-west by the Orlu District and Okigwe Division. On the east of the District was the Imo River.[6]

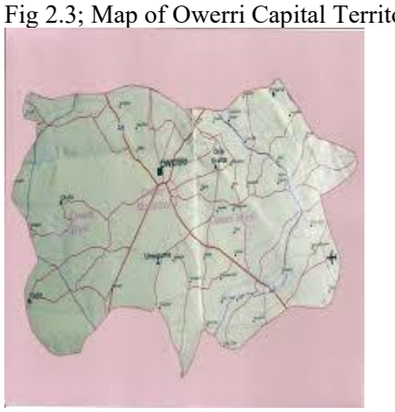
Meanwhile, by 1964 the geography of Owerri was altered to include the county council area of Ikeduru, Mbaise, Mabitoli, Ngor Okpala, Oguta, Ohaji, Oratta, Owerri and Oguta Urban County areas. In 1999 however, Owerri Division was made up of the areas of Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihite Mbaise, Ikeduru, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Oguta, Ohaji/Egbema, Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal.[6] These areas were later divided into three local government areas. These included; Owerri North, Owerri West and Owerri Municipal. The towns of Owerri and the surroundings which made up the capital territory were divided into four parts. These included the old native towns of Owerri-an area which stretched from Emmanuel College through whetheral Road to Okigwe Road and Royce Road to Hausa Quarters and back to Emmanuel College. These areas put together was called Area 'A.' The areas which comprised the Government Station formed the second division and it was referred to as area "B". Ikenegbu layout area was grouped as Area "C", while the vast land surrounding areas A,, B and C as described above which included Egbu, Naze, Nekede, Umuguma, Irete, Amakohia Uratta, Orji Uratta, altogether were grouped under Area "D". These collectivities formed what was called the Owerri Capital. Below are the development plan and geographic map of Owerri Capital Territory as at the time covered by this study.

Fig 2.2; Owerri Capital Territory Development Plan



Source; Imo State Ministry of Lands and Urban Planning.

Fig 2.3; Map of Owerri Capital Territory



Source; Imo State Ministry of Lands and Urban Planning

Owerri had many important streets, areas and indelible structures for which it was recognized. Prominent among these were the Control Post. This area got its name and relevance following the exigencies of World Wars, which occurred in far away Europe. Interestingly, during the war, which began on 3rd September, 1939, the British nationals resident in Owerri, were vulnerable and in order to ensure their security and safety, a security control post was established at the point where Port Harcourt Road, Onitsha Road and Aba Road project into Owerri. The security control post was manned by some police officers who regulated and checked the movement of persons in, and out of Owerri.

The Assumpta Cathedral- an important religious edifice was later built upon the very spot where the police control post formerly stood.

The Douglas House was another architectural masterpiece for which Owerri was easily recognized by those who came in, or went out of the city. One of the earliest things that H.M Douglas did to set up his administration in Owerri was the building of what was known as Douglas House- a prefabricated wooden house floating on metal pipe. It served as the colonial administrative building. Unfortunately, the popular Douglas House had, as at the time of this research, been removed. In its place, an entirely new house was built. As the place was onomatopically called, Ama Tabataba was a popular part of Owerri, which received its name from the sound of guns which the Colonial Army used during shooting practice. This was because the place, as a forested part of Owerri in the olden days, was used as a colonial shooting range, where colonial army officers had their practice.

The area embraced the whole of Works Road, part of Okigwe Road and the Shell Camp Area. It was adjacent to where Imo State University was later built. Its historical importance as Colonial Army shooting range remains the same. Any visitor to this part of Owerri would readily realize the historical importance of Owerri and the reason why the area was considered to be used as part of the Capital City of Imo State. Another land mark area for which Owerri was made popular was Ama J.K. It covered the area where Aba-Owerri-Onitsha Road joined with Owerri-Okigwe Road. The place was named after the initials of John Kamalu Osuji of Amawom village of Owerri, whose efforts partly brought about the establishment of the Catholic Church in Owerri. This area was also

popular because it was here that the first school, the Government school in Owerri founded in 1905, was cited.

The Ama Awusa, meaning, the Hausa quarters, deserves mention here as part of the geography and land mark of Owerri. Established in the twentieth century by Hausa migrants who first, settled at Amawom village of Owerri, and later moved on to find a settlement around the area where Nekede Road meet Douglas Road. The expansion and growth of this area gave the Capital City of Owerri an image of accommodation, friendliness and hospitality. Besides the existence of these important areas and land mark structures with wonderful architectural designs, mention perhaps, should be made of important streets and areas of Owerri whose names were, and still remain living testimonies of Owerri people's tolerance of strangers, respect and regard for hard work and humanistic gestures. In this light, streets like, "Douglas Road, named after the then District Officer of Owerri Division; Tetlow Road, named after J.D Tetlow, a Ghanian who did the first planning of Owerri; Wetheral Road, named after H.F.P, Wetheral, the District Officer who arranged for and brought in Mr Tetlow for the planning and design of Owerri; Royce Road, named after Mann Royce, a British and one time District Officer of Owerri, and later became an Anglican Bishop of Owerri."

In the same vein, other indigenes of Owerri whose outstanding contributions to the development of Owerri still remained fresh in people's memories got streets named after them. These included Ekeonunwa, Onumonu and Njemanze. These streets and roads remained indelible land marks for which the area called Owerri- the Capital City of Imo State was recognized and known.

Historical Background of Owerri People

Owerri was founded about the 14th century by father Ekwem Oha. His mother's name was Arugo. He fled from Umuori Village, Uratta in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State when his life was threatened by his younger brother Ndum. The threat to his life arose from the dispute over the sharing of the Funeral Cow slaughtered when their father Oha the aristocrat and embodiment of royalty died.[2] The reason behind Ekwema Arugo, leaving Orii in Owerri North to settle in their present location, is essential because as understanding of the area which later became the capital of modern Imo State, must necessarily include the peoples' history of migration and settlement. For this reason, the Individual Theory of Migration, which was developed by Peter Stalker,[9] is best qualified to explain the movement of Ekwema Arugo from Orii, to his present location. According to this theory, each migrant as a rational being who carefully weighs up the available options, and looks at the destination that offers the highest possibility of survival. Going by the theme of this theory, one can, in all fairness, insist that the movement of *Arugo Ekwema* from *Orii* to the present location was in connection to individual decision to survive in an area with better condition of safety and economic survival[9].

The first son (Opara in Igbo) Ekwem was to provide the funeral cow as demanded by custom. He did not have the means to do so. He appealed to his younger brother Ndum popularly known as Ndumoha to buy the cow, which he did. Ndum asked for the head, heart and other parts of the cow that go to the first son in keeping with custom. His reason being that he Ndum, bought the funeral cow. Ekwem turned down his request and

a quarrel ensued. The elders (Oha Uratta) were invited to settle the dispute. They did so by allowing tradition to prevail.[2] Ekwem was entitled to the aforementioned parts of the cow being the first son. Ndum did not take kindly to this and so planned to kill Ekwem in order to have his way. The plot leaked and Ekwem fled with his family at the dead of the night to Egbu a neighboring town (Community) taking with them some stores and domestic assistants. History has it that his sister was married at Egbu. His sister fearing that Ndum may look for him asked him to continue his journey to an unknown and uninhabited land for safety and settle there permanently. They set out during the night with the aid of owa (native torch) and arrived at a hill top now known as Ugwu Ekwema and settled there. They heaved a sigh of relief saying *OWERELA IHE MARAYA AKA* meaning *HE HAS TAKEN WHAT IS HIS RIGHT* or what rightly belonged to him.[31] He sounded the drum (as he was told by his sister) to indicate his location. His sister was happy to locate him and his family the following morning. She returned to Egbu thereafter.

The morning broke after arriving and settling at Ugwu Ekwema and they took their first meal roast old yam together in a typical communion fashion (not served) with thanks to Almighty and merciful Father our Lord God for their safety, the thick forest in the area being infested with dangerous animals such as lions, tigers and snakes like pythons, vipers and cobras. But there was need for water for obvious reasons and they knew that the source of Otamiri was at Egbu but were ignorant of the course of the river owing to the thick rain forest of the area. The communities or towns through which Otamirii flowed, were also known. It is common knowledge that peculiar sounds or noises are

characteristic of running water from streams and river.[2] That was Ekwem's experience that morning. He ordered his men to use the direction of the sounds/noise to see if any could be sighted. They obeyed his wish and by surprise stumbled on Otamiri river, close to where Emmanuel College Owerri now stands. They ran back in excitement to Ugwu Ewema and broke the news of the presence of what they described as *OGBU AMUMA*. Ekwem immediately commissioned his men to clear the route to the river -*IKPU UZO*. The route cleared after which he feasted them with corn porridge and that was how Otamiri was discovered.

Political Background before the Civil War

The Political Culture of Owerri People, like many other Igbo collectivities, especially those within the central Igbo area, shard similar socio-political structures. For Owerri, traditionally speaking, the family unit was a very important socio-political level of political socialization of the average Owerri man. It was his active involvement and participation at the family political unit that eventually brought him in close contact with members of other family units at the kindred socio-political level. The "Opara", "Okpara" or "Obilobi" as he was known and called by the Owerri people, was the oldest male member of the family unit. He performed sociopolitical and religious functions for the family. Social control, political leadership and religious wellbeing of the family rested on his shoulder. For instance, the "Obilobi" trained the younger members of the family, especially the males on the tradition, custom, social interactions and leadership roles of the people.[14] He represented the family both at the kindred (Umunna) and the Oha Owerri political levels.

OBILOBI

He was the holder of the family symbol of justice "Ofo" with which he invoked the spirit of the ancestors for family guidance and protection. The kindred political unit was another important socio-political level, which comprised group of families that shard common ancestor or great grandfather. At this level, blood bond was stressed, as it was often forbidden for members to marry one another. The Igbo colloquially refer to any member of his kindred as "Nwanne" or "Nwanna". Meaning, mother's or his father's child. Like the family level, the oldest man or even the youngest man who was from the lineage of the oldest family within the kindred was the holder of the symbol of authority, that is, the "Ofo" on behalf of the families that made up the kindred. The duties of the opera at the kindred level included; performing sacrifices for members on request, representing the kindred vis-a- vis other kindred at the village level, presiding over meeting of the kindred where conflicts and other problems were resolved. Sometimes, an influential or man of affluence could provide the leadership needs of the kindred members, but never for any reason take up the ritual functions of the Okpara or Obilobi as the case of Owerri has shown.

OHA

The next level of political expression was the village level, known among the Owerri people as the "Oha". This level was made up of collection of kindreds. The Okpara Ukwu as he was called among many Igbo collectivities was the holder of the big Ofo, the symbol of power, ritual, justice and truth. Duties of common concern such as allocation of collectively owned properties were the functions performed at this level. Matters of

conciliation and adjudication have direct connection to the duties expected of this level of socio- political unit. The next, and of course, the highest political unit of Owerri people, and indeed, other Igbo groups was the town level. As was pointed out earlier, the kindred was made up of collections of families. In the same manner, the town political unit was an agglomeration of kindreds with the earth godess "Ala" as the major binding force. Other binding forces at this level included believe in one ancestral origin, common market, common territory and adherence to the worship of one god. For the Owerri, this was done through the instrumentality of the Mbari or the celebration of common cultural festivals such as the Oru-Owerri and the Ahiajoku. Owerri tradition of politics diffused its function through many pressure points. It was unlike the Bini political system or Hausa system which concentrated power on the Oba or Emirs. For Owerre, the diffusion points included titledmen, age grades, such as the youth grade, Umuada, Umumgboto and men of financial influence.

For Owerri people, *Ihu-Ala* Owerri and the *Mbari* priests played major roles in Conveying and enforcing the massage of the gods to, and on the people. Importantly, like any Igbo units, role allocation was determined by two factors first, the person to whom role would be assigned must be a member of any of the lineages. Secondly, for roles to be allocated, it had to be determined whether the person to whom political role was to be given was *Osu cult slave, Ohu-ordinary slave or Diala-free born*, or even a stranger. The functions of the "opara" or any other person through which political functions were performed did so in accordance with the wishes of the gods, hence every role or function had religious and spiritual connotations. Expectedly, the wind of change and continuity

has blown asunder the socio- traditional and political land scape of Owerri, beginning from the era of colonial incursion, that today these aspects of Owerri life have experienced modifications and moderations. Describing the change and continuity which traditional Owerri society and indeed, the Owerri before 1976 has witnessed, if *Ekwema Arugo* were to come back to life and stood in his *Ugwu Ekwema* premises, he would look confused and dazed, flabbergasted and even terrified. For he would be seeing a palace completely different from the one he founded. His house, made of mud and wattle and roofed with thatched, is no longer there. His *Obi* as well as his *Obu Ozuzu* have all disappeared. In their place, he sees an impressive civic hall of the *Owerre Nchi-Ise* community.

The endless miles/Kilometers of rich green vegetation surrounding his residence have disappeared. They are replaced with buildings of all types that sprung here and there. The serenity that characterized *Ugwu-Ekwema* has given way to a chaos of activities. All said, it is important to note that irrespective of the changes which civilization brought to bear on Owerri cultures, tradition and social world view, the people of the area retained the core values of their culture. This is why we could talk of continuity in the face of change when discussing the political and social life of Owerri people.

The Monarchy Revisited

All Traditional Institutions in Owerri are hereditary and do not rotate. There are no ruling houses. The institution stands in one family. The hereditary system is not necessarily father to son but to a fit and proper son of the royal family. The Njemanze / Owerri dynasty is a first class institution and has been involved in Nation Building and took part in the 1958 Constitutional Conference that ushered independence to Nigeria

where Ozuruigbo of Owerri HRH Eze Johnson Osuji Njemanze represented the Old Owerri province of the former of Eastern Nigeria as part of the delegation led by late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as did the North and the West led by the late Ahmadu Bello and late Chief Obafemi Awolowo respectively.[2] Eze Njemanze Ihenacho of Owerri was the Vice chairman of the Council of the Traditional Rulers of the former Oil River Protectorate with Calabar as its headquarters. The Obong of Calabar was the Chairman of the Council Diplomatic Ties: Owerri monarchy had diplomatic ties with Arochukwu, Nkwere and the Benin Kingdom. The Title of the Eze of Owerri – OZURUIGBO (The King whose authority spans a large area of Igboland). The first king that is, the Eze-Eze Eke Onunwa.

1. Eze Eke Onunwa 1690 – 1735

2. Eze Okorie Onunwa 1735 – 1788

3. Eze Iheancho Okorie Onunwa 1788 – 1845

4. Eze Njemanze Iheanacho Okorie Onunwa Ozurigbo the First 1845 – 1920

5. Eze Ihemeje Njemanze 1921 – 1931

6. Eze Onwuegbuchulam Njemanze 1931–1941

7. Eze Johnson Osuji Njemanze Ozuruigbo the 2nd 1941 – 1965

8. Eze Reverend Samuel Njemanze 1966 – 1970

9. Eze Reginald Anugwolu Njemanze Ozuruigbo the 3rd 1970 – 1976

10. Eze Alexuis Anumaku Njemanze Ozuruigbo the 4th 1976 – 1988

11.Eze Emmanuel Emenyonu Njemanze Ozuruigbo the 5th is now on the throne as Ozuruigbo the 5th by title, the 8th Njemanze on the throne and 11th king of Owerri, was crowned on the 11th of November 1989 (11/11/89)

Eze Emmanuel Emeyounu Njemanze Ozuruigbo V of Owerri dies at 84

Source: the citizen Imo State blog

Socio-Cultural Life of Owerri People before the Civil War

Culture embraces all aspects of a people's way of life which includes, belief system, language, marriage and family pattern, ethnic norms, technology and medicine. Owerri cultures, like any other culture, was not static. Every culture borrows and lends to others its essentials. Conversely, a culture that accommodates social change is dynamic and moves in the right direction of growth and functional relevance. This extract concisely defines and describes the culture of Owerri people. For instance, Owerri was, and still described as a land of music, enjoyment, relaxation, hospitality, peace and joy. There was no objection to these adjectival descriptions, since among all of Nigerian peoples, arguably, none, but Owerri man could be so described. This was evident in their various cultural music and dance such as, the Chiekweleibekam Dance Group, which was formed in 1974, by all married women in Amawom village in Owerri Nchise. The groups' aim was to promote the culture and tradition of Owerri people. The Akwaugo Traditional Dance Group of Uwala Urata, Ogbodu Dance Group of Irete. Ogadimma Dance Group and the Mezie Musical Group, were a few examples of Owerre cultural musicology to

which reference must be made when and wherever Owerri SocioCultural life was mentioned.[28]

The Festivals in Owerri

Owerri is mostly inhabited mainly by the Igbo people, with the Igbo language serving as a lingua franca, with its state has an estimated population of 1,401,873 as recorded by the 2016 population census. Furthermore, one of the significant ancient cultural festivals in Owerri is the *"Oru-Owere* festival." It is a carnival celebrated annually by the Igbo people(ndi-igbo) of five traditional Owerri villages in Owerri municipality. It is said to be in memory of the founding of Owere (Owerri) in the 14th century by *Ekwem Oha Arugo*.[4]

ORU OWERE (ORU EZE)

Oru Owere is *Oru Eze* (the Eze's festival). The festival is marked by a period of the observance of peace, love, friendliness and togetherness, devoid of bitterness, quarrels, antagonism and physical confrontation, no weeping when death occurs during the period, no firing of cannon and a time to make up quarrels without third party intervention as stipulated by custom. *Oru Owere* the annual festival in Owerri cannot be written without reference to the founding of Owerri. It has been mentioned earlier that the first meal of the founding father of *Owere* and his family was roast old yam, which they ate with oil bean salad at *Ugwu Ekwema* (Ekwema's hill) Our ancestral home.[2]

The roasting of old yams the first meal and the corn meal entertainment developed into a cultural festival or feast *ORU OWERE* with which indigenes commemorate the founding of Owerri. These events tell the story of the founding of Owerri and the time or

period of the year Owerri was founded viz the old yam and corn meal, which are commonly consumed at that time of the year, the rainy season. Worthy of note is the fact that the yam is old not new yam, as new yam had not yet been harvested. Therefore, *Oru Owere* is not new yam festival.

OHA OWERE

However *Oha Owere* is the traditional institution responsible for its conduct and yearly observance. They determine the commencement of the period by a system handed down by our ancestors. The duration of the period is equally guided by the same system. All the key events namely the beginning of the period, the roasting of the old yam, the corn porridge entertainment *(MKPU KPU UZO*) and the day marking the end of the period are Orie market days. The period begins in the month of June and lasts till mid August.

Between the roasting of old yam (*Oru Owere* Proper) and the corn porridge meal is the *Grand Finale* characterized by a colourful procession of age grade formations in Owerri community through given routes in the Old City. The Civic procession assembles at Ugwu Ekwema Civic Center (the civic center of Owerri Community) from where it talks off and terminates at the end of the procession where invited guests are received and made to have a feel of Oru Owere with traditional dances displays and entertainment. The first item of entertainment after the breaking of kolanuts by Eze Ojwere is roast old yam. Ugwu Ekwema is our ancestral home which significance informed our choice of locating the Community Civic Center. The eating of the new yam by Owere indigenes

begin the day immediately after *MKPU KPU OZU* which is the day that marks the beginning of the new calendar year in Igbo culture.

Accordingly, it is pertinent to note that Owerri people, the indigenes of the capital of Imo state do not celebrate the New Yam. When increase in population began, there was the need to expand to other fronts. The sons of *Ekwem* and their families moved away from the ancestral home at *Ugwu Ekwema,* to different directions within the confines of the two rivers close to each other with their families leading to the growth and development of the village. Owerri is not a geographical expression, it has a local setting given by the indigenes. It is not a coming together or movement of people from different places coming together to settle in a place or a place mixed with occupiers and intruders or invaders.[29] It is founded through one person and his family. Prior to the early eighties of the last century, Owerri people did not intermarry for the reason of one blood. Owerri people are peace loving, very friendly, not discriminate against any ethnic or tribal group and treat you in a way more affectionate than they do to their brothers and sisters. They are not criminal or violent by nature.

Those who come to Owerri to work or find a source of livelihood come to stay and not to return from whence they came for her peace and security.ages of Owerri which derived their names from the sons of Ekwem. The grave of Ekwem stands prominently on the grounds of Ugwu Ekwem Civic Center. Ikenegbu was the first son followed by Onyeche, Odu and their sister Oyima hence the villages namely; Umuororonjo, Amawom Children of Ikenegbu Umuonyeche,Umuodu,Umuoyima. The villages were named after the sons and daughter of the founder. Information has it that about eight to ten villages

emerged. Some were sacked and others migrated away to places far and near in Igbo Land, East and west of the Niger with Owerri featuring in the name of their new hometowns as Owere in Diaspora.

