

**ASPECTS OF IHIAGWA HISTORY IN THE POST NIGERIA-BIAFRA WAR
ERA, 1970-2010**

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Abstract

This paper attempts to distill the different measures evolved by the General Gowon led-government towards alleviating the horrible and harrowing experiences suffered by the people of South East immediately after the Nigeria-Biafra war. It further highlights other measures used by the affected people of Ihiagwa to help themselves both economically and socially. The work employed the qualitative method of research. The research was presented thematically in chronological order characteristic of historical research. Sources were drawn from both primary and secondary sources to document aspects of Ihiagwa history between, 1970 and 2010. It goes further to dwell on one-decade intra-communal conflict preceded by succession disputes that characterized the community in the early 1990s and how it was amicably resolved resulting in the creation of another community from the "old Ihiagwa", which some people saw as a win-win situation. It finally enumerates some of the modern challenges being experienced at present by the community and proffers solutions to some of these challenges.

Keywords: Ihiagwa, History, Igbo, Biafra, Nigeria, War

Introduction

Ihiagwa community was one of the epicenters of the unfortunate and avoidable Nigeria-Biafra war that lasted for a period of 30 months. It is pertinent to observe that Nigeria and the People's Republic of Biafra¹ engaged in an intractable war from July 1967, when the actual shootings started, to 15 January 1970, Gen. Yakubu Gowon, the Nigerian head of state ordered a ceasefire². Events that eventually culminated in the war led to a coup and counter coup in 1967, which were given ethnic colourations³. It further degenerated to the massacre of soldiers of Igbo extraction, as well as a pogrom that culminated in the killing of about three thousand (3000) Easterners (mostly people of Igbo extraction)⁴. About two million other Easterners returned to Igboland as refugees, maimed, dispossessed and incapacitated⁵. The worth of property lost by the Igbo in Northern, Western, Mid-Western Nigeria, and Lagos amounts to over Forty Million Pounds⁶. Furthermore, Gen. Gowon's reneging on the agreement reached at Aburi, Ghana and the consequent declaration of the Peoples Republic of Biafra pitted the former Eastern Region of Nigeria against the rest of the country in a civil war⁷. It is noteworthy that Nigeria's position on Biafra is premised on the assumption that if Biafra is allowed to secede then a number of other ethnic nationalities within Nigeria would follow suit⁸. In other words, the Nigerian government's blocking of Biafra's secession move was to prevent the dissolution and disintegration of Nigeria⁹. As lame as the above position may seem to appear, the war had taken place with its consequences on the belligerents.

The reasons for Ihiagwa being one of the epicenters of the Nigeria-Biafra war are not far-fetched. Firstly, it is one of the communities that are close to Owerri, the present-day Imo State capital. So, after "the fall of Owerri" the Nigeria soldiers found the community suitable for its military camps. Secondly, the community served as a gate-way to Port-Harcourt through Obinze, another contiguous community to Ihiagwa at the Western fringes¹⁰.

Immediately after the Nigeria-Biafra war with its devastating aftermath on the community and indeed the entire south-east. The Nigerian Government, led by General Yakubu Gowon, came out with programmes aimed at alleviating the sufferings of those who were severely affected by the bitter experiences of the war. One of such programme was the policy of 3RS which stood for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. The programme, sadly, did not meet up with its mandate with regard to implementation as it concerned the yearnings of the entire area affected by the war. Many communities whose means of livelihood were

greatly disrupted by the war, Ihiagwa community inclusive, therefore went back and devised other means through which they helped themselves. Agriculture which was the mainstay of the community, but was affected by the war was begun. Other self-help projects and programme aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the people and empowering individuals were evolved. Social institutions for the regulation of conducts in society were harmonized.

Although Ihiagwa community is still faced with some of the ills associated with urbanization and inter-cultural exchanges, some of the self-help projects embarked upon by the community laid a very solid foundation in its rebuilding.