In recent times some persons who are not indigenes of Owerri, the state capital and who have never written or published for public consumption any historical account of the founding or origin of their home town or communities have become Owereologists who give unprecedented calculated false and hopelessly distorted account of the origin of Owerri as though Owerri town or community which was in existence centuries before the British expedition in 1901 had no known origin. Her indigenes are not by accident of birth but divine province.[2] Besides cultural dances as sources of joy and harmony, Owerre people were known for rich dishes.

For instance, the Ofe Owerri was, and has remained the staple traditional dish cherished by Owerre indigenes and non- indigenes alike. The high cultural- status of this expensive dish, usually taken with pounded yam, resulted in the adage, onye arii ego okpa, ejila erila ofe owerri. Meaning, Ofe Owerri was exclusively for the wealthy. However, this did not suggest that the dish was only for the rich. It was only intended to convey how rich the dish was. Other dishes that were popular among Owerri people included; Ofe Eyiyi Akwukwo (Vegetable soup), Urataji or Pounded yam, Eze Oka, Iheagwugwo (Oil bean salad and Tapioca).[31]

OFE OWERE

It is a staple cuisine that is unique to the Owerri people (ofe means soup, while Owerri is the capital of Imo state). Beautiful ladies are sometimes compared to Ofe

Owerri in various Igbo cultures, and it is sometimes referred to as the "king of soup". Furthermore, snails, ponmo (cow skin), goat meat, dried fish, oporo (smoked prawns), ground dried crayfish, wraps of ogili (fermented soya beans), cocoyam, palm oil, sliced ugu leaves (pumpkin leaves), sliced oha leaves, sliced uziza leaves, stock cubes, achi powder, and salt are among the ingredients for the soup.[4]

Other Festivals

Aside of the Oru Owerri Festival, the months of August and September each also witnessed such festivals as the New Yam Festival, the Onwa Awaka and Uratta, Ikpukpuzo, Odu Nekede, Ugo-Uzo of Emekuku and the Itaokazi of Emii.[11] These festivals and other social occasions attracted lavish use of palm-wine taken with Oil bean salad, popularly called "Ugba". This delicacy, most of the times, were taken with well cooked or dried bush meat.[12] This rich cultural heritage was often enjoyed with visitors and urban dwellers. No wonder Migrants to Owerri hardly remembered to go back to their source after haven stayed in the area for a while.

The entire philosophy of Owerri communal life was coded in the saying which ran thus, "batta ma uyo, uyo wu uyo magi". Meaning; come in, the house belonged to you and I. This philosophy went a long way in expressing the Owerri man's world view as an empty place, and as such, one should not kill oneself for the sake of earthly riches. It is for this belief that the Owerri man easily accommodated and willing to help those in need that came his way. No wonder visitors to Owerri often felt at home with Owerri people. Owerri peoples' culture of hospitality and accommodation was not limited to normal persons. It was also extended to even abnormal persons such as mad men. For instance,

Emma Orji remembers with compassion, the manner and joy with which such mad men and women like; Obi Onyera from Oguta, Nwogazi- a female lunatic; Nwuchi of Awka, Nwaoguoma, Ogburunajohn, Clifford –alias scot, G.B Nwebe, Frank alias Fara Ngaji, etc., lived with Owerre people without any iota of troubles because they were welcomed by the Owerre people.[13]

Owerri people's culture and tradition of enjoyment and relaxation which had often been misunderstood by many as culture of laziness did not hold any truth. A better interpretation that could best be given to it is that Owerri man liked enjoyment and evening relaxation after the day's work. Owerri man valued life and did not like to engage himself in labour that tasked much from his life. This demonstrated the philosophy of Uwamgbede Kamma, which signifies evening relaxation and hang out over choice dishes after each day's work. The proliferation of quality hotels, eatries and entertainment centres all over Owerri was a consequence of age long culture of happiness and relaxation. Aside of Owerri women, their male folks were generally lazy, delighted only in eating, drinking and relaxation. The bulk of domestic and family up keep was the responsibility of Owerri woman. This was re-echoed in the saying among Owerre men which went thus; "kama nwu, ka Nwunyem nwu". Meaning; "it is better for the wife to die first before the husband".

The culture of Owerri expect Owerri woman to be sexually active. This, again, was often reproduced in such popular saying as, "Nwanyi eje ama otu Nja aba uyo, je abara di ya Uru". Meaning, "a useful woman to the husband is that woman who ties only wrapper while going to bed at night". Contrarily, one would rather insist here that Owerri men

were not lazy. Frankly, the impression of Owerri man's laziness was created by non Owerri indigenes whose sole reason for coming to Owerri was to grab money through extra hard work and by all means. This inordinate ambition for material wealth was not in line with the culture of Owerri people.

Owerri Women

Women mostly were known to be the major actors in trading business, be it the local or the external trade. In fact, it was believed among Owerre people that Local markets were known to be the woman's place; though this trend is gradually changing in recent times. The import of this saying is that it demonstrated, not only the linkage between the kitchen and the market, but also placed Owerre women in the management of both units of economic activities. More so, the idea of sexual activeness expected of Owerri women was not a mark of punishment imposed by culture, rather a desire for procreation since it is only by the means of sex that a woman can bear children. This again was in pursuance of the love which Owerri man had for children. But how did these reconcile with the belief that Owerri women were free women, promiscious and most times, hardly retain one husband when married. This, again, was another misrepresentation of the peoples' culture. This controversy was similar to the concept of *Nwanne Ndi Owerri*. For clarification, the Owerre culture and people have a pride of place for their daughters. Their daughters in turn were very proud and would hardly brook nonsense. Although they would submit to their husbands, yet would they not hesitate to remarry rather than suffer avoidable humiliation.

Consequently, in traditional Owerre, there were case of “Igha di” (divorce) which accounted for a woman having children in different towns because their ability to remarry was great. The concept of “nwanne ndi Owerri” meaning “sister or brother” was an indication of Owerri peoples’ world view which allowed room for communality, brotherhood, oneness and compassion, as an average Owerri person would accord whoever comes his way the same brotherly love, irrespective of how closely or distantly related. In traditional Owerri, any one was free to appropriate any fallen coconut that he found. Any one was free to pick fresh oil palm nuts from any bunch of palm fruits he could find provided he did not carry the entire bunch. After harvest of yam, anyone could go into the bush and harvest any forgotten yams in the bush whether the farm land belonged to him or not. This was an indication and expression of Owerre people’s free mindedness which accommodated all without discrimination.

Besides the above strands of culture for which Owerri people were known, the culture of music was, and still, a land mark of Owerre people’s life style. From cradle to grave, Owerri man was a personification of music. Certainly, Owerri type of music was influenced by the Ikwere, Efik and Ghanians. Haven copied from these people, the Owerre brand of Music known by the Efik as Ekombe, by Ghanians, as high life and lately the Bongo, which all together was known as “Egwu Owerri” were popular not only in Imo state but also beyond. Origin of Owerri music is readily remembered in association with the performance The of Ntiero and Effiom Brass Band, which performed the popular ball room dance and the sugar Babies of Ghana. Since then, Owerri musical cultural landscape has witnessed significant growth, as such names like Israel Njemanze

alias Nwoba; Atushiaka Oguamanam alias Shakaman; Joseph Uneze alias Joe Nez; Herbert Udemba; Evelyn Chukwueke; Edinburgh Ukaegbe and Raymond Anoruo, are easily remembered as pioneer musicians of Owerri. Among the modern musicians who kept the culture of Owerri music aglow included, Celestine Obiakor alias Dady Obi; John Ogu Onuoha alias Ogu spoke; John Nwawuchi alias Jonel Cross; Akagha Nwopara, Douglas chukwu alias Ederi; Nze Dan Orji; Michael Nezieanya alias Michael Ubo; Victor Abimbola; Chief Bill Friday and Rex Jim Lawson, Raphael Amarabelam; John Ikediala; Godwin Opara alias Kabaka; Chris Ezewuiro Obinna Alias warrior. Though some of the musicians are late, but their contributions to the Owerre world of music lived.[5]

Social Institutions

As subsistence farmers had implements for farming, practiced crop rotation, built barns for the storage of yams, built native wooden bridges (Igbo) across the rivers to link their farm land across the rivers Nworie and Otamiri, had their cultural dances, songs, moonlight songs, musical instruments, the wooden xylophone, opi or oja and odu as wind instruments, drums and percussions made of wood and animal skin, clay pot instruments etc marriage rites, birth ceremonies and funeral ceremonies, punishment for crimes depending on the scene of the act. Mbari Culture had its root in Owerri. It is now a thing of the past as religion had dealt a big blow on the arts and crafts etc.

Religious Structure

In Owerri, Christianity dominates over other religions. The two religions with the largest followings are Catholicism and Anglicanism, and Owerri is the location of

Assumpta Cathedral, the administrative centre for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri (Latin: Archidioecesis Overriensis), as well as the Seat of Wisdom Seminary. 2,996 square kilometres make up the archdiocese. However, of the 1.7 million residents in the region, 670,986 are Catholics. The first and largest Anglican church in Owerri, All Saints Cathedral, Egbu, is also the location of the first Igbo-translated Bible.[4]

Educational Structure

Owerri embraced educational ambition with little or no reading materials.[16] Schools such as the Government School, Government Secondary School Owerri and schools both primary and secondary were built by the missionaries – Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Baptist etc and later the Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri the Federal government Girls' College Owerri many private and other missionary secondary schools. Today there is Imo State University Owerri and the Federal Polytechnic and the Federal University of Technology Owerri in Owerri West Local Government Area. All the missionaries have cathedrals e.g the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist and the Pentecostals while the Muslims have a Central Mosque, and the Cherubim and Seraphim all in Owerri.

Marriage Structure

Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, the institution of marriage was greatly regarded.

Like in most other societies, marriage was believed to be as old as man. To the Igbo, it helped to propagate and perpetuate human life; it was revered and held sacrosanct. To them, marriage represented the instrumentality for the realization, preservation, and the

accentuation of the Igbo essence. The agency of this preservation was childbirth; hence infertility was a peculiar harsh misfortune and sometimes a punishment for one misdeed or disapproval of a particular union by the gods. In fact, the considered stability and success of marriage remain embedded in webs of kinship and dependent upon fertility. Children were considered the ultimate blessing of all and the best product of any marriage.[21]

Kinds of Marriages in Igboland before the war

According to tradition and practice amongst the Owerre-Igbo communities, there are three forms of marriage which were acceptable and widely practiced not only in the precolonial but in the colonial times, and even a few decades after independence namely;

Heterosexual marriages

Heterosexual marriage was the regular kind of marriage, involving an adult male and female. Although monogamy was the practice, yet polygamy was appreciated as a mark of greatness and high social status. Intermarriage with neighbouring ethnic groups for the peripheral Igbo, on the other hand, was encouraged as it enhanced trade and travel. Distant traders and polygamists in the precolonial period usually took care to select their wives from geographically strategic and important communities along their business routes. This was of great implication; by marriage, such merchants enjoyed acceptability in their father-in-law's clan, most significantly where the father-in-law was from a respectable and influential family, which guaranteed their security. The father-in-law's house provided accommodation and warehouse facilities which were otherwise

nonexistent in the precolonial Igboland. However, marriages in Igboland were not restricted to adult males and females alone.

Woman-to-woman marriages

The word is used this way because women were the only ones involved in same-sex marriages in Igboland.woman. This type of marriage was common, but mostly contracted as a nonsexual union and a means of improvising the male child personality, with the inherent functions and responsibilities thereon in a patriarchal society. Same-sex marriage was also contracted among the Igbo, just as in some other cultures in Africa. However, in all known cases it was between two women. While one was the wife, the other was the female husband and the sociological father of the children from that marriage. To a large extent, the practice did not involve a sexual relationship between the couple as opposed to lesbianism. The reasons for this practice have been highlighted by many. While some have seen it as a way out for barren couples, others believed that it was a customary way for precolonial single but wealthy women who could not have their children to procreate.[20] Yet for others, it was a status symbol for some precolonial Igbo women. However, it would seem that the most significant reason for the practice of female husband was the improvisation of the male child's personality, with the inherent functions and responsibilities therein a patriarchal society.

Child marriage

Child marriages were often conducted as the most common way of acquiring rights in women. The marriage rites and stages of these three forms of marriage were also the

same, except that for child marriage, after the initial betrothal, the child bride was allowed to grow up to maturity before the traditional marriage rites were then observed. For the various reasons; to ensure the continued friendship ties of their respective families, to restrict the family business or wealth within the two families, and to protect especially the girl bride from any future suitor. On the other hand, child marriage as the most common way of acquiring rights in women. The Igbo girl child was betrothed early, sometimes before she was a year old. However, payment of the pride price in such an arrangement was always deferred until the couple attained maturity.

In contemporary times, however, the nature and practice of these forms of marriages among different Igbo groups have continued to change owing to three major factors namely; the extensive contacts which the Owerre-Igbo had within Igboland and with other ethnic groups outside Igboland such as the Yoruba that led to increased cultural infusions; the influence of Christianity and Western education, and; their occupational influence. Most Igbo villages could intermarry, but could not intra-marry. For the exogamous groups, an incestuous relationship was avoided and held as *Alu or Ihe nso* (taboo).

One of the recent developments has been the introduction of certain practices that appear alien to the Igbo culture. Some of these include the practice of *Aso-Ebi* (cloth of the family, usually uniform or group attire) for the different categories of invitees; friends and well-wishers of the celebrants as well as the organisation of both the traditional and (western) church ceremonies as an integral whole on the same day and most times, in the same space. Marriages amongst the Owerre-Igbo were not only influenced by external

cultural infusions such as *Aso-Ebi*, but also inter-Igbo group infusions which to a large extent appeared to have robbed the Owerre-Igbo the uniqueness of their traditional marriage practices.

Significance of a Father figure in Owerri Igbo Marriages

Among the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria, the institution of marriage was considered one of the foremost sacred and solemn institutions. This was so because of its interconnectedness with life and procreation as well as its acceptability and links with the world of the ancestors. Hence marriages were contracted not only amongst the living but also the dead, (in this case, the dead parents or guardians of the couple). Amongst the Owerre-Igbo, the role of the parents in the union between couples in marriage was so important and ritually significant, especially the role of the father. Hence, even in a situation where the bride's father had been separated from the mother by any reason, or the fact that the bride had grown far away from the father or in rare cases, a product of a single parent (in this case a single mother) during marriage ceremonies, the presence of the father, if alive, was ritually mandatory. This was of great significance: namely;

* Inheritance amongst the Igbo was patrilineal, therefore, culturally, the father owned the child.
* The father had the final consent to any marriage proposal brought to his family. This arose from the fact that he was not only the head of his family but also represented the link between his family and the family's forebear.
* Women were not allowed to discuss issues relating to marriage proposals and bride price.

In situations where the father of the bride was dead, the mother of any girl who received marriage proposals normally directed such suitors to the bride's most elderly uncles or male relatives as the case might be. Even where these male relatives were not known to the single mother, she was culturally obligated to search for them. There must be a father figure to culturally legitimise the marriage. Culturally, these male relatives provided or were regarded as support and as a bulwark for their sister in case of any maltreatment later in the marriage by her husband. It was believed that the absence of the bride's male relatives could suggest that her in-laws were at liberty to maltreat her anytime they wanted since she did not have any male relative to defend or protect her.

Further, marriages amongst the Owerre-Igbo, like other Igbo groups, were considered the major legitimate for procreation. Hence, the major reason for marriage among others was to propagate and perpetuate human life; it was, therefore, revered and held sacrosanct since it conferred legitimacy to the union of the couple and the children thereof, both in the eyes of the living and the dead. This belief in the conferment of legitimacy on the children in a union by marriage and ownership of such children by the father (both biological and sociological) was the basis upon which the Igbo society considered any child born outside marriage as illegitimate and therefore, had no rights to inheritance amongst his kinsmen if the child was male.

Pregnancy before Marriage, A taboo in Igbo Culture

Consequently, teenage pregnancy was considered disrespectful to the family of the girl and a taboo against the earth goddess. This was the reason teenage pregnancy was avoided. A girl who gave birth in his father's house and outside marriage was considered

wayward by society and this stigma affected her chances of getting married later on in life. She could only get married to an older man or an older widower and in recent times to an outsider (especially a person from another ethnic group). This was because no family of any young suitor would allow their son to bring such a stereotyped woman home as his bride. Undoubtedly, marriage among the Igbo represented the foundation of the social structure of society. Hence it reflected in the arts, music, and general cultural practices of the people.

Importance of Marriage

Marriage defined relationships for both the bride and the groom as well as for their offspring. Therefore, marriage was regarded as an obligation, a duty to society. A man who was ripe for marriage was considered fully responsible when he took a wife, while a man who remained unmarried even when he had passed the age of marriage was considered an efulefu (worthless person) among his kinsmen. If a man remained unmarried till death, he was buried without the traditional rites accorded his peers. On the other hand, marriage was the ultimate expectation of every "ripe" woman. From the age of eighteen to about 25, a woman was considered "ripe" for marriage. Beyond this age, anxiety, and stigma set in not only for the woman but also for the whole family, especially the mother.

The anxiety and stigma derived from the belief that females from good and respected families easily attracted suitors. To a large extent, a "ripe" yet unmarried female was seen as lacking good character, home training, or not from a good family. This was considered shameful and an indictment on the mother, who was expected to

give her daughter the expected “home training”. While marriage qualified a man to be considered responsible amongst his kinsmen, it was also the first step to being considered an elder (other qualifications include age, a wealth of experience, the courage to speak the truth at all times, etc.). It was difficult to find an elder who was not married. Even when a man lost a wife to death, he was expected to have other wives, thanks to polygamy or re-marry if he had only one.

Bride-Price

A man ready for marriage was one who was considered economically capable of taking care of a woman, capable of shouldering responsibilities of both his family and his in-laws. This was determined by the ability of the groom to afford the bride price which was considered high amongst the Owerre-Igbo. Apart from reflecting the ability of the groom to take care of the bride and other responsibilities, the high bride price also was suggestive of the value the groom was ready to place on his bride. The higher the bride price, the higher the groom was believed to value his bride. Indeed, it was a thing to brag about amongst a man's peers that his wife's bride price was the highest. Hence, most Owerre-Igbo men took pride in marrying from Owerri, which was considered one of the areas of Igboland with the highest bride price.

Traditional Marriage Items

Source: The Guardian Nigeria

Bride price List

EMO STATE

MARRIAGE LIST

Source: NaijaGists

Generally amongst the Igbo, the value of the bride price was usually determined by the township, social rank, and the personal qualities of the bride. However, in recent times, her level of education, institutions attended and profession all influenced the value of her bride price. And since the Owerre-Igbo were generally people who pursued western education more than any other Igbo subgroup, this affected the bride price of their women.

Owerri Traditional Marriage

Traditional marriages amongst the Owerre-Igbo as part of traditional marriages in Igboland followed an expected process after which it was considered complete and sealed. Any traditional marriage that did not go through these stages was considered incomplete and the bride was not expected to move in with the groom. There existed about five major stages in Owerre-Igbo traditional marriage. These include;

(1) *ipa mmii Ajuju uzo*

(2) *iku aka n'uzo*

(3) *ipa mmii shi ehu na mmii nkaleshi*

(4) *ipa ngwa efere*

(5) *ipa mmii ukwu*

Ipa mmii

It simply means “wine carrying” suggesting the importance of wine (palm wine, but not exclusive) in all the processes as well as the fact that wine was the most important ritual item in the various processes involved. It is significant to note that these processes existed in the general Igbo traditional marriage practices with slight differences. These differences reflected the peculiarity of the various Igbo groups. Prominent amongst these differences were the names of these stages which were most reflective of the language dialect of the groups, followed by the items needed for each process and lastly, the bride price. Bride price amongst the Owerre- Igbo was considered the most exorbitant and this stemmed from their social construct of marriage and the value placed on it.[21]

Ipa mmii Ajuju uzo

It simply means “seek for direction”. This was the first contact the family of the suitor had with the prospective bride's family. Traditionally, this process was initiated after the suitor's family would have made secret inquiries about the prospective bride and her family. The issues that were inquired about included knowing if the girl was Osu (outcast) because an Osu was not allowed to marry a Diala (freeborn), was from a respectable family and had good character; whether her family had any blood disease

including epilepsy or had some undesirable family traits such as stealing, barrenness, promiscuity, curses and hereditary sicknesses, etc.; whether there was a history of sudden death and so on. These initial inquiries were carried out when the parents of the suitor did not arrange the girl for their son themselves as was the practice. The practice also sufficed if the suitor's family was from a distant or different village from the girl's family and therefore, did not know the family well. These preliminary inquiries often were made by the two families. This practice, it was argued reduced the tendencies for the breakup as a result of the discovery of something later which could undermine the foundation of the marriage.