Ihiagwa in the Post Nigeria - Biafra War Era, 19170 - 2010

The civil war ended officially on the 12th of January 1970. After consultations with his colleague, Colonel Philip Effiong who took over from Ojukwu as the Commander made a broadcast to the effect that:

Our people are now disillusioned and those elements of the old government regime who have made negotiation and reconciliation impossible have voluntarily removed themselves from our midst. I have therefore instructed an early disengagement of troops... I urge on General Gowon in the name of humanity to order his troops to halt. A delegation of our people is ...ready to meet the representatives of the Nigeria federal government anywhere to negotiate a peaceful settlement on the basis of the OAU resolution...¹¹

With this, Col. Effiong accepted the concept of one Nigeria in the context of the 12 states structure, Biafra had thus surrendered. In response, General Gowon in a broadcast to the nation referred to the surrender as "a great moment of victory for national unity and reconciliation"¹². And that there was "no victor, no vanquished". He praised the Nigerian soldiers and recalled why Nigeria had to fight in these words; "our objective was to crush the rebellion and to maintain the territorial integrity of our nation"¹³.

The Post War Reconstruction Programme and its Effects

To argue that a lot of people lost their lives in the war is an understatement. In fact, millions of people had died especially from the Biafran side. Thousands more were maimed, while others were thoroughly disorganized. But for those who were lucky to survive the war, the federal government took some policy measures aimed at ameliorating the situation. The federal government had to heed the

warning by well-meaning Nigerians, international agencies, countries sympathetic to the Biafran course, as well as countries who still wanted to see a united, cohesive and indivisible Nigeria that “if Gowon had won the war now, he has to win the peace”¹⁴. The major demands of the time were one of the wars battered areas. There was the need for food, shelter and medicine. There was also the need to restore electricity supply, transport and communication services. The dire need to resettle farmers, reopen factories and then resume normal life in all facets of the society also came to the fore. These needs were encapsulated in a broadcast by Gowon on the 1st of October 1970.

One of the programmes was the 3RS namely – Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. To this end, the federal government appointed Mr. Ukpabi Asika, an impressive political performer and a political science lecturer from the University of Ibadan to coordinate relief matters and look into the refugee problem of the war affected areas¹⁵. In the course of his duties, he re-established administrative structure in the East Central States and was subsequently appointed the Administrator of the State. There was also the establishment of the Abandoned Property committee in all states to administer and collect all rents on all property belonging to the Igbo who had abandoned such property during the war. Many of these property owners who returned after the war received some money which went a long way towards their resettlement.

There was also the establishment of National Rehabilitation Commission by decree No. 41¹⁶. This commission which was headed by Timothy Omo Bare was charged with responsibility of collection and distribution of drugs and other humanitarian relief materials from foreign government and international NGOs. With this arrangement, citizens were provided with food, clothing, and other medical care by the commission. The Nigeria Red Cross, in league with the commission fed over 700,000 people daily in the Eastern states. The Red Cross had also stockpiled 13,000 tons of food and assembled another 7,000 tons by the end of January 1970¹⁷. According to Anthony Enahoro, the then Federal Commissioner for information, “Nigeria’s immediate needs were for assistance aimed at solving acute transportation challenge and reopening public utilities and the restoration of social services and not food. Calls made by Gowon in his broadcast for volunteers were heeded to, as medical doctors, other paramedics, engineers, technicians and administrators offered their services. To facilitate the functions of these professionals, the federal government provided One Million Nigerian Pounds. The process of Rehabilitation was on course, and yielded fruits that the British Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Maurice Foley

commended the federal government and people of Nigeria in these words, "I have been moved by the spirit of reconciliation and brother hood which is guiding the Nigerian people and their leaders". In a similar vein the observer team sent to Nigeria also observed that there was no genocide in the nearly liberated site visited and that within the limitation of available transport, federal troops carried food where it was most needed.

Gowon also announced the reunion in the civil service. Under this arrangement, public servants were categorized; instructions were given to them to report to specific government agencies for re-absorption. As for those in the military, some of the soldiers who showed allegiance to the Biafra State were re-absorbed, while some others were dismissed from the military alongside those officers who participated in the January 1966 coup. Those who assisted the secessionist forces to attack the former mid-western region were detained¹⁸. In the area of economy, appreciable efforts were made to cushion the effects of the war on the entire Nigerian economy. In this connection, Gowon promulgated the Nigerian enterprises promotion decree aimed at indigenizing the private sector. This policy was divided into two schedules. Firstly, it provided for short term transfers of small business to Nigerians. This made some shops and supermarkets owned by Lebanese and people from other countries to close down or sold out to Nigerians. Thus, many of these foreign nationals sought and got naturalized during the period. Secondly, larger business concerns which could not be indigenized within a short period, Nigerians were asked to buy shares in trust for them, with the hope that they would buy in future. It was under this economic development programme that Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) was set up. The bank was meant to provide loans for farmers and encourage agricultural production and food surplus. There was a post-war national reconstruction and development plan for 1970-1974 which was launched in 1970. This was specifically for priority areas. They included government building that were damaged during the war; the university of Nigeria Nsukka received ₦12 million for its reconstruction while ₦6 million was expended in the Rehabilitation of Industries. The African Continental Bank (ACB) was granted ₦5 million for its reopening¹⁹.

Despite these seemingly grandiose policy pronouncements, its implementation left much to be desired, in as much as it did not reach every hook and cranny of the war-torn area especially the interiors that were worst hit. At best, the implementation of the programme was selective, half-hearted and aimed at pacifying the international community who were aggrieved at the way the Easterners were treated. These assertions have been gleaned from a number of

studies and impeccable information. A typical case in point was the abandoned property saga. Of a truth, it is important to observe that those Igbo who left their property in the north and elsewhere, during the war took possession of same after the war. In fact, there were cases where the rents collected from those properties were given back to the original owners to enable them start life afresh after the war. It is still on record that properties of the Igbo situated in Rivers State were never handed back to them. It therefore stands to reason that hatred towards the Igbo still exist despite the much talk mantra of "One Nigeria".

Again, it is a universal phenomenon that life is usually difficult during post-war years, Biafran situation was not different, families were told to trade their Biafran currency, no matter how many million Biafran pounds, for a paltry total maximum of twenty Nigerian pounds. It was bad, inequitable and left a bitter taste in the mouth for a people ravaged by war.

In the case of soldiers who served on the Biafran side, admittedly, some of them were reintegrated into the Nigerian army. But properly speaking, quite a number of them were left to suffer, simply because of the roles they played during the war. This singular act of the government grossly belied its claim of "no victor no vanquished". It can be deduced that these soldiers were not taken back into the army because of the area they came from. Other than that, there was no justifiable and thoroughly convincing reason(s) to truly explain away their dismissal from the military²⁰. Worse still, the government did not put any workable programme in place aimed at cushioning the psychological effect of those who were maimed. The twin factors of having to depend economically on family members and their permanent disability killed them faster than other debilitating diseases between the first decades of post war life²¹.

The spiritual growth and development of the community and indeed that of the entire Igboland were not taken into consideration. All the machineries put in place by the Europeans towards evangelization were abruptly stopped. A lot of missionaries were rounded up, taken to Port-Harcourt, hurriedly tried by a military court and declared *personae non grata*. Their expulsion from the region was unceremoniously carried out with military dispatch. With the exodus of these Europeans from the region the manpower needed for the proselytizing mission fell abysmally. Although this move affected the spread of missionary activities in the region, the preemptive measure taken by Bishop Whelan was what saved the total collapse of Catholic missions in Owerri. Shortly before answering the Port-Harcourt summons, he quickly appointed Monsignor Okoroanyawu as the Vicar-General and Administrator of the war ravaged Owerri Diocese. The onerous task

of picking the bits and pieces of what was left, fell squarely on him. He quickly rose to the occasion by assembling his indigenous colleagues. With these capable hands, he set out towards building a formidable, highly focused and determined team. The team channeled its attention toward the Rehabilitation of the seminaries. The process of completely repossessing Okpala Seminary from the Federal Troops who occupied it during the war was begun. Indigenous priests of Owerri who were still abroad were asked to come home to assist in the post-war development of the diocese. The call was specifically directed at those who had completed their studies abroad but were held back because of the exigencies of the war. A greater number of them heeded to the call and did return. And their services helped the Rehabilitation processes.

Although, Ukpabi Asika's appointment as the administrator of the East Central State was commendable, his consequent reestablishment of all administrative structure in the state was also equally applauded but the subsequent takeover of all the mission schools in the state deprived the churches of one of its most important tools for evangelization²².

Post War Economic Activities in Ihiagwa

Although the Nigeria-Biafra war severely affected the economic lives of the people of Ihiagwa, their interest in agriculture, particularly farming which dominates their economic activities never waned. Traditional land ownership system which was kinship was not disrupted by the war. There was renewed interest in farming as people engaged in the cultivation of several crops, roots and so on. This was done on subsistence level, for the production of food for the immediate family. However, few others who had surplus either sold the produce for the procurement of other items or exchanged it for other needs of the family. There was the reintroduction of barns for the staking and preservation of yams, while cassava which was next to yam in the order of preference was processed to produce varieties of products to feed the people. Hunting activities were led by professional hunters and others who specialized in using trained dogs to hound game, hunting exhibitions were organized. The products of these hunting exercises were either sold for money or used to enrich the protein intake. Short distance trade which was affected by Nigeria-Biafra war hostilities was begun in earnest as a cross section of traders started the sale, distribution and exchange of goods and services with neighbouring communities²³.