It is significant to note that the Owerre-Igbo engaged in both endogamous as well as exogamous marriages. In any case, the background check on the girl and her family determined whether a marriage proposal was to be initiated or not by the suitor's family. Upon getting satisfactory answers to these issues, the parents of the suitor in the company of a few kinsmen visited the prospective bride's family. The atmosphere of the meeting was usually that of “strangers seeking direction”. This was reflected in the language used by the suitor's family. Upon their welcome into the house of the prospective bride (this was usually marked by the presentation of kola nut to the visitors) the father of the suitor or the most elderly male began by making some complimentary remarks usually in proverbs and wise sayings. But the most significant was usually: “please we are in search of a hen which we were told belong to this family” or “there is a beautiful flower in this family which we would love to pluck”.

This meeting and language of the meeting were usually ceremonial since the families would have earlier discussed the reason for the meeting informally and fixed the date. The family of the girl, on the other hand, would through the father of the girl or the most elderly male thus: “We have so many hens in this homestead, can you identify the particular hen when you see it?” The answer to this question was usually in the affirmative by the suitor's family. In some parts of Owerre, the daughters of the bride's family were immediately lined up for the identification of the prospective bride by the suitor, while in some other parts; the identification was left for the second stage. In any case, this was followed by drinking the palm wine which the suitor's family brought as well as other items such as “bush meat” brought to entertain the guests. After the entertainment and exchange of information, a date for the next stage was fixed.

Iku aka n'uzo

It simply means “knock at the door”. This stage normally commenced some days after the first stage. To demonstrate the seriousness attached to their marriage proposal and to avoid competition from any other prospective suitor, the suitor's family usually would not waste much time before visiting the bride's family for this second stage. As the name suggests, *Iku aka n'uzo* literarily translates “to knock at the door,” suggesting that the suitor's family had come to knock at the door of the house of their prospective bride. Before this meeting, informal arrangements would have been done by the two families. Elderly members of the two families and other accompanying guests were usually involved. At this meeting, the prospective bride is made known to the two families. However, before then, the bride's family would have gotten the consent of their daughter

to the marriage proposal. It was after this confirmation that the list for all the items for the entire stages of the marriage ceremonies would be handed over to the suitor's family by their prospective in-laws.

Ipa mmii shi ehu na mmii nkalezi

It simpl means “confirmation of the proposal” As the name suggests, this was the stage and event where the groom's family finally confirmed to their prospective in-laws their intention to marry their daughter by presenting formally their first wine (palm wine and in modern times other assorted local and foreign gins), with other items listed in the marriage list. It was at this stage that the proposal was made public and the two families were at liberty and excited to refer to themselves as in-laws. At the end of the ceremony, the bride was usually allowed to follow her in-laws home. This was as a matter of ritual, for her to be acquainted with her in-laws' family and for the in-laws as well to ascertain the bride's character. In a typical traditional setting, the bride was tested in various ways; how well she was able to cope with house chores such as waking up earlier in the morning to sweep the homestead, fetch water for the entire household and any other chore that would be required of her, including cooking for the family. This later check was to confirm how good she had been trained in cooking and kitchen chores by her mother. She was expected to stay with them for a week after which she returned to her family. After this stage, the groom usually visited his in-laws to help out on the farm or any other responsibility that his mother or father-in-law might extend to him, such as fetching firewood, bush cutting for farming, etc. He also brought them gifts such as a game or “bush meats” fruits and farm produce.

Ipa Ngwa efere

It simply means “to present items of the plate”. This was one of the two biggest ceremonies in the Owerre-Igbo traditional practice, the other being the *ipa mmii ukwu.* This event was exclusively for the mother of the bride. Most of the items on the list for this stage were usually feminine items such as a box of dresses and wrappers, items of adornment such as bracelets, bangles, and kitchen utensils. Others include items for the other women in the family and clan including powders, food items such as tubers of yams and cocoa yam, milk, and vegetable oil, etc. Livestock including chicken, goats, and other edibles were also included. It was usually an elaborate ceremony with virtually all the women and young girls in the village in attendance. It was characterised by merriment: traditional dance by the women, singing and clapping as well as drinking and eating.

Ipa mmii ukwu

It simply means “the presentation of the big wine”. This was usually the biggest, most colourful, and most significant in the Owerre-Igbo traditional marriage rites. It usually involved the entire village, visitors, and guests of both families. The bride's family usually invited traditional dance groups, drummers, and masquerades in some instances where the bride's or groom's father was a titled man. Age grade dances were also a normal sight, especially for the groom as a mark of support and solidarity from his age grade. One of the highlights of the event apart from payment of the bride price was the bride's search for the groom who would have been seated among several young men. The bride's father usually handed his daughter a cup of palm wine and asked her to locate

and show the people the young man she had chosen to live with. This search could take up to ten minutes, with the bride going to and fro amid loud shouts and chants from the excited crowd each time she appeared to make a move towards the wrong man.

At the end of the drama, she would locate the groom, kneel and offer the cup of palm wine to him, signalling to the crowd that “here is my man.” The groom then, as a confirmation, accepted the cup of wine; drank the content and put in some money into it, and handed it back to her. Before the advent of paper money, cowries were used for this purpose. The crowd then roared in excitement. It was at this point that the bride price was haggled and settled. Traditionally, and as the bride price ritual required, the bride price haggling was usually conducted by the two families. It was conducted in absolute silence by the male elders of both families skilled in the art of bargaining. The business was conducted with sticks or pebbles. The bride's family usually puts forward several sticks or pebbles representing the amount of cowry bags or in modern time paper money to be paid. The groom's family responded to this by making their offer. This was followed by a counteroffer and so on until the two families were agreed on the final bride price to be paid. Once an agreement was reached, it was heralded by three backhand clicks and a handshake by the elders of the two families. This was followed by shouts of excitement by the womenfolk who would have been outside waiting for the agreement to be reached. This was then followed by the actual payment of the agreed amount.

In some cases, the payment was made to the bride's father in his inner room then he emerged before his kinsmen with a loud hailing thus: Igbo kwe nu! Kwenu! Kwezue nuooo!! And the crowd would chorus a loud Heh! Heh! Heh! If the bride's family was

wealthy or the bride's father a titled man, it was usual for him to release two or three gunshots to signal to the whole village that indeed, he had received his daughter's bride price in full. This was usually a proud moment for the bride because her bride price was paid in full; and for the father, because her daughter was married to a capable son-in-law. However, in many instances, the bride price was not always paid in full. In such cases, the groom would have discussed and agreed with his father-in-law before the event. Hence, the payment was usually done in the inner room, so that no one else, apart from the two in-laws, would know the exact amount paid.

In any case, the amount paid must be enough to cover the share due to the elders and youths of the clan and village, while the balance of the amount, obviously the father's share, was paid later to the bride's father whenever the groom and his family were able as the two parties had agreed. This gesture was suggestive of good and lasting relations that would exist between the in-laws in the future. Apart from the bride price, other items provided for the *mmii ukwu* ceremony include, wraps or some quantities of tobacco, several jars of palm wine and assorted local and foreign gins, cartons of cigarette, several quantities/pieces of stockfish, a huge number of tubers of yam, bar soaps, several gallons of palm oil, and in modern time, bags of rice and beans and other foodstuff and assorted gifts as contained in the list. Most of these were shared amongst the kinsmen and villagers.

At the end of the ceremony, which marked the last stage of the marriage, the bride went with her husband and in-laws to her new home to start a new life with her new family. She was usually presented with gifts from his family and relative. Such gifts

include cooking utensils such as cooking pots, pestle, and mortar, wooden bench, goats, and fowls. Similarly, there were internal influences, for example, the names associated with the various stages of the Owerre-Igbo traditional marriage have witnessed some changes.

Owerri Traditional Marriage in Modern Times

In the conduct of the traditional marriage rite itself, especially the provisions of some of the items on the marriage lists by the groom's family, the influence of Christianity often had made some of the professed “born again Christian” couples to reject items like alcoholic drinks and beverages, cigarettes and tobacco, etc. They preferred to replace them with cash or other exotic gifts that were not frowned at by their beliefs.

Igba Nkwu

The practice of *Ipa mmii ukwu* has largely been replaced with *Igba nkwu*, a name derived from the Anambra-Igbo. This is traced to the apparent domineering influence of this group over the other Igbo subgroups in recent times. Similarly, some have introduced the wedding ring during the *ipa mmii ukwu* stage when the bride was expected to locate her groom from the crowd with a cup of palm wine. It became customary for the groom to present the bride with a ring after he had been located by the bride and drunken/taken the palm wine presented to him.

External Factors which Influenced the Owerri Marriage System

Christianity and from it, western education and western civilisation have also been identified as some of the external factors that influenced Owerre-Igbo marriages. The

traditional religious belief system which underpinned social behaviours was threatened by the new religion. Deities and their shrines which were revered and evoked fear amongst members of society were desecrated and violated. Religious syncretism became an abominable practice since the God of Christianity was “a jealous God” (Deuteronomy 4:24, Exodus 20:5)

Christianity and the accompanying western culture and lifestyle affected the construct of marriage amongst the Igbo generally. Practices such as polygamy, levirate custom, and widow inheritance were all discouraged as 'sinful' by the new religion and its adherents. The accompanying western culture appeared to have impacted more on the concept of marriage amongst the Owerre-Igbo as the institution acquired a loose construct: a contract or agreement only between the couple, which could be dissolved anytime they desired. This new construct took away the place and role of the family members, in-laws, and ancestors. The western construct of equal rights of the husband and wife as equal partners in a marriage infused into the modern construct of Owerre-Igbo marriage also challenged the authority of the man as the head of the family as obtained in the earlier construct of Owerre-Igbo marriage, a status bequeathed him by patriarchy, hence the numerous cases of divorces sometimes arising from lack of submission of the wife to the husband and sundry other reasons hinging on patriarchy.

These have come to characterize marriages in modern times. Consequently, most people no longer consider traditional marriage adequate but insist on Christian marriage (white wedding) or marriage at the courts to complement it. In many cases presently, court marriages precede the Owerre-Igbo traditional marriages, and the latter most times

is conducted simultaneously with the Christian marriage. For the Owerre-Igbo Catholics, living together as a couple after the traditional marriage without the Christian version would earn the couple suspension from receiving Holy Communion in the Church. Modern and enlightened parents do not accept that traditional practice any longer. Besides, western education also influenced the bride price as the more educated the bride, the higher her bride price.

Further, the tradition of secretly making inquiries by the suitor's family about the bride and her family before their marriage proposal appeared to be waning. In particular was the consideration given to whether the bride was "Osu" or "Diala" (free-born; Apart from many advocacies and public enlightenment programmes by the state governments concerned against the stereotyping of people as outcast (Osu) or "free-born," discrimination that made it difficult for them to get married, whether man or woman. The church's efforts, campaigns and Sunday sermons against this labelling appeared to have been successful. Most couples nowadays do not bother about these prenuptial inquiries as they support their actions with the western cliché that "love is blind."[21]

The Osu caste discrimination is very pronounced in the area of marriage. An Osu cannot marry a freeborn. The belief is that any freeborn that marries an Osu defiles the family.[19] So freeborn families are always up in arms against any of their members who wants to marry an *Osu*. They go to any length to scuttle the plan. Because of the Osu factor, marriages in Igboland are preceded by investigations– elders on both side travel to native villages to find out the social status of the other party. And if it is found that one of them is an Osun, the plan would be automatically abandoned. Many marriage plans have

been aborted, while married couples have been forced to divorce because of the Osu factor. Chinua Achebe also notes this in his book. When Okonkwo learns that his son wants to marry Clara, an Osu, Okonkwo says: “Osu is like a leprosy in the minds of my people. I beg of you my son not to bring the mark of shame and leprosy into your family. If you do, your children and your children’s children will curse you and your memory, you will bring sorrow on your head and on the heads of your children.”

There have been several instances like that where young men and women of Igbo extraction have suffered emotional trauma as a result of this cultural malaise. And now the question is, why is it that this cultural practice has refused to go away even among educated Igbos? The reason is not far fetched. The practice of Osu caste system is hinged on religion, supernaturalism and theism. And Igbos are deeply religious and theistic people. Osu are regarded as unclean or untouchable because they are (alleged to be) dedicated to the gods.[19] So it is the dedication to the gods that makes the Osu status a condition of permanent and irreversible disability and stigma.

Osu caste system in Igboland

Source: voice of the sun

The *Osu* caste system

It is a traditional practice in Igboland characterized by social segregation and restrictions on interaction and marriage with a group of individuals known as *Osu(Igbo*: outcast).[17] The Osu individuals historically were marginalized by the Igbo deities *Alusi*, and as a result, they are often perceived as inferior and segregated from the *Nwadiala* or *Diala (Igbo*: real born) class.[27]

The *Osu* caste system's roots trace back to the era when Igbo city-states were governed by *Odinani* a system of earth-based laws. “Ala” a deity, established rules for the people to follow in order to ensure the nation's prosperity within the territory granted by *Chukwu*, the Supreme God. Offenders found guilty of grave abominations were exiled to prevent the wrath of the earth deity and the spread of abomination among the citizens. These outcasts came to be known as *Osu.* They were either sold into slavery to others or were offered as sacrifices to deities demanding human offerings during festivals, ultimately leading to their enslavement.[26] Another perspective on the history of the Osu caste system centers on Ostracism. Those who defied a king's orders or community decisions were banished, resulting in the victim and their descendants being labeled as *Osu*s.[25] The Osu individuals are treated as inferior by the *Diala* class.[18] They are often confined to living in shrines or marketplaces and face objections when seeking relationships, be they romantic, marital, or congenial, outside their caste. In Chinua Achebe’s No Longer At Ease, it is noted that *Osu*s are designated separate seats in churches. The *Osu*s, seen as unclean, are barred from breaking “Kolanut” or offering prayers on behalf of individuals outside their caste due to the belief that they may bring calamity upon the society.This mistreatment has compelled many *Osu*s to seek refuge in other countries.

Since the advent of modernization in Igbo land, the osu caste system has faced criticism from those who view it as contrary to human right principles and freedom from discrimination. Human right groups advocating for its abolition highlight the punishments suffered by the osu individuals in Igboland, including parental poisoning of their children, disinheritance, ostracism, exclusion from social clubs, disruption of marriage ceremonies, denial of chieftaincy titles, property deprivation, and expulsion of spouses.[22] On 20 March 1956, Igbo legislators in the Eastern House of Assembly, Enugu, abolished the practice of referring to people as *osu*s. The imposed fines discouraged the public use of the term "O*su".*[23]

The *"Osu* Caste System" was officially abolished on 28 December 2018 during a ceremony held in Nri, the acclaimed ancestral home of the Igbo nation, in Anaocha local government area of Anambra State. The event was titled "*Nigeria: Osu Caste System in Igboland Ends Today".*[24]

Economic Activities

The study of Owerri economy will be approached from two dimensional angles, embracing both her traditional and modern economies. This approach is not intended to compare the two forms of economies, but to strike a balance between the two, in order to show the place of change and continuity in economic evolution of Owerri people which have continued symbiotically up to the time of the study in a proverbial fashion of the old in the new and the new in the old. To achieve this, a look at the three means of production; land, labour and capital is essential.[5] Owerri, as the capital city, serves as the main trading hub for yams, cassava (manioc), corn, and palm products for a modified

rainforest region that also produces rubber for export. It is renowned for its centres for handicrafts. There hasn't been much industrial growth yet, although one firm makes galvanized sheet iron.[4]

Land: Nigerian peoples have, from time out of human memory, eked out a living from land. As the case with all dominant agricultural societies, land was their most important resource and the individual person's relationship to it was a crucial factor of social and political identification. This sweeping statement, as factual as it is, also applied to Owerri people, who, traditionally depended on land as their chief source of economic mainstay. In Owerri traditional setting, land was abundant and was also collectively owned by family units. The head of the family distributed land for farming purpose.

Labour; For sure, in traditional Owerri there were plenty of land to be cultivated and lots of agricultural activities to be performed. The bulk of labour and its supply revolved around the family units. The unit of agricultural labour in Igbo society is the family, made up of a man, his wife and unmarried children. The same applied to Owerri people. Polygamy and large families were the vague partly as a means of ensuring a large labour force. Besides the family unit as chief source of farm labour, slavery, clientage and associational labour force constituted the other sources of labour force in traditional Owerri economy. Importantly, there was abundant supply of labour force to till the soil and attended to the animals. Hence Owerri people largely depended on human labour to till the land for agricultural purpose.

Agriculture: Agricultural practices were the major economic activities for which Owerri people were known. Consisting farming, fishing, animal husbandry, hunting, fruit and

vegetable gathering, agriculture had inseperable relationships between the people of Owerri and their general socio-cultural life, as one man could combine social, cultural and farming activities, while also playing military role when called upon. Put differently, there was no clear cut specialization in economic activities in traditional Owerri economy, as many economic functions could be handled by one man. Land rotation was practiced in order to allow long time of fallow and land fertility. Mixed cropping was also a common practice among Owerri farmers. Their farming method was mostly crude and non-mechanized, producing mainly for subsistent and just a little for exchange, in order to keep trade relations. The desire for large scale farming was discouraged by the land tenure system which did not allow for individual land holding, bigger than what the family head could guarantee. In most cases, the choice crops were yam, which was, and still regarded by Owerri people, and, indeed, the entire Igbo nation, as the king of crops. Other crops includes maize, Cocoyam, melon, Okro, cassava, pepper, and vegetables. Such crops like palm trees, raffia palm, pawpaw, etc, grew wild in the bush. The harvesting and collection of palm fruits was the collective responsibility of the family and some times, by individuals.

Animal Husbandry: Animal rearing was also a common economic activity for which Owerri people were known. The people owned and domesticated such animals like goat, sheep, dogs, fowl etc. The feeding and care for these animals was very simple. Most times residues from the farms were used to feed the animals. In addition to the strategy of using farm residues in feeding the animals, the animals could be allowed to move freely around the home stead and fed freely. There was also the common practice of taking live

stocks like goat and sheep to nearby garden or farms, where they were tied to pegs pined to the ground. “This was to allow them feed themselves around. In the evenings, the animals would be untied and taken back to the barn within the family compound.

Hunting: Hunting was one of the major economic activities known to be common among Owerri people. It was an economic activity associated among the male folks. It served as both source of meat, and family protein needs. It provided job for the people. Only courageous men could engage in hunting expedition. Hunting took place mostly in dry seasons when the bush was accessible. Hunting skill was a special one. Only men who knew the skill could successfully embark on hunting. Hunting in traditional economy of Owerri could be organized both in the night and during the day. Those hunting in the night used head lantern made of local materials for light. Most of the times, hunters appealed to spirit of the bush for guardians and necessary hunting skills. Men who engaged in hunting were exposed to many dangers such as encounter with dangerous animals like Lions, Leopard, etc. Stories have also been told of hunters who hunted to their own peril spirits who disguised as animals. Most times the killing of rare animals like lion did not only confer upon the hunter social respect, but also was received with fanfare and ululation by the people of Owerre.

Hunting as an economic activity among Owerri people was done only on Eke and Afor market days. The reason for this is yet not too clear. But it is highly suspected that it was on these two market days that people of Owerri were not found in the farms and bush because they had to go to the market to buy and sale. It was therefore safe for the hunters to hunt in the bush and farms without the risk of shooting human beings.

Occasionally, Owerri people could organize group hunting expedition. The group of hunters could involve hunters from more than one village. Before the invention of den-gun, hunters in Owerri whether at the individual or group levels, made use of crude weapons. However, with the introduction of den- gun, catarpolt, Knife, etc, there came some improvement in Owerre traditional hunting expedition.