Attempts towards Urbanization

Ihiagwa community and the entire Igbo land have been known as people who never relied on outsiders for the provision of their immediate needs and solution to other associated human problems. These efforts towards growth and development manifested itself very glaringly before, during and after the colonial era. The first maternity home was established by the people of *Ihiagwa* in cooperation with the Church Missionary Society way back in the 1940s. The establishment of this maternity home greatly reduced the incidence of maternal and infant mortality. The Baptist school and the Catholic Church mission were also built by the community. The first sets of graduates produced by the community were mostly beneficiaries of bursaries provided jointly by the community. These giant strides towards building a cohesive and united community were so much on course and yielding the desired dividend when the first salvo that heralded the civil war was heard.

The war which lasted for 30 months could not allow for the continued execution of these projects. The community was a theatre of war; there were lots of casualties, hunger and starvation in the community and the entire region. The horrible and harrowing condition as well as the despair and hopelessness could better be imagined. In spite of all these, the post war years witnessed a resurgence and intensification of communal efforts toward self-help efforts. With the help and support from different branches of *Ihiagwa* Welfare Association across the cities and the coordinating home branch: *Ihiagwa* Central Executive Council, the revitalization of infrastructures and other social amenities destroyed during the war began, while the ideas of construction of new ones were also conceived. To this end, the road connecting *Ihiagwa* to Owerri through Nekede which was severely damaged received rehabilitation²⁴. Other corridors linking *Ihiagwa* and its contiguous neighbours were also rehabilitated. The maternity home that was razed down during the war was rebuilt and stocked with drugs. While the midwives and other paramedics who fled during the war were encouraged to come back and resume work.

In the same vein, a committee that had earlier been set up for the renovation of schools damaged in the course of war rose to the occasion. The rebuilding of four elementary schools in *Ihiagwa* was completed stipulated time frame. This enabled the children to go back to school soon after the war. Another area that received attention was the market (Nkwo-ukwu *Ihiagwa*). This market was the epicenter of battles between the Federal Troops and the Biafran soldiers. Consequent upon which shops were looted, some seriously damaged while others were completely

razed down. It took the then Central Executive Council and the committee several months to clear the dump, wreckages and all the building that fell into ruins after the war. This cleared way for people to resume economic and commercial activities once again. All arterial roads connecting the eight villages were manually repaired. Artisans, farmers and traders whose trade and businesses were affected by the war also benefited from this venture. In this connection, some of them that showed manifest desire and interest in going back to their businesses were assisted with some money and other things needed. This assistance went a long way towards re-launching them back to life, thereby ameliorating the terribly harsh conditions occasioned by the war²⁵.

The draw-bridge linking Ihiagwa community and its neighbours of Obinze and Mgbirichi on the western flank was destroyed during the war. This was to make the infiltration of the Federal Troops from Port-Harcourt into the community very difficult, if not completely impossible. It was after the war and in pursuance of self-help efforts of the community that the bridge was rebuilt. With every zeal and love for the community all artisans, labourers gathered to put the bridge back into place. The reopening of the road greatly increased the flow of goods and services from and into the community. There was also the resurgence of short and long-distance trade. The Ihiagwa postal agency built in the late 1940s by communal labour was upgraded to a Sub-Post Office. Although it equally suffered from severe damage during the war, it was rebuilt soon after the war, and reopened by Mr. A.C. Orah, one of the Commissioners in the Ukpabi Asika administration of the former East Central State²⁶.

The high point of self-help efforts in Ihiagwa was the period between 1976 and 1980. It was during this period that the battle to become an autonomous community as well as the establishment of a befitting secondary school were fought and won. The post-war Community Council sited the headquarters of Ochee Community Council at Eziobodo, instead of Ihiagwa, thereby divesting Ihiagwa community of her leadership roles. There was a protracted political battle which ultimately led to the creation of Ihiagwa autonomous community. The multiplicity of antagonistic tongues also delayed the recognition and installation of the first recognized traditional ruler of Ihiagwa. The selection of the tradition ruler was rancor free and the cost of the installation ceremony was born by the community.

When the revolution in the establishment of secondary schools in Imo State occurred by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the community had none. Concerted efforts were made by the community to establish a secondary school with her sister

community of Nekede at their common border that now houses the police training school. This suggestion was met with a sharp rebuff by Nekede. Similar offer was made to Eziobodo, another neighbouring community. The community rejected it and went ahead to establish its own separate secondary school. The pride of Ihiagwa community was hurt. Consequent upon this, an emergency meeting was convoked by the Central Executive Council in 1978, with a clear mandate to get a secondary school for the community. They went to work and after determined effort, the goal was realized. Ihiagwa secondary school is located at the North – Western end of the community. It is about one kilometer from Nkwo Ukwu market and is bordered by the Otamiri River for about half of its size with an area of about ten hectares. The institution was founded to satisfy the yearning desire of the community to give education to its people. The school sprang up entirely from the community effort. After the erection of the first classroom blocks, it was handed over to the Imo State School Management Board. The project was regarded by the community, as their own little contribution towards the widening of secondary education opportunity in the state in particular and the country in general. It was commenced early in 1978 when there was an upsurge in the establishment of secondary schools in every community in Imo State following the introduction of Universal free Primary Education in the country. Under the management of Mr. A.O. Nwosu as the pioneer principal, the student population was eighty-one (81), with three streams of class one and five teachers²⁷. The school was basically the brain child of the community and a neighborhood school at its inception. During this period, various churches in Ihiagwa responded to the appeal of the Parent Teachers Association by supporting in the construction of the administrative block. In 1981/1982 session, there arose the need for a science block. The self-help effort of the community was again rekindled. The building of the block was begun before the State Education Board donated some science equipment worth over One Hundred Thousand Naira (N100, 000.00) to the school and by March of 1982, the building was completed with all the fitting and furniture. The school was inspected on the 19th, 26th and 31st of March 1982 for approval to be used for General Certificate in Education in September of that same year. The Ministry of Education and the West African Examination Council released the result of the inspection. Consequent upon this, the school was approved to take all the science subjects and the general papers in the school curriculum. Today, though not without its own problems, the school has produced responsible men and women in various professional callings, both from the community and beyond. These professionals have been contributing their own quota in the Nigeria's quest for sustainable development and nation building²⁸.

In the area of culture and tradition, African music and masquerades also contributed in bringing the name of the community to limelight. Among the popular groups included those of *Akataka* and *Agaba* masquerades. The famous *Obiwuruotu* dance group was founded in the early 1980s. This group of young men and women were known for their spectacular music genre and bravura performances. Their musical performance spanned for about three decades and featured prominently in the entire traditional music scene in Imo State and beyond.

It is clear that the self-help efforts and projects embarked upon by the community before and immediately after the civil war went a long way not only in cushioning the effects of the war but also helped in building a more united and stronger community.

The Social (*Nnaochie*) Institution in Ihiagwa

The socio-political and cultural dynamics of change especially after the civil war exposed the community to the need of having a central leadership structure to conduct their affairs. First, their famous warrior who emerged during the famous (Ogu Mkpuru Oka) died soon after the war; his reign was very brief. Besides, he never commanded community-wide acceptability. Second, the de-facto warrant chiefs also never enjoyed the respect and acceptance of the people. Reasons being that, it was an entirely British idea, foisted upon the people of the community and the entire Igbo land a novel concept as it were. Third, the seed of Christian faith sown even before the war began had begun to fructify such that it would be retrogressive and an exercise in futility to continue to appeal to deities for regulative influence and justice. A combination of these internal and external forces of change created a passionate demand for a traditional ruler in Ihiagwa. This demand for a ruler expresses itself in series of conferences and meetings by the people²⁹. Just like the proverbial biblical story of the people of Israel who made a demand to the effect that God should give them a leader³⁰. These meetings yielded results, for on the 26th December 1977, the first *Nnaochie* of Ihiagwa was crowned. It is pertinent, at this juncture to run a brief profile of the *Nnaochie 1* of Ihiagwa. Eze John Anozie Ngoka was born in the 1900s in Iriamogu village in Ihiagwa. His father was Ngoka Okoroafor, while his mother was Adanma Okoroafor. The young Anozie completed his primary education between 1924 and 1930 at Saint John's (CMS) School Ihiagwa, Central Nekede, and All Saints (CMS) Egbu. He later took some home tuition courses from Rapid Results College.