Fishing: Fishing as a form of economic activity was not common among Owerri people. This was because there was no big stream or river in Owerri that could support extensive fishing activity. However, the presence of Nwokatankwo and Otamiri, provided room for small time fishing activity. Importantly, fishing for Owerri people was solely for family and personal consumption. It was unlikely that these rivers supported commercial fishing. Similarly, Lake Nwebere and the Nworie Rivers did not provide opportunities for fishing, since they were, but small lakes of minor significance. Again, periodic flow and dryness of both Nwokitankwo and Otamiri compelled only occasional fishing among Owerri men. The implements used by the fishermen include, but not limited to, hook, basket of various designs, canoe, head lamp, for those who fish at night. There were also other fishing materials like, trap, fence and holes dug in the rivers which could hold fish when water dried up from the stream. Some of the favorite fish food used by the fishermen to lure fish to their trap include, earth worm, maggot. Cassava piles, death snail, palm fruit etc.

Trading: The people of Owerri from time past were known traders. During the days of long distant trade, Owerri people had trade relations with Nkwere, Isu, Mbaise, Mbaitoli, etc. Even till date, the routes created in the course of long distant trade between Owerre

and her neigbours are still in existence. These routes were called the “Amara Isu”. In the course of both long distant and internal trade relations, such market centres as the Afo Ihitta, Eke Ukwu Owerrre, Eke Ihitta, Eke-egbelu, and Afo Awaka sprang and became functional. These markets operated every eight or four days known as Eke, Orie, Nkwo and Afo. Other economic activities such as, weaving, carving dying, and herbal medicine were common among Owerri people.

Transportation: Transportation during this time was mostly by human portrage, as there were just a few mechanical means of transportation to help transport goods from place to place, and non existence of beast of burden as was the case among the Hausa and Fulani in the pre-colonial and colonial times.

Oil Prospecting in Nigeria: This began in Owerri before the second world war. The war ended and shell D’arcy returned to Owerri in the forties of the last century to continue the oil prospecting hence the shell camp in Owerri. Shell was in Owerri up to the early sixties before moving to Port Harcourt when their level of technology could not strike oil in Iho in Ikeduru LG.A of Imo state a few Kilometers away from Owerri. However, today there is a Chevron Rig in Owerri but not yet commissioned.[2]

The British Occupation

Owere was anglicized to Owerri with the arrival of the British. However, it was still pronounced as Owere. Before Owerri was created and existed for many years or centuries, all of its nearby cities (communities) were founded. The Owerri Divisional Headquarters were first established by the British Colonial Government as Provincial Headquarters.[15]

The peace with friendliness of Owerri people was encouraging which made the British settle and build;

a. Military Hospital later named African Hospital which thereafter was renamed General Hospital and today is the Federal Medical Centre Owerri. The Owerri General Hospital is relocated to New Owerri in Owerri Municipal.

b. Government School in 1906 and added the secondary wing now Government Secondary School Owerri in 1935 and moved the Primary School to Wetheral Road Owerri as Owerri Township School in 1952.

Meanwhile, in 1969, Owerri served as the third and final capital of the Republic of Biafra. The breakaway state's capital was constantly being relocated as the Nigerian Military took control of the previous capitals.

Owerri during colonization

Source:"Portrait of a Colonizer"(African Studies Review in Colonial Nigeria, 1897-1920)

The Nationalist or Economic Protectionist Theory otherwise known as the Neo-mercantilist Theory, which was developed by Gilpin Robert,[7] is best suitable to discuss the growth of Owerri capital territory from its rudimentary stage to capital city in 1976. According to theory, European nation enacted rules and policies to protect their

economic interest both at home and in over sea colonies. In this wise, every nation in Europe that had territories in Africa, did so for national economic interest.

Owerri not only Divisional Headquarters but became the provincial headquarters of the Old Owerri Province was what is now Imo, Abia plus Afikpo up to Diobu in the Rivers State. The need to have a seaport informed the building of Port Harcourt from Owerri the Provincial headquarters. When Port Harcourt was finally built, Delta province was carved out of Owerri Province with Port Harcourt as its headquarters. Note that Port Harcourt was built from Owerri as Port Harcourt never existed before the advent of the British. Interestingly, the changing nature of Owerri economy due to urbanization, depletion of available land for cultivation and increasing low agricultural yield pushed many Owerri indigenes into modern type of economic activities thereby relegating farming and associate agricultural activities to the background.

Consequently, before long, Owerri Capital Territory became washed with all manners of modern business activities ranging from production, services, construction, trading and agro-based business activities. The climax of it all was the establishment of the Onitsha Road Industrial Layout by the Achike Udenwa led government- an industrial programme that has remained, since inception, as one of those elephant projects for which Nigeria was known, and on whose account the nation's economy was being stagnated.

The work has so far demonstrated that Owerri People have rich and worthy history that can be appreciated by Owerri indigenes and non indigenes alike. It has equally shown that the rich Owerri culture and tradition as well as the entire areas of Owerri have

since the advent of Europeans, gone through series of transformations, thus, becoming a modern city and the capital of Imo State. In all fairness, the study has proven that Owerri culture and tradition are peculiar to Owerri People, cherished and envied by foreigners highlighting the historical origin and geography of Owerri people before the Civil War;

Long Live Owere nchi ise![2]

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CHAPTER THREE

OUTBREAK OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR ON OWERRI (1967-1970)

Introduction

The Nigerian-Biafran War stemmed from the fact that different entities with totally different cultures and systems were unified following the promulgation and amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates. The independence of 1960 created three provinces which followed the tribal patterns, that is the Hausa and Fulani of the Northern States, Igbo of the South-Eastern States, and Yoruba of the South-Western States. The already existing tribal tensions heightened the overthrowing of the government in 1966 which led Aguyi Ironsi taking the reins of power as president. Aguyi Ironsi lost his life to another coup (Northern led) few months after and this unleashed further retaliated measures on the Igbo flock. On the 30th may, 1967, the Igbo Nation declared independence as a nation. Violence and anti-Igbo pogroms in Northern Nigeria, ethno-religious altercations, a military coup, a counter-coup and persecution of Igbo living in Northern Nigeria; struggle for control over the lucrative oil production in the Niger Delta was the herald that championed the civil war in 1966.[1]

Owerri was known for its good food and agricultural productions before the war. It was very important during the war as it was and still is a central town. One can get to aba, umuahia okigwe through owerri, each not more than forty minutes. A route that links to diverse places including Calabar, Port Harcourt and Ikot Ekpene, Enugu, Onitsha which marks its strategic position. Then, in 1968, the Nigerian troops captured parts Owerri such as Port Harcourt road, Okigwe road etc but in 1969, the Biafran troops

defeated them and drove them out from Owerri. Then the Nigerian troops regrouped and came back with a terrible force backed with foreign aids and conquered Owerri finally.[18] The escalation of the war can also be attributed to International involvement such as United Kingdom, Israel, China, France, Soviet Union, Egypt, United States, Canada, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, Congo, Ivory Coast etc.[4] The war was characterized with serious bombardments with Russian made weapons, air raids and supersonic jet fighters on Biafrans by the Nigerian soldiers, killings, infantry, military onslaught, shellings from artilleries..

Biafra stood strong for three years till the Nigerian govt with the help of foreign agents were able to subject Biafrans to serious economic blockade.[14] The biafran economy was such that the citizens did not have food to eat which led to a disease called kwashiorkor which ravaged the Biafran land killing so many children. The war was gravely disastrous on Owerri as every family in Igbo land lost one to two or more persons while some had no survivors at all. As such the number of people that died during the war is inestimable.[16] Ojukwu being the leader decided to surrender as he saw that Biafrans could no longer bear the hunger. This was followed with increased British support in which the Nigerian federal forces launched their final offensive against the Biafrans. After the fall of Owerri, the surrender paper was signed on 14 January 1970 in Lagos and thus came the end of the civil war and renunciation of secession.[2]

Background of the War

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran war or the Nigeria-Biafra War, was a war fought to counter the secession of the Republic of Biafra from Nigeria. Biafra,

which declared its independence on May 30, 1967, was in the then Eastern Region of Nigeria with the Igbo people forming the majority. The war lasted for 30 months, from July 6, 1967, to January 15, 1970, with millions of casualties on both sides. The Nigerian civil war did not happen overnight but certain events led to it where thousands both military and civilians lost their lives.[5]

The Amalgamation of 1914

In 1914, the Southern Protectorate of Nigeria was joined with Northern Protectorate to form the single British colony of Nigeria. The unification was done for economic reasons rather than political. Sir Frederick Lugard who took office as governor of both protectorates in 1912, established several central institutions to anchor the evolving unified structure. But this marriage was made without the consent of the people, without a referendum but in the interest of the colonialists. A system that would bring about greed, hatred, nepotism and tribalism in the long run among the people of Nigeria.

The 1946 Arthur Richards' Constitution

The year 1946 saw the adoption of Arthur Richards' Constitution which defined Nigeria for the first time in terms of regions thus dividing the still colonized country into three main regions; the Northern, Western and the Eastern regions. The 1946 constitution was thus a compromise instrument on the part of the British designed to establish a constitutional framework in which all sections of Nigeria could be represented in the legislative council and which guarantees an unofficial majority both in the House of Assembly and in the legislative council for indigenous Nigerians. However, the effects of this constitution made the centre weak but granted strength to the regions in the same

country. This could have been the best time of creating three independent countries instead of creating three dependent ones in a country.[6]

Operation Wet-ie and the Western Regional Elections of October 1965

In 1964, the United Peoples Party(UPP) had evolved to be the Nigerian national Democratic Party(NNDP) with Akintola as the leader and as a friend of the ruling party, Northern Peoples Congress(NPC). Hence, the 1965 Western Regional elections gave the NPC another chance of maintaining its political power in the country. More importantly, the NNDP was determined to remain in power. In the face of all overwhelming odds against the NNDP should the elections be free and fair, it was left with one alternative; to rig the elections. As a result of grave irregularities, the NNDP won the elections. It was publicly charged that the NNDP victory was due to fraud.

Defeated political candidates had in the past run to the courts to challenge irregularities at elections. This time, they did not go to the courts. Instead, the people took the law into their hands. Riots, looting, arson and murder were the rule of the day. Party thugs poured gasoline on opponents and set them ablaze, a situation then known as operation Wet-ie. Nigeria looked to the Federal Government to step in to arrest the situation in the region, but all pleas were to no avail. Meanwhile, the riots and killings continued and the NNDP Government of the Western Region imposed curfews in Mushin, Ikeja, Agege, Ajeromi and Awori district. Yet, the disturbances continued and each day brought a new toll of rioting, arson, looting and murder. Balewa's reluctance to step in and declare a state of emergency when he should have spiraled the coup of

January 1966. As Emperor Nero watched as Rome burned, the prime minister fidgeted as the West descended to an incendiary state.

January 15 1966 Military Coup d'etat

The war escalated from a tribal dispute which involved a coup killing corrupt politicians and senior military officers in the country from the three tribes Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba.[8] This coup was carried out by Seven Majors led by Majors Emmanuel Arinze Ifeajuna, who sabotaged the Igbos when they were winning and Patrick Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. On the morning of Saturday, January 15, 1966 the nation woke up to the frightening news that Prime Minister Balewa was missing, the Sarduana of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Western Region, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Samuel Okotie Eboh and a host of others, including senior and junior military officers had been killed in a military pogrom and putsch. This coup ushered in the Commander of the Army, Major General Johnson Thomas Umunnakwe Aguiyi Ironsi took official control country and became the military Head of State.[5]

Comprising of the Seven Majors wer six Igbo and one Yoruba, Adewale Ademoyega. These events raised tensions among the Northern elite, especially in the Army, that the Easterners were behind the coup, as the majority of the coup plotters were Easterners while a majority of the casualties were Northerners. In a bid to quell contentions in the Army, Ironsi made Gowon, a Northerner, his Chief of Army Staff. No action was taken in the Igbos' Eastern Region and not one single shot was fired. This convinced the

Northern elements in the Army that the Igbos were behind the killing of their leaders and officers. Hence, the plan for vengeance began.

July 29, 1966, Northern Counter-Coup

The decree No. 34 of May 24, 1966 promulgated by Ironsi and the non-trial of the coup plotters of the January 15, 1966 carnage was the beginning of the end for him. The decree made the centre strong, thereby abolishing the powers granted to the regions. Interestingly, Nzeogwu, in an interview he granted in 1967, affirmed that Ironsi shot himself in the foot with that decree. This caused massive unrest in the Northern part of the country which led to a counter coup in July1966 killing J.T Aguiyi Ironsi. Prior to this, Ironsi began a tour of the country and met with the Northern elite and traditional emirs, assuring them of a united Nigeria. In the early hours of July 29, 1966 Northern soldiers, led by Major Theophilus Danjuma and Lieutenant Gaba Dada Paiko, came to arrest Ironsi and questioned him about his alleged complicity in the January coup. He was beaten as he was dragged along to a shallow pit in Lalupon, near Ibadan with his escorts, where their bodies were riddled with bullets. The rise of Aguiyi Ironsi as a military Head of State raised fears in the hearts of the Northerners that the Igbos were all out for the total control of the country.[6]

The Igbo Pogrom

The Igbo politicians spared heightened the grievances of the other tribes especially the Hausas. In other words, this created enmity between the Igbos and the Hausas which led to massacre of the Igbo called the Igbo Pogrom. The pogrom was done by the Northerners who appeared to be so aggrieved due to the killing of the Saduana of Sokoto

by the coup plotters led by Chukwuemeka Kaduna Nzeogwu(he was born in Kaduna which gave him the name Kaduna Nzeogwu but from Delta State). He executed the ones in the north and made sure the targets were killed including Saduana of Sokoto, Abubakar Tafawa belewa of the Yorubaland but failed to execute Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe(Titula President) and Michael Okpara. This led to grave animosity against the Igbos. The Igbo pogrom started with the killing of pregnant women in thr north and their babies butchered as the foetus' were gruesomely cut out from their mothers' womb, their dead bodies were put on a train to the East.[8]

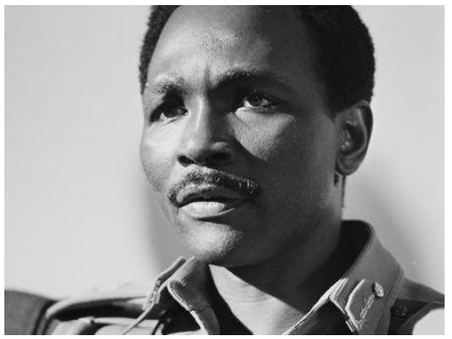
As they killed so many Igbos, the Igbos who survived ran home and persuaded Ikemba Ojukwu, a senoir Igbo man in the army to organize and rule the Igbo. That was how the leadership of the Biafran Govt came up under Ikemba Ojukwu.[14]

The January 1967 Aburi Conference

With the Northern Counter coup of July 29,1966 the political development of Nigeria's Federal

structure took a different turn. It was heightened even more by the fact that the Eastern Regional Government in Enugu immediately threatened secession if certain grievances and demands were not met. The immediate concern of the Federal Government was for it to find ways to appease the East so long as such concessions were within the framework of one Nigeria. But the Eastern Military Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, refused to leave the East for any meeting anywhere in Nigeria because he claimed he was not safe outside the East.

Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon



Source: Terry Fincher-Hulton Archive/Getty Image

The Federal Government too argued that the Nigerian leader, Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon should also not go to the East for any meeting. His life they also claimed was not safe there either.[22] it is important to note that On 15 January 1966, Nigeria recorded its first military coup d'état, which also ushered the military into governance. Under the new military administration, Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, was appointed Military Governor of the Eastern Region. Later that year, on 29 July, a counter-coup took place, which saw the coming to power of Colonel Yakubu Gowon as Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria's Armed Forces. Disagreements between Col. Ojukwu and Col. Gowon over leadership issues resulted in the former refusing to take instructions from Lagos (then the federal capital).[29]

Eastern Military Governor, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu

Source: keystone features-Hulton Archive/Getty Images

Tension mounted and Lieutenant-General Joseph Arthur Ankrah of Ghana offered a neutral meeting place. The venue was Aburi, Ghana. The point of the agreement at Aburi was that each region would be responsible for its own affairs and that the Federal Military Government would be responsible for matters that affected the entire country which gave great delight to Ojukwu. The officers, Ojukwu and Gowon agreed to this known as the Aburi accord, and had a unanimous decision to fulfil the agreement of the Aburi accord. Unlike Ojukwu who was eager to act on the Aburi accord once in Nigeria, Gowon broke his promise when he returned and restated that the constitutional changes the East proposed at Aburi would not work because such changes would result to the end of Nigeria as a single nation. In response to the accord, the federal government promulgated Decree No. 8, which was mainly an embodiment of the accord. The accord finally broke down because of differences of interpretation on both sides. This led to the outbreak of Nigerian Civil War.[23]

Ojukwu's declaration "On Aburi we stand"

Source: HistoryVulle Aburi Accord: What really Happened in Aburi

The Role of Permanent Secretaries

When they got back from the Aburi meeting, some of the educated northern elite and advisers from the western countries made Gowon understand that the Aburi Accord was a grave mistake. They advised him on the implication of the Aburi Accord, that any of the regions being Eastern, Weastern or Northern region can secede anytime under a con-federal state. Gowon withheld the implementation while Ojukwu still maintained "on Aburi we stand" by implementing the Aburi accord within the eastern region forming his own eastern region army, flag, currency which brought about Biafra. Ojukwu used his own veto power to pull out the eastern region from Nigeria due to Gowon failure to implement the aburi accord.

Map of Biafra

Source: BuzzNigeria.com.Nigeria Civil war

Biafra was recognized by countries such as Ivory Coast, Haiti, nothern america, Tanzania and Gabon. Gowon still maintained one nigeria.[30]

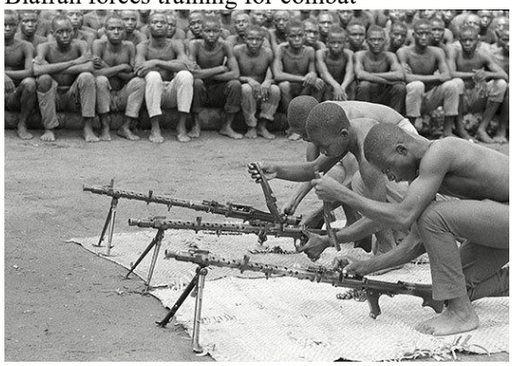
The Creation of 12 States

When on May 27,1967 General Gowon announced that Nigeria would be divided into more states, twelve in all. The Northern Region was broken into six states; North-Western, North-Central, North-Eastern, Benue-Plateau, Kano and Kwara etc thereby cracking its monolithic posture. The East was broken into three, with the Igbo people having their own state(East-Central) and the non-Ibo "monority" people in the East two of their own states(Rivers and South-East). The Mid-West remained as it was.

Some part of the Western Region was carved out and merged with the Federal territory of Lagos to form Lagos state. What remained of the Western Region became Western State. The creation of more states in the country pushed the East-Central State, the Igbo heartland, into an interior pocket, cut off from the coastal oil reserves and its two seaports of Port-Harcourt and Calabar. Thus, the lack of seaports for the East-Central State was devastating. For the secessionists the creation of more states was a bombshell,

a political reality that they refused to accept or even believe. They began to speed up the secession of the Eastern Region which would include according to them the two new states of Rivers and South-East.

Biafran forces training for combat

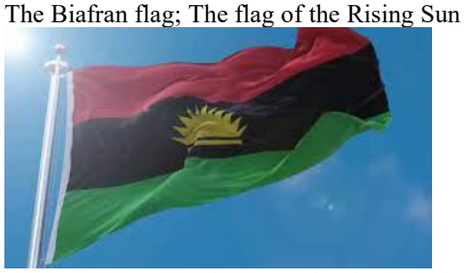


Source: Kurt Strumpf-AP/Shutterstock.com

Declaration of Biafra in May 1967

On May 30, 1967, Ojukwu proclaimed that "the territory and Region known as Eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelves and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and the title. The Republic of Biafra." A new flag was hoisted in public buildings in the East and the Police and Army appeared in different uniforms. A national anthem that sounded like Sibelius'Finlandia and which Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe later claimed was plagarized from his poem, "Ode to Onitsha", was broadcast.

The Biafran flag; The flag of the Rising Sun



Source: Vanguard News, Nigeria struggles with memory of Biafra war

Outbreak of the War

Nigeria's political instability had now been pushed to its limit. On July 6, 1967 the Federal Government mounted what she initially termed a "Police action" to arrest the secession. The secession was now such that it could not be stopped by just a mere "Police action".Nigerian Govt declared war on the Biafran Govt for trying to secede which led to 30months cruel Nigerian Civil War in which over one million innocent civilians' lives were lost, equipment worth billions of dollars wasted and thousands of stalwart soldiers on both side dead. After a senseless war that lasted for thirty months that has scarred and marred the history of Nigeria, the Biafrans eventually surrendered after Ojukwu had fled for Cote d'ivoire. His deputy, Major-General Philip Effiong then announced Biafra's unconditional surrender and the secession ended.[14] "Keeping Nigeria one is a task that must be done" was General Yakubu Gowon's slogan as the reason behind the war.[8]

The Civil War in Owerri

The war started in Lagos, and everybody took to their heels forcing people back to their fatherland. Some people came back home while some could not make it as they were either killed on their war home by bombs or killed in lagos. They were not given the

opportunity to escape nor the means. Some received the information late. Those that were able to make it home, came back with nothing but the clothes they were putting on.[27] Within a year, Nigerian government troops surrounded Biafra, and captured coastal oil facilities and the city of Port Harcourt. A blockade was imposed as a deliberate policy during the ensuing stalemate which led to the mass starvation of Biafran civilians. During the two and half years of the war, there were about 100,000 overall military casualties, while between 500,000 and 2 million Biafran civilians died of starvation.[3]

Colonel Odumegwu Emeka Ojukwu, the leader of the breakaway Republic of Biafra, stands in front of a Biafra flag as he addresses a press conference in Enugu, August 16, 1967.

Source: ***Vanguard News*, Nigeria struggles with memory of Biafra war**

Course of the War

In July 1968, Commander of the 3rd Marine Commando (3MCDO), Colonel Benjamin Adekunle began making plans for an invasion of Aba, Owerri, and Umuahia in a military operation he nicknamed Operation OAU. Adekunle stated that he would be able to capture all three cities in two weeks. Adekunle's strategy was to surround a city and starve it into submission before attacking its weakened defenders. After 12 days of violent fighting in Aba, the 3MCDO managed to capture the city on September 14,

followed by Owerri on September 16. When the 3MCDO was pushed back at Umuahia, the Nigerians retreated to Owerri, where they set up defenses in and around the city. The Biafrans made their way down the Aba-Umuahia road and managed to capture the entire road along with Aba on October 15.[2] When the Nigerian soldiers came down to Apagana, it was disastrous as they met with serious resistance destroying the Niger Bridge.

Biafran soldiers were winning as they went into lagos, heading towards Ibadan but ifajuna sabotaged Igbos when they were already winning which caused a huge setback. Moreover, we were really small in number as calabar, rivers betrayed Biafra and joined the enemy side. Brigadier Patrick Amadi was heading Nnewi sector and defending it against the enemy as such the enemy couldn't penetrate so the Nigerian soldiers came into Owerri through Port Harcourt. Due to the set back, Ojukwu had to enter the war himself and was almost captured by the marine Nigerians.[8]

The River Niger Bridge at Onitsha destroyed during the Nigerian Civil War

Source; Daily Post Nigeria

Siege of Owerri

The capture of Owerri was not in the initial assignment of the 3MCDO. The assignment given to Adekunle's Division was the liberation of Uyo, Annang and Aba while Owerri lay in the 2 Division operational areas. However after the conquest of Port Harcourt by the Federal troops, the commander of the 3MCDO Colonel Adekunle went to Lagos on Tuesday, May 21st,1968 and granted interview to the world press where upon he was asked the next target of the wonderful 3MCDO and he answered that he would capture and give Owerri, Aba and Umuahia (OAU) as Independence Day October 1st, 1968 celebration gift, to General Gowon and the people of Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the3MCDO was divided into 4 sectors. Sector 1 was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Godwin Ally comprised of 15 and 16 Brigade, 2 Sector by Lt. Colonel Akinrinade comprised of 14 and 17 Brigade, 3 Sector by Lt Col. AlabiIsama, comprised of 12 Brigade, 13 Brigade and 18 Brigade and 4 Sector by Ayo Ariyo.[24]

15 Brigade, under Major YemiAlabi (and later by Major Makanjuola) and 16 Brigade commanded by Major Utuk were tasked to conquer Owerri. 12 Brigade under Captain Isemede and 17 Brigade under Philemon Shande were giventhe responsibility to conquer Aba. 13 Brigade commanded by Major Tuoyo and 18 Brigade under Major Aliyuwere given the task of capturing Umuahia. 14 Brigade commanded by Major George Innih was to provide the link between Owerri and Aba. The capture and recapture of Owerri by both forces was so confusing that it made the hitherto optimistic government spokesmen in Lagos, to become increasing circumspect about predicting the

date for victory, and confined themselves to “we are confident that the war will end this year”.[25]

The Biafran forces, unlike in some other sectors of the war, were now also on the offensive instead of the usual defensive battle. At Owerri, the war became dogged and dirtier. The fall of Owerri in 1968 came after the Biafran troops successfully drove the Federal army out of Oguta[26] which was undertaken by the Biafran 14 division. The battle of Owerri/Oguta fell under the domain of 1 Sector of the3MCDO commanded by Lt. Col. Godwin Ally which included a Special Force under Aliyu Abubarkar, 14 Brigade commanded by Eromobor and later by George Innih and 16 Brigade commanded by Major Utuk. However, at 1700 hours the same day, Achuzia, Nwajei and Anuku launched another offensive with the available troops against the Federal forces of 15 Brigade in Oguta led by Major Makanjuola. The attack was very successful so much so that by 1845 hours, the Biafran forces had cleared the town completely from the Federal forces and the Biafran Naval PC 204 played a leading role in the exercise. Much equipment and clothing weresalvaged from the boats the Biafran forces destroyed including a 40mm Bofor anti-aircraft gun and a Panhard amoured vehicle which the Biafran nicknamed “Oguta Boy”.

Biafran soldiers rejoice after defeating the Nigerian army at the battle of Abagana march 31 1968

Source: CNN IN photos: Nigeria's civil war CNN

On 13th September 1968, they launched an attack on Obinze, eight miles south of Owerri, the headquarters of the Biafran 52 Brigade and 14 Division and disorganized them. They moved their headquarters to Owerri but had not effectively reorganized their army when the Federal army attacked Owerri. Infact, the report of the attack got to the Biafran army Commander, Major-General Madiebo and the commander of14 Division, Col. Nwajei when the Federal forces were still at Awarra but there was little they could do to remedy the situation owing to lack of ammunition. Not long, the Federal 16 Brigade commanded by Major Utuk(now given field promotion of Lieutenant Colonel) got to Ohoba town and was pressing to enter Avu and Obinze on the outskirt of Owerri. Later they got to Chokocho-Okehi-Okpuala road. Yet, the Biafran forces had no answer to the assault. Although the Biafran 63 Brigade led by Major Okilo put some feeble resistance which was highly infinitesimal to the Federal fire power and numerical strength.

The Capture of Owerri by the Federal Government

On 17 September 1968 therefore, Owerri came under severe attack. The Federal army offensive was preceded by constant air raids by the Nigerian Air force so as to degrade the resistance of the Biafran army before the Federal army final assault. One of the earliest targets of the air raids was the Biafran state house in Owerri. In the night of 17th September, Owerri saw a heavy artillery bombardment and on Monday, 18th September, Owerri fell to the Federal army of the 3MCDO and the Biafran 14 Division commander Col. Nwajeiwho achieved great fit in Oguta was relieved of his appointment despite his plea that he lost Owerri not because of the will to fight but arms to fight with and was replaced by Brigadier Ogbugo Kalu. This operation to capture Owerri, Aba and Umuahia often referred as operation OAU started in September 1968.

The Civil war in Owerri

Source: Nigerian Civil War- Wikipedia

The Recapture of Owerri by Biafran Soldiers

On the 7th October, 1968, 6 days after the October 1 anniversary, the 1 Sector of commando had lost almost all its troops and weapons and 3MCDO was up in flames, the battle was so devastating that on 15 October 1968, the Biafran forces reorganized and launched a heavy counter attack to recapture Owerri. They surrounded the city and then sent troops into the city to have the Nigerian forces flee from the city so as to run into the

waiting hands of Biafran forces. While Nigerian Head of State Yakubu Gowon was distracted by the anti-tax riots in the west, the Biafran Brigadier Alexander Madiebo encircled Owerri while a unit of Biafran soldiers attacked Nigerian supply convoys attempting to enter the city. The Biafrans were assisted by heavy rain and mud which slowed down supply convoys even further.

On 3 December the Biafran 14th Division under Colonel Ogbugo Kalu and 63rd Brigade under Col. Lambert Ihenacho moved towards Owerri, capturing the villages of Eziama and Elelem. On 5 December the Biafran 60th Brigade under Colonel Azum Asoya began the main assault on Owerri, in which over 50,000 rounds of ammunition, 300 mortars, 200 howitzer shells, and 20 anti-tank weapons were fired. The assault lasted for two days but the 3,000-man Nigerian 16th Division under Colonel E. A. Etuk stayed in their original position, while suffering heavy casualties. The Biafran 68th Battalion under Major Ikeji gained control of a stretch of the Port Harcourt road from Owerri to the Otamiri River, establishing a link with the 63rd Brigade.[2]

Mortar bomb blast in Owerri

Source; From Molly Kilete, Abuja *Sun Nigeria*

On 19 December 1968 16 Division regrouped its soldiers and captured the town of Abiaka, followed by Avu and Afrola. Thus, on December 21, 1968 the Biafran army

surrounded Owerri, firing mortars and shells into the city. Meanwhile, the year 1969 started with the transfer on 3 January by Colonel Ojukwu of two Brigades of the “S” Division from Aba front under the command of Colonel Onwuatuegwu to the Owerri front to help Ogbugo Kalu and the Fourteenth Division in the siege of Owerri.

On 6 January 1969 the Biafran 60th Brigade captured Umuakpu, Umuagwo, and Omanelu while the Biafran 68th Battalion under Major Ikeji seized Obinze; the 68th Battalion attempted to capture Avu but were beaten back by the Nigerian 16th Brigade. By the end of the day, the Biafrans controlled much of the Port Harcourt road and began planting mines, digging ditches, and laying trees across it in an attempt to block any Nigerian reinforcements from entering Owerri. Thus on January 8,1969 the Biafrans gained control of Owerri. Although the Biafrans lost the city, they regained it within a few days. They gained control of the main Aba-Owerri road at Alakwo and Okpuala down to the road between Olakwo and Owerrinta Bridge, near Ugba junction and later to Amala. On January 12 Col. Benjamin Adekunle ordered another offensive against the Biafrans inside Owerri.the Nigerians inside Owerri were trying to push out of the town in all directions. They pushed up to Orji Bridge on the Owerri-Okigwe road and from there launched attack on Mbieri and Orodo with the aim of getting to Orlu and Nkwere but they were pushed back to Izombe and Obudi. The Nigerians troops were quickly running out of food and ammunition and were constantly being bombarded by the Biafran air force led by Carl Gustaf.

A damaged aircraft at the airstrip in Uli, codenamed "Annabelle."

Source; Daily Post Nigeria Photo: edujandon.com

On 15 January 1969 the Biafran 60th Brigade attacked Owerri and were able to force the 16th Division to retreat across the Otamini Bridge. Instead of pursuing the retreating Nigerians, the hungry and half-naked Biafran soldiers discovered the Nigerians' food and clothing supplies and decided to have their fill. The Nigerian 16th Brigade was able to regroup and made a counter-attack across the Otamiri Bridge, causing the Biafrans to retreat. On 24 January the Nigerian government renewed its offensive and began bombing Biafran positions in the area. After five days of continuous air strikes, the Biafrans remained in their original positions; the Nigerian government knew that Owerri was encircled and they couldn't do anything about it.[2] At the end of January 1969, in a conference with Colonel Ojukwu and Brigadier Kalu, Colonel Onwuatuegwu proposed that head-on tactics should be abandoned, and what fire-power the Biafrans had should be used to try to clear the flanks of Owerri and close the Nigerian supply line. The plan was agreed to, and throughout the month of February both commanders cleared the Nigerian occupied villages to the east and west of Owerri. finally penetrating in force round to the south of the town.

On 7 February 1969 both the Nigerian Air Force and Egyptian mercenaries bombed out and completely destroyed the villages of Umohiagu and Ozu Abam, which prompted accusations of deliberately targeting civilians. The government ordered the Nigerian Air Force to avoid civilian targets but they disregarded this request and continued to bomb towns and Red Cross shelters. In late February, Gen. Gowon visited the 16th Brigade in Owerri and attempted to encourage them to keep fighting until re-enforcements could be sent. The completion of the encirclement and the final cutting off the Nigerian supply came on 28 February. On 14 March Nigerian troops attempted to capture the Omanelu-Umuakpu and Elele-Ubimini-Awarra roads but were beaten back by defending Biafran soldiers, leaving them isolated and short of food.

On 15 March the Biafran S Division under Major Timothy Onwuatuegwu made a frontal assault on the 16th Brigade but was forced to halt after suffering heavy casualties. Major Onwuatuegwu placed half of his men under the command of Major Joseph Achuzie and were able to get within 1km of the city. Major Achuzie demanded total control of the S Division but was refused by Onwuatuegwu and the two men almost shot each other after drawing their guns. President Ojukwu stepped in and gave Major Achuzie control of the S Division for one week, continuing the frontal assault on Owerri. Achuzie's plan ultimately failed and he retreated after suffering heavy casualties, Ojukwu then immediately restored Onwuatuegwu as commander and began drawing up new plans for invading Owerri.[2]

The Battle of Owerri

On 31 March the Biafran 14th Division under Ogbugo Kalu attacked Owerri and secured control over 70% of the city. Biafran soldiers began intercepting radio waves that revealed the 16th Brigade was going to execute all Biafran POWs due to a lack of food. The Swedish pilot Carl Gustaf von Rosen and his "Biafra Babies" fighter squadron, consisting of six MFI-9 Junior fighters, constantly hounded Nigerian air drops, making Nigerian food supplies scarce. By April 1969 the Biafrans had driven the Nigerians more than a mile away from Owerri. On 20 April Etuk's second-in-command, Major Ted Hamman, was shot and killed in Owerri by a Biafran sniper who had managed to get within firing range. On the evening of 22 April, Lt. Col. Utuk held a meeting with his battalion commanders. It was decided that despite orders from Colonel Adekunle in Port Harcourt to stay put, they would instead pull out. On April 24 the Nigerian 16 Brigade fought their way out of Owerri and made a beeline out of the area.

A young officer orders an attack during the Biafra conflict in Nigeria in 1969

Source: Romano Cagnoni/Hulton Archive/Getty Images- Remembering Nigeria's Biafra war that many prefer to forget-BBC News policies Nigeria

Major battle started at Umuguma on the morning of 25th April and up to Avu and Ohoba when the few remaining men of 16 Brigade led by Utuk joined other Nigerian

troops after Ohoba. In warfare, the inability to rescue isolated troop held in enemy territory has the capacity of throwing both the military and the political class into disorientation. The eventual withdrawal of the encircled 16th Brigade commanded by Lt. Col. Utuk from Owerri brought relief to the Federal military and political class but also marked the complete recapture of Oweri by the Biafran forces. On the Biafran side, it sent a signal to Nigeria and the world that despite all the reverses of the war to date, Biafra was still capable of significant resistance. It destroyed the myth surrounding the federal 3rd Marine Commando Division and its well-known commander, Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, a.k.a."Black Scorpion". It enhanced road and telecommunications links within the enclave of Biafra. It relieved the threat to the strategic Uli-Ihiala airstrip. It also created a hinge point for subsequent aggressive Biafran probes towards Port Harcourt.[7] On April 25 the Biafran 14 Division ambushed the retreating Nigerians killed and captured many of their men. By this time most Nigerians had been kicked out of Owerri and on April 26 many more Nigerians surrendered to the Biafrans.

On 26 April 1969 when the Biafran troops led by Brigadier OgbugoKalu succeeded in driving the Federal forces out Owerri for the second time, Biafrans went agog with the news. This battle of Owerri and of course the battle of OAU ended in favour of Biafran army, and to a very large extent, eclipsed all the hitherto achievements of Col. Adekunle, the commander of 3MCDO. On May 16, 1969 Colonel Adekunle was replaced by Colonel Obasanjo to revive the morale of Commandos. According to Obasanjo, the Moral of the soldiers at least of 3 Marine Commando Division was at its lowest ebb. Desertion and absence from duty without leave was rife in the Division. The

despondence and general lack of will to fight in the soldiers was glaringly manifest in the large numbers of cases of self-inflicted injuries throughout the formation. Some officers tactically encouraged these malpractices and unsoldierly conduct by condoning such acts or withdrawing their own kith and kin or fellow tribesmen to do guard duties in the rear and in the officers' own houses. Distrust and lack of confidence plagued the ranks of the officer corps. Operations were unhealthily competitive in an unmilitary fashion and officers openly rejoiced at each other's misfortune. And as was expected, Obasanjo revived what was left in the 3MCDO. He paid them their salaries and paid greater interest in their welfare.

End of the War

On 20th May, 1969 The attack was led by the I sector of the 3MCDO and in just one hour battle 3MCDO lost about 1,000 troops. After the battle, and despite series of attempts, the Federal forces did not conquer Owerri again until 9th January 1970[7]. Machine guns were used by Nigerian soldiers which killed so many people including Biafran soldiers. Usually, when one surrenders, they would be taken as hostages but most Nigerian soldiers took no hostage but killed all those who surrendered. Biafrans had no arms, the guns they had were only capable of shooting once unlike the Nigerian sophisticated weapons. On 5th of January 1970, Major General Alexander Madiebo the Biafran army commander assured the leaders that if given more arms and ammunition, he would turn the table on Nigerians in less than one month. This was supported by Mr Dominic Amadi when he said; "We didn't have enough Amunitions as we were given

just two bullets to go to war while the Nigerian soldiers had chains of bullets and enough firearms."[8]

Despite the optimism of the Biafran army, the revitalized 3MCDO led by Colonel Obasanjo recaptured Owerri on 9th January and the Biafran leader, General Odumegwu Ojukwu left the country on 10th January 1970 and the war formerly came to an end on the 15th of January 1970.[7] However, not all parts of Owerri were captured places like Umunahu, Umualum were not affected by the war, it was majorly Ebikoro and Umuchima but passed by Emekuku, the people were not affected.[18]

Owerri People During the War

The town of Owerri was inadvertently so important to the Federal and Biafran forces during the civil war so much so that the battle of Owerri has been acknowledged as one of deadliest in the civil war. This was evident in the way the town changed hands between the Federal and the Biafran forces as many as three times. While the Biafran forces saw Owerri as the last major town under their control, they believed that its effective defense would go a long way to ensure the safety of the Uli airport. They were therefore ready to defend it to the last man.[7] As a result of this, Owerri was gravely affected as a great battle ensued. The war brought all activities to a halt such as political, social and commercial activities. There was abject poverty, houses were burnt down, people died, there were corpses everywhere. There was no freedom of movement, starvation, kwashiorkor and malnutrition were the order of the day. There was no food to eat even if there was any, it was nothing to write home about.[16]

The sensitivity of this study gave rise to the interview of the Owerri survivors who were eager to share their bitter experiences during the war as so many events and mishaps took place.

Conscription of Male Teenagers into the Biafran Army

The Biafran young men suffered a great deal during the war, they were either killed on sight by the enemy forces or forced into the Biafran army by Biafran soldiers without proper training. These young men were conscripted into the Biafran army and sent to the war zone.