He was a devout Anglican and a product of the missionary training. He started his missionary career in 1932 at Saint John's (CMS) church Ihiagwa where he worked for several years before he was posted to teach at Umunam Imerienwe in 1939. After further training at Onitsha, he was sent to Ife in present day Osun state in 1942. His missionary journey took him to several other places before his retirement in 1976. He was still working in his local parish before he ascended the throne. He had three children, in his days as a missionary; he came in contact with a lot of people that influenced his life in positive ways, notable among who were; the Late Rev. J. N. Onuwbuariri, Rev. Nkemena from Obosi, Late Archdeacon S.N. Okoli from Akokwa and Archdeacon Chukwuezie. He was a complete gentleman who served Ihiagwa during his missionary works. It was in recognition of his personal characters of love, humility, truth, that endeared him to the community and made him a consensus candidate for the throne. He actually brought these sterling qualities to bear during his reign that spanned for almost two decades. He constituted strong formidable cabinet members that advised him on several policy formulations. These members were selected, each from one village that constituted Ihiagwa. Apart from this body, there was also the Council of Elders. This assemblage of elderly men and the intelligentsia of the community deliberated on issues delegated to them by the Cabinet, especially issues that bothered on customary matters. Because of the harmonious relationship that existed between the crown and the subjects, the community recorded unprecedented peace and progress during his reign. And as a memorial to his enthronement, the 26th December of every year was set aside for the remembrance of his ascension to the leadership throne in Ihiagwa³¹.

The pomp and pageantry of this royal occasion was usually second to none around the neighborhood. Ihiagwa sons and daughters from all works of life, both those at home and in the diaspora, looked forward to this festival which they believed was a unifying force. It usually commenced with thanksgiving service usually at Saint John's Anglican Church Ihiagwa and ended with traditional and cultural displays by various troupes, goodwill message and speeches. The high point of the occasion usually, was the conferment of traditional titles to deserving sons, daughters, and in-laws of the community. The maiden edition of this installation and award was bestowed on selected scores of Ihiagwa son who fought for the unity, growth and general development of the community. They were especially given different traditional titles according to their specific contributions to the development of the community and or their innate qualities. The period of his reign as the traditional ruler of Ihiagwa also witnessed the cessation of hostilities and superiority contest between the community and her envious neighbors; there

was a revival to the community's glorious past without unnecessarily offending the sensibilities of her neighbors and without going back to fetish practices.

The period of his reign which also, happily coincided with the administration of the first Executive Governor of Imo State (Chief Sam Onunaka Mbakwe) witnessed progressive changes. It was during this period that the community was connected to the national grid; though never completed, the construction of road from *Naze* junction through *Nekede* to the community was begun, while materials for the construction of the bridge linking Ihiagwa and Port-Harcourt through *Obinze* were stockpiled. *Ihiagwa* community become characteristically urbanized, with the siting of both a customary court and a full fledged Post Office in the town. While the court dispensed justice to litigants both within and outside the community, using laid down general rules and procedure, though not without recourse to acceptable customs and tradition of the people. The Post Office facilitated communication. It increased the propensity to write and receive letters, telegraphic message. It also eliminated the transportation cost hitherto paid from Ihiagwa to Owerri just to post letters, and receive parcels. The siting of a Police Training College at the border between Ihiagwa community and her sister community, Nekede, greatly increased the urbanizing status of these two communities. This increased Urban renewal also brought about employment opportunities especially at the junior cadre. There was marked decrease in crime rate in the communities as a result of the presence of the police college.

Although he suffered a debilitating condition a few years after his coronation, the fecundity of his ideas and leadership qualities never diminished throughout his reign. He lived for the community, and with the assemblage of capable and trusted cabinet members, served it assiduously for almost two decades³².