A Biafran man trains with a dummy rifle during the Nigerian civil war

Source; Nation Newspapers Photo -/AFP/Getty Image

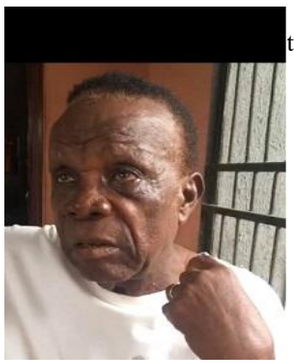
They were given guns and sent to the war fronts without training on how to carry a gun, shoot, or even military tactics in combats.[27] Most of them never made it out alive and those that survived was due to the influence of a top ranking officer. Anchoring this, Hon. Chibuzor had this to say as thus; “A relative of mine who was sent to the war front with no training died while trying to run or dodge the bullets in combat. My father left my pregnant mother to go to war which was not by choice. He survived because of my

mother's father who used his influence in the Biafran army as a high ranking officer to keep him away from war fronts and sent him back home."[20]

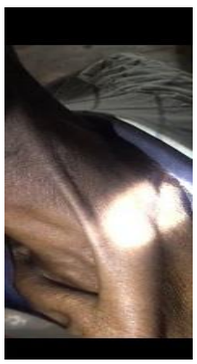
Moreover, men who did not enlist in the army were in constant hiding for fear of being conscripted. If any is caught at home by the Biafran soldiers, they were first beaten up for not willingly joining the army before being taken to the war zone.[19] Biafran soldiers carried out house to house search looking for young men to conscript forcing them into hiding. Mr Dominic, an ex-military personnel gave his account as thus;

> I was conscripted at a very young age into the Biafran army and had just four hours of training under Captain Henry who was incharge of Ohaji Sector. I was assigned to Mbieri sector in Mbaitolu. I was in-charge of deployment of guards. After being trained for four hours, the next morning we went to the battle. It was a massacre! Biafran soldiers were dropping dead right before my very eyes. I lost a relative of mine in that battle and sustained a huge scar on my neck.[8]

Mr Dominic Amadi the war



Neck injury sustained by Dominic Amadi during



Source; photo taken by Olive Ebuzor

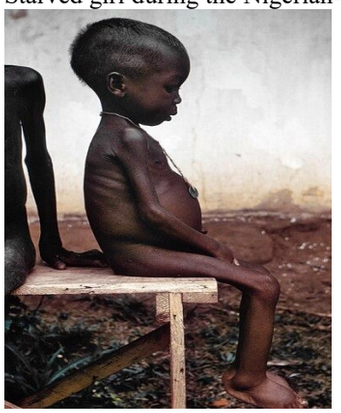
The men really suffered as many were lost in the war, especially the young boys conscripted and sent to the war front.

Displacement of Persons and Death of Children

Owerri was in a very bad shape during the war as people abandoned their houses, belongings. There was sporadic shootings, people left everything they had and only carried what they could lay hands on. As a result, those who ran experienced hardship, hunger and starvation as they became homeless. Those who could not run were shot to death, corpses were in houses and along the street. People lived in fear especially children who only depended on their parents. Mrs Stella Chikezie briefly stated; “I was so young during the war and couldn’t fend for myself as such, I relied on my parents for survival. I became a burden to my parents due to the hardship.”[11]

Children starved to death, they suffered from malnutrition which led to kwashiokor. This was as a result of the blockade by Nigerian govt on food supply from Ghana and Cameroon.[20] It was believed that so many mothers lost their children, families who had six children before the war, had only three left after the war. While some other families lost all their children during the war to “kwashiokor” for lack of food.[19]

Starved girl during the Nigerian-Biafran war (late 1960s).

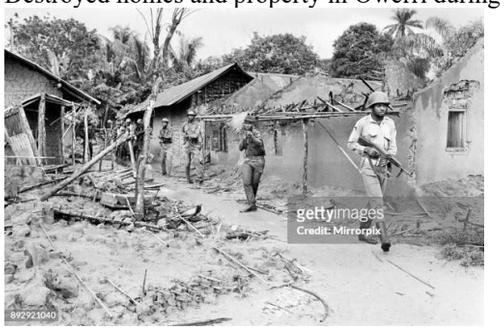


Source: http://phil.cdc.gov/ uimage ID: 6901

Babies were abandoned because of their cries while some were forced to be calm with palms tightly covering their mouths to avoid being detected by Nigerian Air crafts. These Air crafts easily detect sound/noise and movement. For Mrs Catherine Obi, even while walking and one hears the sound of the Nigerian Air crafts, you are to remain still and not move a muscle if you were not swift enough to hide. She further discloses as thus; “Right in front of me, a child was gunned down. I saw the plane on time and hid under the shed of plantain leaves but the child was unfortunate.”[27]

The war was a traumatic experience for the Owerri people. Bombings and eerie sounds of the planes had psychological effects on them. Young men were in hiding while the old remained till things got normalized but only a few survived. Only few stone houses were still standing. Others being thatched houses were all destroyed. Even the stone houses were damaged with bullets and deserted by the original residents. Soldiers were the ones living in those stone houses during the war but left when the war ended, the original residents were either driven out by Biafran soldiers or killed by Nigerian soldiers.

Destroyed homes and property in Owerri during the Nigerian civil war



Source; Kurt Strumpf/Associated Press Getty images

People returned to their homes after the war to find most of the loved ones dead, wives, daughters seized from them while some were abused. People trekked long distances in search of food and shelter. One of the victims stated briefly as thus; "As the war came down to Umuchima Umuoba Uratta Owerri North Local Government Area, everybody ran, both young and old ran for their lives including myself, we called it "Osondu agwuike" which means "You never get tired running for your dear life"[27]. There was chaos as people scrambled for safety, moving from one place to another carrying nothing but what they could lay their hands on.[14]

Restriction of Movement and No Means of Transport

During the war, there was no patrol, cars were parked and left to be destroyed by bombs. People trekked long distances to buy items in the forest. This was done through flanking roads to avoid being seen by Nigerian Air-raids.[19] Catherine accounted as thus; "I trekked all the way from Uratta to Umuekwunne Ngor Okopala, another local government at Aba road for food and shelter. Even trekked to Umuokanne Obiti Okpani Ohaji Egbema, another local government with my child, Evan on my back. We would leave in the morning around 4: am and get to our destination around 9:pm."[27] Nobody could move freely, those wearing colourful clothes had to cover themselves with mud. There was no means of transport, people traveled on foot from one place to another. Apostle Peter Paul Ebuzor gave an account of his own experience as thus;

> I was in Ntina in Abia State when the war started. In the middle of the war, we moved to Afuejama through imbaise which was where I stayed till the end of the war. People ran from Uratta, Owerri to Afuajama. My grand father could only carry his spring bed on his head from Uratta to meet us at Afuejama. When the war came close

> through Ugba junction Avu. We ran through Imbaise, crossed the Imo River and entered Amummara and stayed there for three days.[14]

It was believed that when the war came from the Hausa land down to Port Harcourt. Those from Port Harcourt ran and came down to Owerri. Owerri joined in the race for safety especially to a place called "Emii" as the Emii people did not run. This was because of the food and resources in abundance. For Mrs Regina, "It was better to die inside with food than run into suffering and starvation". The deadly impact of the war did not really hit Emii, but it was a war zone because a big river which demarcated the Biafra soldiers and the Nigerian soldiers.[19]

Lack of Social Amenities and Medical Personnel

There were no hospitals, people resulted to herbs for doctors were also running for their lives. People with the Artillery problem died due to lack of medical services. Most people had infected injuries for lack of antibiotics, no panadol for pain. *"I ran with the injury on my back bleeding like never before."* Catherine described.[27] The only drugs available were Caferol and APC(Aspirin Phenacetin and Caffeine).[18] There was no means of Communication as phones were not available. One may be away from home and receive news like "your community or a neighbouring community has evacuated or been attacked or bombed and your family or a loved one is in that community and you are here".[18] The family which escaped may have separated, fleeing to different locations. Going back home may not be an option but even when decided to due to the fact that clothes, belongings and property are still at home. One might get home only to meet the house raided or looted because once the soldiers attack a community and everybody runs

away, thieves would come and raid your home. Those thieves were not thieves by choice but victims of hunger and suffering like any other Owerri indigene.

People search the rubble following a bombing raid in Owerri in 1969

Source; Romano Cagnoni/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

People were rendered jobless as companies were closed. People did odd jobs, tilled each others farmland if any was found for money, though there were still civil servants but who would go to work for one cannot guarantee its safety. Some enlisted into the Biafran army because of the economic hardship. Dominic noted as thus; "*Before the war, I was a banker in Lagos, but joined the Biafran army when the war broke out because of the suffering."*[8]

It was believed that some women in Owerri became refugees and stopped child bearing because of inadequate medical facilities.[13]

Economic Hardship

The war brought nothing but hardship to Owerri as the women were not trading as usual. Every market was on a low key.[15] There was no business, no shops, no growth, nothing to sell, Some people ate fermented "garri". This was supposed to stay like two days before consumption but because of the hunger, some would not wait and start eating

which in turn, killed them all.[18] Poverty became the order of the day as there were no Agricultural products, nothing like rice. The goods that were meant to come down to the east did not come. Babies born today were carried on the backs by their mothers as they searched for what to eat.[19] There was no salt, food especially protein. Stock fish was processed to produce salt. Catherine recounted briefly as thus; "We used sock fish to produce salt, fish, wash it, cook it to the extent. Then, extract the salt water and store in a bottle. Putting the stock fish in the food like that without processing it takes the food salty and dangerous for consumption."[27]

Low standard of living

The political, social and economic system in Owerri crashed due the effects of the war.[17] The hunger and malnutrition which at a point took over Biafra encouraged inflation. Prices were intolerably high, with "garri" attracting the fantastic price of one Biafra pound or more to the cigarette cup. There were times before the war when the same amount or its equivalent could buy between 240 and 720 cups.[21] At some point, money became available but there was nothing to buy with it. Then, the Biafran money was discarded, it was not in use anymore which led to a great period of suffering as the people only made use of the little Nigerian money they had.[12] It was believed that immediately the war started, all money in the bank was seized. Civil servants who were paid salary few hours before the declaration of Biafra suffered greatly as they were not able to make any withdrawal. Most easterners lost their positions in the country as the rich became poor and the poor, poorer.[14]

Broken Marriages

Marriages during the war was a disaster as couples were separated because of the war. Wives were forcefully taken away from their husbands by Nigerian soldiers while husbands were gruesomely killed by the Nigerian soldiers or conscripted into the Biafran army. Wives lost their husbands to the war and turned them into early widows after the war. Catherine opined as thus;

> "A relative of mine whose husband refused to run with us was gunned down by Nigerian soldiers. This happened as early as 8:am when I was returning from "fatigue" with food items that I covered up with Akika "Dry leaves".Then, I heard a loud noise and hid in a nearby bush. I looked ahead from where the noise came from and I saw a group of Nigerian soldiers marching forward, they entered the home of my relative and came out. After they were gone, I went in to check on my relative's husband and found him in the pool of his own blood, he was shot to death. I ran in tears and broke the news to my relative who at that time was still looking for food to bring to her husband. I helped her in digging a trench where we buried her husband, an able bodied fine young man."[27]

The grief suffered by the women was nothing to be compared with. For Catherine, it was a burden that the Owerri women would carry in their hearts forever.

Molestation and Abuse of Owerri Women

The Biafran women suffered untold hardship during the war especially the young fair ladies as some were raped, beaten, any resistance resulted to death. Those that Nigerian soldiers took liken to were taken in as wives without their consent. All women including young girls were denied their rights and freedom especially to life. The safety of the women were not guaranteed as a result of insecurity. [16] They suffered a great deal especially when taken by the Nigerian soldiers. As an elderly woman, when caught by Nigerian soldiers, you are forced into the food production unit mainly "Garri" production while as a young woman, you are either raped or taken in by Nigerian soldiers

till they are done or satisfied with you before letting you go dead or alive. Parents, families had no say in it, any objection from them resulted to death immediately. A victim shared her experience as thus;

> I traveled on foot with my sister and my son on my back. On getting to the Nigerian army checkpoint I gave my child to my sister to carry and with my pregnancy, we were given a safe passage. They thought my sister was the mother of the child. We repeated the same thing at every checkpoint while dressing my child like a girl to avoid being killed by the Nigerian soldiers. Most women lost their children and husbands mostly in battle. A relative of mine who had nine children, lost all her nine children to the war. The children she has now are the ones born after the war.[27]

However, it may be argued that most married women were taken from their homes and families and used for sexual jamboree.[16] Attempting to clear this issue of doubt, Nkwam Uwaoma informed as thus; “I can remember my sisters carried me and some other children at their backs claiming to be the mothers. But that did not stop the soldiers from conscripting known wives and only set them free when they retreated”.[12] Women really suffered during the war as those caught were sexually abused and beaten by Nigerian soldiers. As such, the women were always on the run hiding from the soldiers.

Young women were living in the bushes, only coming out to eat hurriedly before going back into the bush. Mrs Regina shared her experience as thus; “My best friend just finished eating, only for her to go back into hiding, the Nigerian soldiers sighted her, pursued her until they caught her. Her family pleaded with the soldiers to let her go but they refused saying “Hausa no kill me, Biafra no kill me! If I die with this girl, I die for nothing”. The girl spent two days with them before they let her go.”[19]

It was believed that most women who were not able to escape from the Nigerian soldiers remained married to them.

Bomb Attacks

Owerri was deeply affected by the war as it was bombed, looted and occupied by Federal forces for 18 months or more. All social gatherings became a target for bombing. Social gatherings such as marriage was extinguished. The only activity was to dig one's grave.[16] These Nigerian Air crafts were structured in such a way that the sound follows some minutes behind the plane which makes it difficult to detect when the plane is at close range. The structure of the Nigerian Air crafts has been argued as some believe that these planes only detect movements during the day while Ekeziem argues otherwise in his experience as thus;

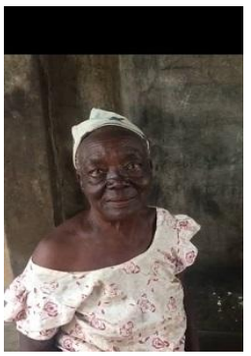
> I witnessed the bombing of one of these markets known as "Ahia four" meaning "market by 4 pm" They killed a good number of people in the Ahia four bombing. I was few miles away from there in the forest before the explosion. I broke my hand while diving away from the explosion. The market always starts by 4:pm and on that faithful day, as usual, the market started by 4:pm and the Nigerian Air crafts came by 5:pm and bombed the market killing countless of lives. So many women suffered heavy injuries from the blasts, a relative of mine had a deep cut, a part of her skin on her left leg was sliced off."[18]

People paused their movements due to the Air raids which destroyed so many communities. Houses, markets, schools were destroyed by mortar bombs. Mrs Catherine Obi shared her own account as a victim of the mortar bombs as thus;

> I am a victim of mortar bomb and I still have a huge scar on my back. I got this scar when I was searching for cassava to harvest on a farmland with some other women and immediately, we heard the sound of a war plane hovering above us. As we looked ahead, we saw Biafran soldiers waving their hands, telling us to lie down flat as some

of them were already lying down. I got the information on time and laid down before the Nigerian plane let down the mortar. The bomb exploded and 90% of the people that came with me to hunt for food were killed including some Biafran soldiers. Though I was lying flat, pieces of the bomb hit me giving me this huge scar on my back. It was a massacre![27]

Mrs Catherine Obi

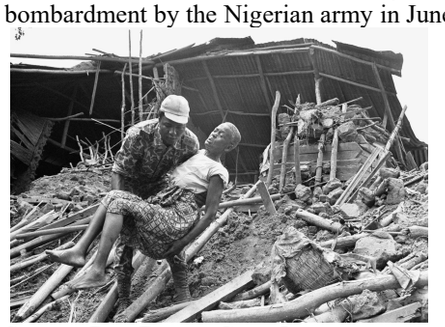


An injury sustained in a mortar bomb explosion

Source; photo taken by Anurika Paul

Although the Biafran soldiers made progress in killing some of the Nigerian troops, it was still a painful experience that on one would want to experience again. However, some youths today who have no experience whatsoever are eager to use war as a means of settling disputes.

A Biafran soldier carries an elderly woman from the wreckage of her home following an artillery bombardment by the Nigerian army in June 1968.



Source; Ron Burton Getty Images

Insecurity

Owerri was deserted, those who were not capable of running being the old ended up dead. The Nigerian soldiers were killing incessantly once perceived as a threat. They would forcefully enter homes, take the women and murder the rest. Regina gave an account as thus; "A little girl was shot in front of me though she survived."[19] When the Nigerian soldiers became informed of the teenage conscription of Biafrans, they embarked on a killing spree. Any Biafran teenage boy seen was a threat and should be killed. Most young men perceived to be Biafran soldiers were killed on sight. Many young Biafrans ran from their homes but were sabotaged by their fellow Igbo brothers. Peter Paul shared his experience of this as thus; "I witnessed the killing of about 20 suspected Biafran soldiers on a row with just one shot."[14]

It was believed that the Nigerian solders had the intention of killing males from 5years of age and Islamizing the toddlers.[14] The declaration of "One Nigeria" was also followed with mass killing of any who said otherwise.[19]

Sabotage and Anarchy

Some Igbo men were paid 20 thousand Naira to bring girls for Nigerian soldiers. Igbo women were beautiful and never related with Northern men before the war. They saw the Igbos as *ndi bekee* meaning "whites" or "civilized people." Thus, it satisfied their ego whenever they saw any Igbo woman and took her in. Due to the hunger in the land, some Igbo men betrayed most of the Igbo young girls which gave them the name *Ndi sabo* meaning "Saboteurs.[19]

During the war, some Biafran teenage boys were trained under the command of Ifajuna to overthrow or topple the Biafran government. According to Peter Paul, these young boy ignorantly enlisted into the army not knowing they were being trained to execute a coup d'etat. He further explained in his account as thus;

> Immediately the war broke out, our house boy who was in standard six joined the army and happened to fall under the command of Ifajuna. At that time, we envied him because he was looking so healthy and fattened with strange military skills as I could remember. It was later we found out that they were being trained to overthrow Ojukwu's government.[14]

The coup was a failure as they were all executed including Ifajuna, their commander. However, it brought a huge setback which aided the defeat of Biafra.

Loss of Military Personnel

Nkwam Uwaoma described the war as "A life horror I would never forget". So many soldiers lost their lives in the war. The Nigerian soldiers fought with mortars, bombs while Biafrans soldiers made use of *Ogbunigwe* also known as "Ojukwu bucket" which disfavoured them during the war for lack of Ammunition.[19] These soldiers were fathers, sons, brothers, uncles. It was a sad moment for the Owerri people when their loved ones never made it back alive. Some died in battle, some while testing explosives.[18] Nkwam Uwaoma shared his experience which he termed as "the worst" as thus;

> I lost my Uncle in the war, Captain George of the Biafran soldiers. The most painful part was that it was already declared that the war had ended as it had been announced. Captain George, my Uncle had just returned from the war, he was one of the survivors, a strong soldier with vast knowledge in military tactics. He was in our compound when he heard marching boots of soldiers on the major road across our compound. As the soldiers walked close to our gate, they shouted "One Nigeria" and he thinking they were Biafran soldiers who survived and were returning to their homes shouted "One Biafra" and immediately, they fired at him and

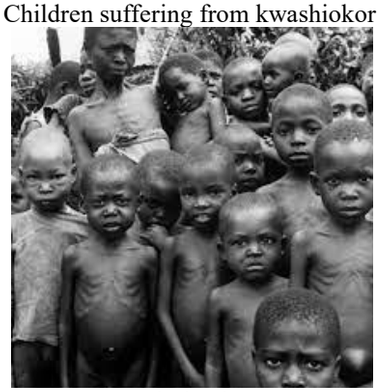
shot him to death right before our very eyes." he explained bitterly.[5]

Indeed, it was a bitter experience for the war victims, especially the women who were abused by the Nigerian soldiers. Consequently, when the war survivors came back home, not only was the whole place deserted, but it was also discovered that so many people have been lost. "We were like strangers in the land who had just returned, searching for our loved ones" Peter Paul described bitterly.

Diseases

There was no food during the war which was one of the essential needs of man. As a result of this, kwashiorkor knocked so many Owerri people down. Some people were taken to Gabon especially those that showed early signs of kwashiorkor of which many of them did not come back alive.[12] Diseases like "go slow" which makes one unable to walk, "Jigga" a foot infection for lack of shoes ravaged the Owerri people. Amongst these, Kwashiorkor was the most deadly disease that killed so many children. Lizards, palm oil, mice were fed as protein to these children to remedy the situation.[27]

Children suffering from kwashiokor



Source; Nairaland Forum

Social Setback

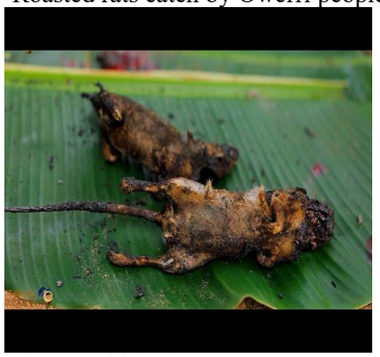
The war gravely affected the Educational system in Owerri. Children were withdrawn from school as education came to a standstill. Students could not move to higher institutions. Thus, the war was a huge setback in the educational system as students were delayed for three years.[14] For Ekeziem, some were able to attend some level of education when he said, "I was able to attend some level of education during the war because my father was in the research and production unit in the Biafran army."[18]

There was poor social life during the war, marriage was a disaster as there were low morale, issues with husbands for poor care, death of spouses etc. The war eroded or destroyed existing marriage customs and traditions as they were not strictly observed before the war. Customarily, some wedded without church weddings, ceremonies etc.[8] It also delayed and disrupted the marriage plans. This is as a result of the people who were to get married were either fighting in the war as "A soldier cannot leave the warfront to come and marry."[18]

Starvation

Owerri was greatly affected by the war. Hunger was a major factor that killed the Igbos during the war. People were dying like animals because of hunger. The Nigerian soldiers surrounded and took over Owerri town. People mostly survived on the spoils left by soldiers as they moved, through flanking(pathways).[19] People ate rats, lizards, grasshoppers and all sort of things to survive.

Roasted rats eaten by Owerri people



Source; Nairaland

Those that came back from cities Like Lagos suffered the most as they were not used to manual labour. As a result, they lost their children to starvation. It is believed that, in the beginning of the war, food came in through Calabar but Awolowo made a deal with the Head of State of Cameroon to block the food coming into the Biafran land. This was done in exchange with Bakassi because of their oil which he agreed to. This led to hunger and starvation across the east as there was no food only hardship and starvation.[15]

Though places like Emii did not experience first degree starvation, therefore the Emii people did not desert their community even though it served as a war front. They believed that *"It was better to die inside with food than run into suffering and starvation"*.

Loss of lives and property

Owerri was indeed affected by the war. A lot of lives including soldiers and civilians were lost as many people were killed in Owerri sector of the war. Many families were scattered and massacred during the war. Mothers lost their husbands and children in battle. People became homeless and fled to other places for safety.[13] Even when people

came back to their homes toward the end of the war, there were still mines as the relics of the war, planted everywhere which killed a good number of people including booby traps. The war ended historically at Imbaise as that was the last place the Nigerian soldiers invaded.[12] Nkwam Uwaoma gave an account of his own experience as thus; “Though I was very small, I remember how my parents and I ran to Mbano. My parents carried our goods, property, iron pots, iron beds. Initially, people taught the war would not last long but for a while, as such carried their property with them. But along the run, when the war lingered, people abandoned their property on the road as they were unable to carry them.”[12]

Owerri people fleeing for their lives in search of safety and shelter

Source: Nairaland Forum

People including pregnant women had no other option but to abandon their homes, property and run from bomb blasts.[27]

High mortality rate

More than a million persons died during the war. A good number of people died at war front, a large number by air raids and starvation while so many never returned till date.[27] The war took so many lives from Owerri, especially the men. Families were

scattered, massacred as every family had a record of dead people. Regina briefly recounted as thus;

"I know about 20 persons that died during the war from bullets, mortars, bombs etc they include children, men and women."[19]

Biafran casualty in the nigerian civil war

Source: Hurst, R.(2009, May 20). Nigerian Civil War(1967-1970). BlackPast.org.global african history

Strategies Adopted by Owerri People During the Civil War

The war had catastrophic, brutal and psychological effect on the people during the War which led to different strategies adopted by the people to Survive. Some Owerri people who experienced the war were interviewed and they gave accounts of the different strategies they utilized in surviving during the war. Ex-military personnel Elder Nwawuihe gave his account as thus; "Owerri was empty during the war, no market was going on, schools were shut down. I was in the army during the war under Captain Okpoka who was in charge of Ohaji sector. We lived in the forest, there was no food to eat. People ate rats, lizards, grasshoppers and all sort of thing to survive to the extent lizards became scarce."[10]

The Role of Women During the Nigerian Civil War

Although some women were in the militia. some were forced into marriage by the Northerners while some willingly accepted marriage proposals from them for the money and comfort. Such families took off quickly financially due to the financial aides provided by the In-laws.[14]

Breadwinner of Families

During the civil war, women became bread winners in families as the men were either in hiding or conscripted into the Biafran army or killed by the Nigerian soldiers.[13]. The women were the ones who could move freely without fear of being conscripted into the Biafran Army. As such, women were the ones cooking, taking care of the children and homes.[18] According to Catherine Obi, women were the ones taking food to *Ahia attack* to sell when she stated thus;

> As a woman, I became the breadwinner in my family. The women were the ones going to farmlands, hunting for food. The corn meal brought in by the Red Cross, Garri (cassava flakes)
> and stock fish by Gabon served as food for a while. These items were distributed at relief centers such as school compounds. The women were the ones who went out to secure food from these relief centers. So, families who didn't have hardworking women or females at all starved to death.[27]

**** Ahia Attack***

Ahia attack was a special markets where available products were sold at cheap prices. These markets were open at special places to avoid being seen by the Nigerian Air crafts. It was the only way the women could buy essentials like salt, rice to bring to the community and this was done in the soldiers camps early in the mornings. It was a very risky movement coupled with the struggle of reaching the camp. Women risked their

lives as the camps were enemy territories. The soldiers conquered the easterners and camped in their schools, colleges and few universities then. Prof. Nkwam Uwaoma shared his experience as thus;"The women risked their lives to buy the food items the Nigerian soldiers brought into their camps. This was what gave it the name Ahia attack meaning "Smuggling market".12

* ***Fatigue***

The Biafran soldiers also took some women in for food production but they did not take any woman with child. As a result of this, young women paraded their younger siblings as their children. Though some were questioned by Biafran soldiers at check points but pity cards were sold to them which they bought as Catherine explained as thus;

> On getting to the Biafran checkpoint, I gave my sister my child to carry. The soldiers started asking questions on why the child was carried along and I explained to them that my sister would not abandon her child to die of hunger and that her husband died in the army while fighting the war. With that, they pitied us and referred to my child as "Ojukwu Bucket" meaning "he would grow up to be a srong soldier to fight against the Nigerian government". Then these soldiers would guide us to a place called "fatigue". There, we would get "garri and other food items." We would harvest the cassava, process it and at the end, we would give half to the soldiers, sell to other people through trade by barter system as that was our medium of exchange during the war. We would exchange the cassava in buds with people who have yam, pepper etc. Most times we spend days at the camp harvesting and processing cassava and after that, we would take the food items to fatigue for sell. The fatigue was a heavy means of food, income and survival as each time we returned from fatigue, we would carry bags and basins of "garri" and other food items.[27]

Women returning from “Fatigue” with basins of garri

Source: Getty images

The new emphasis on cassava, it may be argued, resulted in a gradual shift of power to the women in the family. Women practically became the main source of income in most families, as majority of the men were away to the war fronts. That way, their livelihood and survival became completely dependent on their wives and grown-up daughters.

Hence, men lost respect as well as their biological and natural place as the head of the home, while women were elevated socially and economically.[21]

Survival Instinct

It was believed that Owerri People survived because of their survival because of their survival instincts, most of the things eaten then could not be eaten now such as lizards, termites in which when tried now would lead to health havoc. For instance a mad man could eat a rotten food and not fall sick unlike a healthy man. It was the situation we found ourselves in as Herbs were discovered at this time. A lot of things were done to survive.[20] No matter the hardship and chaos Owerri people encountered, they never stopped fighting, striving and struggling to survive. A major factor about Owerri people during the war was that their fighting spirit was never broken.[14]

Lizards, Rats, Lubber Grasshoppers

During the war, there was hunger and starvation across the East due to the blockade by the Nigerian Government. There was no food, items like sugar, bread were not found.[18] Bush hunting of rabbits, rats became the order of the day. People resulted to eating grasshoppers such as *oshinaka* known as "lubber grasshopper" and lizards for protein when the hunger became unbearable.

Oshinaka known as Lubber grasshoppers during the Nigerian civil war

Source; UF/FASGardening Solutions

Amazingly, grasshoppers were in abundance for lack of bush burning. People also ate *Mkpon* and *Akiri* found in ponds.[14]

A Biafran man eating *Akiri* during the war

Source; Nairaland Forum

The grasshoppers were used to cook soup serving like protein. "Major General Gabiel was a soldier whom I served under. We ate lizards to survive." Dominic recounted.[8]

Flood

Due to hardship, there was no water, people traveled long distances on foot in search of water. “A bucket of water served my family and I for months” Peter Paul recounted briefly. One could hardly find ponds, stagnant water, seeing flood was a miracle.[16] Regardless, people make use of what was available being stagnant water. They used so many processes to make the water ready for consumption. They boiled the water to kill the germs, allowed the germs to settle before sieving it for consumption.[27] It was also believed that some people survived on their urine for lack of water.

Herbs, Cassava Leaf, *Kpokirikpo, Oha Nnabe, Anara Ohia*

As the heat of the war became stronger, for want of something to eat, Owerri people either began to experiment with existing plants or completely adopted new ones. Plants such as *Kpokirikpo, Oha nnabe, Anara ohia* and *Ububa* which one could have never eaten before the war were used as vegetable in soup while corn meal was used to thicken the soup instead of *Ofor* or “cocoyam.” Cassava leaf was a major leaf used in soup and also used to cure kwashiokor.[14] Though, people encountered heavy difficulty in harvesting it. This was because there was no means of harvesting and processing the cassava with tools such as cutlass, matchetes, engine etc but had only hoes. People used their bare hands to carefully bend the cassava till the buds were out to avoid breaking the stems. We used “Akika” found in stagnant water as meat and crayfish to cook soup.

There was no palm oil as most of the palm trees were destroyed by bombs. The Owerri people called such food. However, it was essentially regarded as a female crop in most parts of Igboland and was not used for consumption. But with the absence of

pumpkin leaf, water leaf, mushroom and increasing level of hardship and suffering, awoke the survival instincts in Owerri people. Therefore, people consumed whatsoever was available in which they termed such food as "Win-the-war". Meanwhile those leaves eaten then cannot be eaten now without causing health issues.[21]

Relief Centers by Red Cross and the Church

The Red Cross and the Church established relief centers in schools. It was through this means that corn meal, egg yolk were able to get to Owerri people. The distribution of these items to queued up Biafrans in school compounds was usually done in the evening by four as it involved gatherings. It was believed that the Nigerian Air crafts did not have the technology to fly at night which has been an issue of debate. This served as a cover for the Biafran civilians to gather in schools to get a share of food from the relief centers.[18] But most times, the members of the Red Cross were biased in distributing the food items as they were nepotic in nature. For Peter Paul, this was advantagous to some persons who had influence as thus;"My father happened to be the headmaster of the school being used as a relief center and the person in-charge of the relief was a bosom friend of my father. This granted us full access to the relief which was how we were able to survive"[14]

A Catholic Priest distributing corn meal to Biafran children

Source; MetroGisting

However, the red cross and the church risked their lives by bringing food to Biafra land through planes. Some of these planes were shot down, bombed by Nigerian Air crafts. When the few had the opportunity to land, they spent nothing less than 30 minutes to offload the food before disappearing into the sky to avoid being seen or detected by the Nigerian force. The corn meal was cooked in a very large pot and dished in plates to the civilians on a single file.[27]

Women in relief centers collecting food such as corn meal

Source: BBC-Remembering Nigeria's Biafra war

The church played a significant role during the war as they offered assistance to any Biafran civilian. Anchoring this, Peter Paul recounted as thus; “As the war came closer, my family and I moved to Ihittu imbaise and continued the next day through Amuize and all the way we met only Biafran soldiers. We got to Ngugu and met a Reverend Father.

Father Ibekwe was able to help us with some food stuffs such as stock fish, corn meal, egg yolk, which tends to cure kwashiokor.[14]

Role played by Gabon and OAU

Gabon rescued some Biafran children who were dying of kwashiokor and gave aides especially when they discovered that the Nigerian Govt was out to wipe Biafrans from the face of the earth. They also provided wheat, corn meal, stockfish, "Garri Gabon", and other items like beans which requires to be parboiled three times before cooking for consumption.

A feeding center north of Owerri in Biafra.

Source; Concern Worldwide(Photo: Peter Williams)

Those that were not patient enough on parboiling it three times before consumption died from diarrhoea. The stock fish was also boiled to extract salt. [27] It was believed that Gabon and Ivory coast provided treatment to the Biafran soldiers.

The OAU sent soldiers on peacekeeping missions. Peter Paul recounted thus;

> In Ngugu, we met gallant soldiers who we thought were Biafran soldiers but what sprang up our doubt was how fresh and healthy they were looking. They did not look like our soldiers who were looking malnourished. They were killing anybody but provided us with company and security. It was later we discovered that they were OAU. It was when they left us that Nigerian soldiers started coming out with guns, killing and raping women.[14]

Research Scientists

Research scientists who worked in the Research and Production Unit were manufacturing bombs, salt etc. They were also involved in food production and refining petroleum.[18] This unit was made up of some Majors in the Biafran army stationed in the laboratory. Some were also involved in mechanical maintenance of service vehicles.[17] This was a means of survival for some Biafran soldiers as they were not stationed at the war front.

Disguise

During the war, most young women used ash mixed with water to disguise themselves as old women while some went into hiding to prevent being taken by soldiers.[9] Some soldiers who sustained injuries but recovered pretended to be recumbent using the injury as an excuse to avoid going back to the war front. Catherine shared her experience as thus;

> "My elder brother who was among the unfortunate men did not come back till date, but my ypumger brother who went with him came back because he was shot and the bullet grazed his head piercing into his scalp damaging his artillery. He was unable to speak and understand until the bullet was removed. After receiving treatment, my Dad hid him and refused to send him back. We came up with an idea of moulding his leg with mud, red in colour and wrapping it with bandage. We did not hide him anymore but gave him walking stick to pretend like he has been shot on the leg. Once we see the soldiers coming, we would bring a plate of food to him, though he had already eating, we would apply "Bam" to his eyes to make him teary and start comforting him. When the Biafran soldiers come and see him injured, they would only sympathize with him and let him go. We would untie him at night and tie him up again as early 5: am. We did this repeatedly, everyday till the war ended.[27]
> She further explained;
> We did almost the same thing to my other brother by not hiding him too but told him to pretend to be epileptic. So when the soldiers passed and

> saw him, they grabbed him, to be conscripted. But my father deceitfully thanked the soldiers for taking away his epileptic son, at least one less mouth to feed. On hearing that, my brother started acting like an epileptic patient and fortunately for him, the soldiers left him saying that an epileptic boy is useless to them, that my mother should take him back into the house. That was how my two brothers survived the war.[27]

APC and *Akoh*

Owerri people depended on APC(Aspirin Phenacetin and Caffeine), Caferol especially the local means of treating malaria known as *Akoh*. It is a leaf which is cooked to an extent and poured into a big calabash. Then, the sick person dips its face into the calabash and inhales the steam till the person starts sweating.[18]

Marriage

Some women voluntarily followed the Nigerian soldiers to escape the untold hardship in the land. These soldiers in turn paid their bride price.[16]

Though the war brought about hardship, great numbers of deaths and disabled persons, some Biafrans benefited during the war. These benefits happened at different intervals being beginning, during and after the civil war.

First Phase;

The civil servants who stayed back in Lagos when the war started benefited as they were paid salaries for the period of the 3yearrs war.[14]

Second Phase;

Some communities that were not affected by the war became safe havens for the war-affected communities. However, some of these communities used this opportunity to

exploit the war- affected communities by demanding payment for the hospitality. Catherine captured this as thus;

> The Umunahu youths made a lot of money during the war. The Nigerian soldiers destroyed every other means of escape leaving just the Umunahu sea passage. We had to swim across the river to Umunahu with their permission. And this permission was only granted after payment. There was no other choice but to pay them if you want to escape from the Nigerian soldiers. Then, they would help us especially in carrying our children across. So, Umunahu became a safe haven for the Umuchima people during the war for a while.[27]

Biafran soldiers crossing Umunahu river with their wounded

Source; Concern Wordwide

Some women like Catherine made a lot of money in selling garri she got from "Fatigue" and "Ahia attack". He further lamented as thus; "The Biafran money was in pounds and I made a lot of money selling garri to those who still had money. If the money I had was still useful after the war, I would have built houses, living huge."[27]

Third phase;

Some Biafran soldiers who joined the Nigerian army after the war were compensated with high ranks.[20]

Though the war was devastating, destroying families, killing about four million Biafrans including children, infants, men, women, babies, soldiers etc. It is believed that some Owerri people benefited quite a lot in terms of marriages with the Nigerian soldiers,

high military positions etc. It may have been people who fled from the war that brought different species back with them at the end of hostilities. In Afikpo, it was the refugees who resided in the area that introduced the species of yam called *Ona* (three-leaved yam), as well as consumption of *Ugba* (oil bean) and *Ukwa(breadfruit).*[21]

However, the fact still remains that Nigerian soldiers at the end of the war, went hey-wire killing and maiming families, unscrupulous and power drunk soldiers perpetrated mayhem on families on little or no provocation. As such the grievances and psychological trauma of owerri people are yet to be addressed. In no small measure, this study will serve as a major contribution to the body of knowledge generally.

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9. Dr Veronica Josephs, 71yrs, Cardiologist interviewed at her clinic at Olukwu by J. Charles, Benin on 29thMay, 2023

10. Elder Patrick Nwawuihe, 73 years, retired Civil Servant, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro, MCC road, Owerri on 4th June, 2023

11. Mrs Stella Uchechi Chikezie, 66years, trader, interviewed in her church at Ebikoro, MCC road Owerri on 11th June, 2023

12. Prof. Nkwam Uwaoma, 74 years, former Deputy Vice Chancellor of Imo State University, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro, MCC road on Owerri 18th June, 2023

13. Mr Ijeoma Theophilus, 64 years, Educationist, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro, MCC road Owerri on 11th June, 2023

14. Apostle Peter Paul Ebuzor, 65 years, retired from Ministry of Education SCMB (Secondary Educatuion Management Board), interviewed in his compound at Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri on 20th June, 2023

15. Mrs Salomey Nwawuihe, 67years, retired Civil Servant, interviewed in her church at Ebikoro MCC road on Owerri 11th June, 2023

16. Mr Innocent Chikezie, 70years, retired school teacher, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro MCC road Owerri 8th June, 2023

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18. Mr Ken Ekezie, 63years, Director of Opertions in Imo Signage Advertisement Agency(IMSA), interviewed at his work place at Hero's square Concord Avenue New Owerri, Owerri on 13th June, 2023

19. Mrs Ada Regina Ohagwam, 72years, trader, interviewed in her compound at Olakwo, Owerri on 17th June, 2023

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CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACT OF THE WAR ON OWERRI

Introduction

The Nigerian civil war is something no Nigerian would ever wish to happen again because it brought a lot of economic, political and social destruction to Nigeria especially the eastern part of country. And ever since, the eastern part of the country has been struggling to regain its roots in Nigeria.[5] Before the war, the easterners were indeed prosperous. Their success in commerce and merchandise was nothing to be seconded. During the war, the easterners in the military lost their jobs and were forced to return back home. Commerce, resources were in jeopardy and so many Owerri people became refugees, abandoned people. After the civil war ended, the Federal Government began recovery interventions in the war- affected zones, this was enabled and facilitated by an oil boom that occurred in the 1970s, which provided an expansion in government resources.

The Nigerian government and international agencies attempted to reintegrate the war-affected populations, repair the destruction done to physical infrastructure including health and educational facilities, and restore social services and public utilities to the war-affected regions. For the past 51 years, Nigeria continues to confront multiple threats across the territory, with insecurity deepening in northern and southern parts of the country. Though the Biafran war was fought 5 decades ago, research has shown the continuing prevalence of conflict such as ethnoreligious conflicts, Niger Delta conflicts, gender-based violence, school based violence, political and electoral violence, the end

SARS massacre, indigenes-settlers violence, pastoralist-herdsmen violence, and the Biafra agitation and the Boko Haram violence as the main violent conflicts in the country.