Intra-Communal Conflict in Ihiagwa

Ihiagwa community is made up of eight villages. They include: Ibuzo, Nkaramochie, Mboke, Umuokwo, Umuezeawula, Umuelem and Umuchima villages. The first three is collectively called Ihiamogu Nshiato, according to Ihiagwa mythology; they are believed to be aboriginal inhabitants of the community. The second three is called Umuoboalu, believed to be the scion of the first three, while the last two is collectively called Chimealam. The community is further divided into two blocs traditionally and socially. While the first six villages are grouped together with the name Dindi, the last two is called Chimealem³³

The first recognized traditional ruler of Ihiagwa, Eze John Anozie Ngoka, was from Iriamogu, one of the villages that make up Iriamogu Nshiato. Other than his sterling qualities and piety that distinguished him from other candidates, no other criterion was used during the selection processes. It was after his coronation that the first constitution of Ihiagwa was drafted. In the section that spelt out the criteria and conditions regarding the selection of a traditional ruler, the framers made it rotational. This section of the constitution was vague, full of inexactitude and of doubtful phraseology. The framers were not circumspective; hence, they did not take into account the geo-political configuration of the community. It was not explicitly written whether the rotation was between the two blocs, among the eight village that constitute Ihiagwa, or whether it was going to be among the three or six villages that make up Iriamogu Nshiato and Dindi, respectively³⁴.

The death of the *Nnaochie 1* of Ihiagwa in 1991 precipitated a leadership crisis that actually crystallized into long drawn succession dispute. Immediately after his death, the Ezeship stool and other paraphernalia of royalty were handed over to somebody from Nkaramoche – one of the villages in Iriamogu Nshiato to act in regency capacity. Incidentally, he was fated never to act in that capacity, for he died a few weeks into his regency, throwing the community into yet another state of confusion. It was in the midst of these mind-boggling complexities that a conference was convoked. The high-point of the meeting was to discuss ways to move the community forward politically and of course, on how to jointly give the late traditional ruler, Eze John Anozie Ngoka, the *Nnaochie 1* of Ihiagwa a befitting farewell ritual. The venue of the conference was the Conference Hall of Ozuzu Social Club located meters away from the Eze's palace. In attendance were cabinet members, traditional titled men and people who mattered in the community³⁵.

In the course of their deliberations to reach an accord on the roadmap to peace and successful transition, a delegate from Umuelem village, one of the two villages in Chimealem bloc, a highly respected son of the community who allegedly had been feverishly and lavishly preparing to succeed the *Nnaochie* reminded the conference of the infamous constitutional provision which stipulated that the position of the traditional ruler should be given to the bloc where he came from. His stance drew the ire of other members who saw it as untimely, ludicrous, and irrational and a complete disregard for traditional rules and conduct. In the midst of this outburst and furore, he staged a walk out from the conference, in league with quite a number of other delegations from Chimealem bloc. Few others from his side who expressed shock, disbelief and strong dissenting views from him stayed till the end of the deliberations. The Ozuzu conference as the meeting came to be known

constituted a burial committee that oversaw the traditional funeral rites and final burial of the traditional ruler, without the contribution or participation, either in cash or moral support from the two villages that constitute the Chimealem bloc. This was apart from very few exceptions who sent their condolences either individually or as families. The above incident was the fundamental *casus belli* for internecine tendencies and fratricidal killings that characterized the existence of the community shortly afterwards.

The forceful installation of the *Nnaochie* II, following a court ruling on Nze James Muruako without the approval of the entire community, particularly from the six villages of Dindi made matter worse. His reign as the *de facto* ruler of the community further accentuated the existing fault lines; it also widened the cleavages and created new ones. The protracted legal battle that lasted for several years was the clearest sign that there was the absence of a strong central leader in the community. The absence of a leader created the existence of warlords in the two blocs that made up the community: Dindi with six villages and Chimealem with two villages³⁶.

This phenomena of *warlordism* or the existence of unrecognized, *de facto* leaders with private militias who fought each other, creating political unrest and killings became a problem in the community. *Warlordism* as a negative development kept the community disunited for several years. There were mutual suspicions, irrational fear, hatred, breakdown of traditional ties, name calling, relationships and other social intercourses were dictated by blood-lines and other cultural affinities as the people avoided occasions and situations that brought indigenes together. One tragic incident where this phenomenon manifested itself most glaringly was in 1998 when some young men were killed. These men were members of a vigilante group from Dindi, the circumstances surrounding the gruesome killings of these men who have families to cater for is still shrouded in mystery, as nobody or group has come to claim responsibility. The existence of these strong men had a negative effect of denying the community of a strong leader capable of providing unity and attracting further developmental projects to the community. The phenomenon of *warlordism* therefore became a paradox. On the one hand, it caused disunity, but on the other, it produced a critical time for answers to some questions. Elder statesmen, titled holders, intellectuals and students were angered by this phenomenon. They therefore began to demand for an end to *warlordism* and disunity. This demand expressed itself in series of meetings, and conferences especially by the six villages that make up Dindi. These conferences eventually resolved to give their unflinching support for the

emergence of another autonomous community from the old Ihiagwa. This clamor for the creation of another autonomous community from the old Ihiagwa, following this disagreement and crisis situation dovetailed nicely with the period when the Imo State Government was to recognize some areas that had been clamoring for separate existence. In 2013, the Imo State Government granted autonomous communities to score of areas where there had been problems of succession. Happily, Dindi autonomous community was carved out from the old Ihiagwa, with one of the strongest contenders, Eze Kingsley Ezewunwa Odu as the first traditional ruler of the area.