Owerri was greatly affected by the war, people died from sickness, hunger, malnutrition etc. At the end of the war, the Nigerian soldiers embarked on massive killing and raping of women which ruined so many marriages and young girls. Most women voluntarily went with the Nigerian soldiers to survive the hardship while some were forcefully taken away. Some were even involved in "Ahia Bush" or "Ahia Attack" to get food. Women became refugees in distant country side, landless and could not farm. They trekked several miles to buy little food items. Hunger, death of children, mothers, fathers, relatives etc were the order of the day. So many died, old and young by bombs, bullets, illness and diseases such as Kwashiorkor. People lived like animals as they were poorly housed with no food. Every social and economic developments set up by Government were shattered.[1]

The political, social and economic system in Owerri crashed due the effects of the war. Mistrust, brutal killings, destruction of properties, rise in internal and externally displaced persons and having the country teetering on the verge of the precipice are some of the key consequences identified by this study. The war has brought about security consciousness, disunity and trust issues in Nigeria especially between the Northerners and the Easterners.[14]

Political Impact of the War on Owerri

During the war, decrees and edicts were used to rule the people. Though, the Federal govt declared “no Victor no Vanquished”, the easterners were treated as people who lost the war economically. For instance, those who had property, houses in the north, could not gain access to them as they were tagged “Abandoned property” seized by the govt. Since then, the Igbo people have been stigmatized, being called greedy and pompous people and having no shares politically. They have constantly been growing with this stigmatization. It was more like Neocolonialization, trying to control the Igbo people internally through economic pressure and political suppression. The major internal crisis such as marginalization, abandonment, sabotage as saboteurs were raised among them to create division are the major reasons that led to IPOB.[5]

Marginalization and Confiscation of Property

Homes, property in Rivers were confiscated by the govt tagging them as “Abandoned property”. After the war, any Igbo man’s property found in a northern state was referred to as Abandoned property. The Easterners lost their financial positions and strength as they were left with just “20 pounds” irrespective of the original amount in the bank.[1] Ever since till date, the Easterners are being marginalized. For years up till date, the east have not been able to produce a President even though the money and resources are available. They no longer have much say in government, politics as the war created enmity between Igbos and other tribes especially the Hausa.[7]

Development and Security

The level of crimes hugely skyrocketed. War crimes were so critical during the continuance of the civil war. Owing to the fact that great hunger and starvation persisted, constant marauding ravaged entrepreneurs and natives causing increasing insecurity. There was no new development during the war, instead the already established and existing structures were reduced to dust including the few stone houses in the East. The roads were overgrown with grasses due to desertion. In the North, Igbos lost their lives to the Nigerian soldiers while some became disabled whilst fleeing for their lives. The insecurity during the war have somehow found its way into the Nigerian society of today and it has manifested itself in the Boko Haram Insurgency, Fulani herders/Farmers clash. There seem to be no end to the insecurity challenges in Nigeria even after Five decades.

International Image

One other negative effect of the Civil War, which could not have been immediately quantified, was the way it destroyed the image of the country in the eyes of the International community. There were hundreds of thousands of civilians that died through starvation and there were a lot of human rights violations, both on the side of the government and on the side of the Biafran army. Most children were sent to Gabon for treatment and education. While so many died of kwashiorkor.

It was believed that some mothers whose children were at the brink of death did not allow their dying children to travel to Gabon but looked after them till death. “I didn’t want my son to die in a foreign land. I wanted to do my best for him staying by his side and my husband agreed with me.” [17]A victim bitterly shared. This gave the nation of Nigeria a bad picture, destroying the country’s international image.

Boundary Disputes

After the war, Nigeria wanted Bakassi back but Cameroon claimed it belonged to them supporting its claim with the deal with Awolowo during the Nigerian civil war. This led to the boundary dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon in which Bakassi was finally given to Cameroon.[11] However, the war led to the Creation of more states. States were created in the country by the federal government e.g. 12 states were created.

The war strengthened the confidence the government had in the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), even when four countries in Africa supported the secessionist government of Biafra during the war.

Economic Impact of the War on Owerri

One of the negative consequences of the 1967 to 1970 Civil War in Nigeria was the drain it had on the human, material and financial resources of the nation. In order to prosecute the war effort, the government of the day had to expend a lot of money. Even the seceding army had to spend money to procure arms and ammunition that cost millions of naira. Human lives, which constituted a great resource, was lost, estimated to be in the millions. Properties were also destroyed.

Dislocation of Economic Activities

The war brought to a standstill, the economic activity of the entire nation. The industries of the country which should have been producing goods, either closed down or operated at a very low capacity. During the continuance of the Civil war, both parties suffered the toils of war but one party had it worse than the other; ever since then, the economy has being in shambles. The economy of the new Biafran Nation hit rock bottom

as they were cut off from food supplies coming down from Nigeria. There was no active work force in the Biafran Nation and as such unemployment rate was on the increase. The majority of industrial plants stopped functioning and thus active production grounded to a halt; every resource was channeled towards curbing the exigencies of the war, that is to buy war arms.

Low Yam Production in Owerri

Before the war, Owerri was blessed with Yam but during the war, the Nigerian soldiers harvested all the yam and cassava till they had nothing. Till date, it's been difficult to plant yam as they end up not growing.[12] Owerri lost the opportunity of producing Agricultural produce in food production which caused famine due to desertion. Till date, Oweri is yet to recover as Igbo people can no longer boast of being yam producers which might be as a result of blood spillage and the dead bodies buried in mass. During the war, the yam seedlings were taken by the Nigerian soldiers. Owerri people had no yams to cultivate or plant after the war. This made people travel long distances on foot to buy yam seedlings from other communities.

Humanitarian Crisis

The demand for food, and essential commodities were on the high while the supply was critically low, people suffered severely from starvation as prices immensely increased. This created a huge imbalance in the economy of the Biafran Nation. An estimate of 1 to 3 million people lost their lives, mostly to starvation, and this sparked a massive humanitarian crisis. The levels of starvation in Biafra during the Nigerian civil war was three times more pronounced than the starvation recorded during World War II

in Stalingrad and Holland. About 3m people lost their lives during the war, there was no family that was not affected one way or the other. Parents, children, young men and women were lost to hardship, hunger, bombs, gunshots during the war. Only a few of the Biafran young man who were conscripted into the war without training, made it back home alive. Most families were wiped due to starvation.[5]

Sixteen-year-old Igbo boy, Biafra, Nigeria, 1968

Source; Concern Worldwide

Oil Crisis

On the other hand, Nigeria's economy received it's own fair share of the heat, the oil in Delta was hijacked and Nigeria did not have control over it. For a country whose major source of revenue was oil, it was a big blow on the economy. The government of Nigeria was more concerned with the supply of arms for the war, thus, citizens experienced a major setback in the provisions of basic necessities of life.

Economic Reconstruction Programme

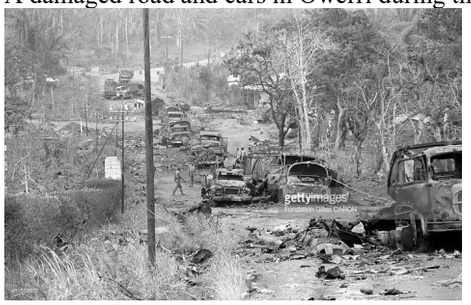
The most devastating event that happened after the war was the reconstruction economic programme initiated by Awolowo, This involved the confiscation of all the money in the bank owned by the easterners irrespective of the amount. Only the sum of 20 pounds was released to the Easterners, including the rich amongst them which further delayed and crippled the economy of the Igbo people. The rest of the money was seized by the federal govt claiming it as part of the war. Also the Indigenization policy which is among the economic policies disfavoured the easterners. As such the Eastern business merchants could not benefit from the foreign companies and investors who were ready to sell and buy shares because they had just twenty pounds. The North benefited as the foreign investors sold their shares and did business with only the North who unlike the Igbo people had the money, means and resources.[5]

Social Impact of the War on Owerri

During the continuance of the war, religious and educational structures were burnt down (some partly destroyed) and as a result, after the war, a lot went into rebuilding and restructuring of those buildings that were burnt down during the war. Immediately the war ended, Ukpabia Asika was appointed Civilian Administor for Eastern Region. He promised rehabilitate the region but did little or nothing as everything remained as it was. The roads, bridges were still damaged, no rehabilitation. The were bunkers, trenches used during the war were still everywhere. The bridge joining Umuahia and Imbaise was destroyed during the war. Till date, that same bridge has not been repaired. That is why we do not have a major road joining Imo State to Umuahia.[6] To Peter Paul, the survival instinct of the Owerri people motivated the adoption of communal self-help

activities.“The home of a relative of mine got burned during the war and the whole community helped him rebuild” he further commented.[7]

A damaged road and cars in Owerri during the war



Source; Romano Cagnoni/Hulton Archive/Getty Images Nairaland

Disruption of Educational System

Many of the institutions of learning were destroyed. The war brought the educational system to its knees. Some institutions that were not destroyed had to close their doors and their academic calendar was totally distorted. After the war, many children were thrown out of schools as there was no money to continue their education. Some became school dropouts as those in the Universities, Primary schools could not go back to school. While some young girls got married having spent 3 years away from school because of the war.[12]

Reduction in the Size of the Nigerian army

One of the other negative effects of the Nigerian Civil War was that it reduced the strength of the army. This was due to the fact that many of the soldiers were killed in the war. Many civilians were also killed either directly by the soldiers from both sides or by the effects of the war such as starvation and malnutrition. This reduced the population of the country. Many families were scattered and massacred during the war. Millions of people died.[3] Most of the young men that were forcefully conscripted into the Biafran

army did not return. Villages lost so many able bodied young men. There was no burial ceremony, no casket, the war really dealt with Owerri people. Trenches were dug in a catholic mission called CKC parish now was used for the mass burial. The dead were referred to as *Ogu eri* which means "Those killed during the war". People died from starvation, stray bullets as there were no hospitals at that time. Then, it was just the Red Cross that served as doctors and helped in treating the injuries they could handle. No doctor would sit and treat you and not run for his/her own life thus, the increase in mortality rate.[17]

Increase in criminality

After the war, some of the soldiers who were involved in the war effort were not properly demobilized. This had left a lot of small arms in the hands of people who should not be holding guns. The result was that some of these guns were deployed by criminal elements culminating in serious criminal activities.

Lawlessness and Religious Crisis

The social strata during the civil war crumbled greatly; lawlessness became a norm. Dissatisfaction with life prompted riots and criminal activities and this led to a lot of refugees leaving Nigeria. More also, the war brought about great numbers of deaths and disabled people who could not continue life normally and this led to them to being expunged from the circus of the society. At the end of the war when one Nigeria was declared anyone who said otherwise was shot at sight. Anyone that dies be it child or adult is dumped into that trench when it gets full, another is dug and so on…. just like that. Most of the men we have today are those that were born after the war.[18] In some

towns in the former Biafra, the end of the war saw a resurgence and revivification of traditional practice as natives turned away from Catholicism, including an invigoration of the masquerade-worship of deities and many more developed a strong apathy towards the white man's religion.

As a result of the mistaken belief that the civil war stemmed from religious frictions between the Muslim (North) and the Christian (East), the relationship between the two parties has become askew. This has continued overtime and has grown into great depths of cold war that has reproduced itself in other forms of religious crisis.

Inter-Marriages

Before the war, hardly can a northerner marry an Igbo woman. It was the war that made it possible and made us understand that they could actually intermarry. There was no such thing as I nter marriage. Though most women were forced into marriage with the Hausas during the war, some willingly accepted marriage proposals from these Hausas who had the money and comfort. Who in turn came and paid dowries and married them. Such families took off quickly financially due to the financial aides provided by the in-laws. Though there were some Hausa soldiers who had bad intentions towards the Igbo women while some really needed to marry Igbo women and as such paid everything to go into full marriage with the Igbo women. Such families got appointments into political seats and other benefits.[7] While some women voluntarily followed the Nigerian soldiers to escape the untold hardship in the land, some that survived were not able to get married but took to prostitution.[9]

Dissolved Marriages and Broken homes

It was also believed that some women who lost their children during the war were rejected by their In-laws and sent away by their own husbands after the war.[12] The war broke so many marriages as some women left their husbands and got married to Biafran soldiers who to them were heroes. While some were turned into early widows after the war and made their children fatherless as the husband never came back from the war.[19] Some parents deliberately abandoned their children during the war. A striking incident occurred in the North part of Owerri where an abandoned child was raised by another family. The child was abandoned by his parents during the war and raised by another family therefore, refused to go back to his birth parents when they came back to lay claim on the child. Even while the matter was taken to court, the child won the case as the court stated that "if the child had been killed during the war, would they (birth parents) have been able to make any claim over him. Therefore, the birth parents had no claim over the child and the child had the right to remain with his foster parents."[11]

Although the Biafran war was fought half a century ago, recent findings remain topical given the continuing prevalence of conflict around the world, and the finding that even when wars are over, their negative impacts are transmitted to the next generation. It is quite amazing that these people we drank stagnant water, ate lizards, rats etc and still survived with no intense ailments. The survival of the Owerri people during and after the Nigerian civil war incorporating the diverse strategies adopted by Owerri people for Survival is in accordance with the saying, desperate times calls for desperate measures. An event no one would wish to repeat itself. However, the new generation who have had

no taste of what a war is like still cheer and push for war. Seeing war as a means to an end, a means of settling disputes.

Endnotes

1. Mr Dominic Amadi, 82 years, retired banker and soldier, interviewed in his compound at Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri on 15th June, 2023

2. Mr Joachim Mbata, 85 years, retired Journalist at IBS-IBC, interviewed in his compound at Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri on 17th June, 2023

3 Elder Patrick Nwawuihe, 73 years, retired Civil Servant, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro, MCC road, Owerri on 4th June, 2023

4. Mrs Stella Uchechi Chikezie, 66years, trader, interviewed in her church at Ebikoro, MCC road Owerri on 11th June, 2023

5. Prof. Nkwam Uwaoma, 74 years, former Deputy Vice Chancellor of Imo State University, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro, MCC road on Owerri 18th June, 2023

6. Ibid

7. Apostle Peter Paul Ebuzor, 65 years, retired from Ministry of Education SCMB (Secondary Educatuion Management Board), interviewed in his compound at Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri on 20th June, 2023

8. Mrs Salomey Nwawuihe, 67years, retired Civil Servant, interviewed in her church at Ebikoro MCC road on Owerri 11th June, 2023

9. Mr Innocent Chikezie, 70years, retired school teacher, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro MCC road Owerri 8th June, 2023

10. Elder Cletus Njoku, 74years, retired Civil Servant, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro MCC road Owerri 11th June, 2023

11. Mr Ken Ekezie, 63years, Director of Opertions in Imo Signage Advertisement Agency(IMSA), interviewed at his work place at Hero's square Concord Avenue New Owerri, Owerri on 13th June, 2023

12. Mrs Ada Regina Ohagwam, 72years, trader, interviewed in her compound at Olakwo, Owerri on 17th June, 2023

13. Hon. Chibuzor Umunnakwe, 48years, General Manager/CEO in Imo Signage Advertisement Agency(IMSA), interviewed at his work place at Hero's square Concord Avenue New Owerri, Owerri on 13th June, 2023

14.Mr Goddy Anoruo, 67years, retired Assistasnt Controller in Correctional Centre(Prisons), interviewed in his compund at Inyishi Ikeduru Owerri on 3rd March, 2023

15. Dr Veronica Josephs, 71yrs, Cardiologist interviewed at her clinic at Olukwu by J. Charles, Benin on 29thMay, 2023

16. Anwunah, Patrick A. (2007).*The Nigeria-Biafra War (1967–1970): my memoirs*. Ibadan: Spectrum. p.328. LSBN 978-978-029-651-3

17. Mrs Catherine Obi, 87years, trader, Interviewed in her compound at Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri on 10th June, 2023

18. Ibid

19. Mr Ijeoma Theophilus, 64 years, Educationist, interviewed in his church at Ebikoro, MCC road Owerri on 11th June, 2023

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the post-war attitudes, perceptions and psychodevelopmental implications of Biafran-Nigerian Civil War on Owerri. Findings in this study indicate that the Biafran-Nigerian war have exacerbated the subjugation, marginalization, and deprivation of the Igbos in Nigeria. This work has highlighted the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on the weak and vulnerable in Owerri, the children and women. The war was fought between the Nigerian soldiers and the armies of the secessionist Biafra with Biafra land as the theater of the bloodiest conflict in the annals of Nigerian history. Yet the casualties were the weak who were victimized by the belligerents on both sides as the world watched the unfolding of the worst human tragedy, with Europe supplying most of its deadliest machineries and weapons of warfare for financial gains and imperialistic considerations.

The war in Owerri was deeply devastating as it was bombed, looted and occupied by Federal forces. Buildings and roads were destroyed, there was no electricity, thousands of lives were terminated. Owerri was destroyed, illness and diseases became the order of the day. The war was unduly cast as a religious war between Christians and Muslims. However, Biafra was not a war about religion. The war had its root traced down to causes that were political, ideological, and moral disagreements which may have overlapped with religious difference, but were not determined by it. Five decades after

the event of the Nigerian Civil war, Nigeria is still battling to maintain its unity, with various groups clamouring for the restructuring of the country. Educational establishments were closed. The prestigious University of Nigeria Nsukka was closed down and students had to stay at home, this became a major setback because after the war, a lot of people (including lecturers and students) lost their lives and some others became displaced or disabled; millions of children became orphans.

The Nigerian Civil War in other terms known as the Nigerian-Biafran War is the most infamous civil war ever listed since the inception of Nigeria as an independent State. The civil war had grave consequences for Igbo economic life in general and food production in particular. Antecedent to the civil war, there were already existing economic, cultural, political, religious and ethnic hostility which predated Britain's ceremonial decolonization of Nigeria from 1960 to 1963. Part of the ills of the country, include the lack of visionary leadership, a lack of patriotism, a lack of discipline, corruption, the problem of low productivity arising from faulty educational planning, poor attitudes to work, an underdeveloped private sector and a lack of adequate power supply. Also, if the callous neglect and underdevelopment of the issue of the Niger Delta, which is the oil-producing area of Nigeria is not well managed, it will continue to be a source of conflict for the entire Nigerian polity.

This unfortunate event remains a brutal and life-defining event for the Igbo people and for Owerri people. The women becoming the breadwinners during the war introduced the Igbo adage *di gbakwa oku meaning* "husbands can go to hell*"* created awareness on the equality between the men and the women. The war had psychological

implications on the Owerri women who witnessed the death of their children, husbands etc. Till date, most owerri women suffer psychological trauma being victims of rape and all sort of abuse by the Nigerian soldiers. However, the Federal Government began recovery interventions in Owerri and other war-affected zones which was facilitated by communal self-help reconstruction strategies by the Owerri people. Owerri, the state capital, has become an industrial and educational center that manufactures beverages, galvanizes sheet-iron, leather products, and soap. The state capital is also the seat of the Federal University of Technology, Owerri (founded 1980).

Though the war is over, the effects of the war still linger on. It is a past that can not be totally swept under the carpet.

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list of Interviewed persons	Place of Interview	Occupation	Age	Date	Time
Apostle Peter Paul Ebuzor	Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri LGA	Ministry of Education (Retired)	65	20th June	8:43pm
Elder Cletus Njoku	MCC road Ebikoro, Owerri LGA	Civil Servant (Retired)	74	11th June	8:25pm
Elder Patrick Nwawuihe	Obazu Mbieri Mabitolu, LGA	Civil Servant (Retired)	73	4th June	2:35pm
Hon. Chibuzor Umunnawe	Hero's square Concord Avenue New Owerri, Owerri LGA	General Manager/CEO of IMSA	48	13th June	1:41pm
Prof. Dr. Veronica Josephs	WINSEPHS Clinic Benin City, Edo State	Cardiologist	71	29thMay	10:42am
Prof. Nkwam Uwaoma	Afo Ogbe, Imbaise LGA	Former Vice Chancellor of IMSU	74	18th June	3:10pm
Mrs Ada Regina Ohagwam	Olakwo, Owerri LGA	Trader	72	17th June	11:40am

Mr Chikezie Innocent	MCC road Ebikoro, Owerri LGA	School Teacher (Retired)	70	8th June	1:31:pm
Mrs Catherine Obi	Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri LGA	Trader	87	10th June	4:55pm
Mr Domnic Amadi	Umuchima UmuobaUratta, Owerri LGA	Banker (Retired)	82	15th June	1:23pm
Mr. Goddy Anoruo	Inyishi Ikeduru, Owerri LGA	Assistant Controller in Correctional Centre(Prisons) (Retired)	67	3rd March	7:15pm
Mr Ijeoma Theophilus	MCC road, Ebikoro, Owerri LGA	Educationist	64	11th June	3:23pm
Mr Joachim Mbata	Umuchima Umuoba Uratta, Owerri LGA	Journalist(Retired)	85	17th June	7:30am
Mr Ken Ekezie	Hero's square Concord New Owerri, Owerri LGA	Director of Operations(DOP) IMSA	63	13th June	2:10pm
Mrs Salomey Nwawuihe	Obazu Mbieri Mabitolu, LGA	Civil Servant(Retired)	67	11th June	2:05pm
Mrs Stella Uchechi Chikezie	MCC road Ebikoro, Owerri LGA	Trader	66	11th June	6:45am

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