Another factor that contributed to the prolonged succession dispute and ultimately led to the implosion of the community was the socio-political milieu of the time. Although Ihiagwa community recorded some noteworthy milestones in terms of developments before 1990, the community reached the peak of its urbanization status, in our considered opinion, at the turn of the 1990s. This is because one of the six Federal Universities of Technology established by the then Federal Military Government of Nigeria was magnificently cited in Ihiagwa. The siting of this institution in the community, no doubt increased the urban nature of the community. Though, not a conventional institution that offers courses in the Social Sciences, and Humanities, the rate of enrolment of students from Ihiagwa into the school increased appreciably; there was rapid increase in population, as students, staff of the institution, and other people from different environment, cultural beliefs and religious orientation came into the community for different purposes. Furthermore, the traditional kinship system of land ownership was greatly challenged. The commercialization of land and individualization of its ownership became the norm. Lands were alienated and divested for commercial purposes, more often, to foreigners. The siting of the school in Ihiagwa community became antithetical to development. This was because the culture of violence was introduced by some students allegedly from different rival cult groups. On different occasions, these cult groups either clashed among themselves or between them and the indigenes. The proliferation of light arms and small weapons as a result of these clashes made it easier for an average Ihiagwa youth to own a gun. On several instances, there had been clashes between students and villagers, with casualties on both sides. The proliferation of arms and weaponization of the youths contributed in making the struggle for succession a long and inglorious chapter in the political history of Ihiagwa community

Urbanization and some of its challenges on Ihiagwa Community

Ihiagwa community has changed from her traditional eight village compartments to a kind of an urban slum; from a decidedly agrarian community to a semi-industrial one. So many reasons could be advanced for these changes. One of the reasons is the siting of the Federal University of Technology Owerri in Ihiagwa community. Closely related to this is the presence of Federal Polytechnic and the Police College both in Nekede, a sister community³⁷.

The presence of these federal institutions has greatly doubled the population of the community. As would be expected, lots of challenges come with these developments. There are no corresponding infrastructural developments to take care of the influx of people into the community. About fifteen-kilometer road from Naze junction to Ihiagwa through Nekede has been in a terribly bad condition since 1979. Power supply to Ihiagwa and other surrounding areas are terribly erratic or at best, non-existent. These dual needs that serve as catalyst to entrepreneurial skills and development are almost unavailable; sinking of bore holes are done individually. Hotels and other allied industries have taken over every available space, with the existence of red-light districts in every nook and cranny of the community. This ugly situation has corrupted the minds of the youths, with some of them engaging in robbery and other social ills³⁸.

The number of buses and taxis that do ply the road in Ihiagwa and its environs, including motorcycle riders has quadrupled. Consequently, the available space (park) built can no longer contain them. This ugly situation is very good recipes for multiple accidents as a number of them now stay on the road, blocking both human and vehicular traffic, especially on local market days³⁹.

Ihiagwa community is also in dire need of a modern cemetery where the dead could be buried. The two existing ones that belong to the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches are filled. The people of Ihiagwa community and indeed the entire Igbo race believe in the linkage between the living, the dead and the yet unborn. A situation where the body of the dead would be unknowingly exhumed in the process of digging for the burial of another would leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

We therefore call on the local government authority whose responsibility it is to build and manage cemeteries to rise to the occasion. The people of Ihiagwa community could also procure one for the entire community. The project could serve as a source of employment to some people if commercialized and properly managed.

Conclusion

The Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970 devastatingly ravaged the entire East Central State that made up the Peoples Republic of Biafra. Most communities were torn to shreds with infrastructure and institutions destroyed. People of Biafra bore the brunt of the war with minor internal war technological advancements. The Research and Production Unit (RAP), comprising of engineers and scientists of Eastern extraction championed and piloted manufacturing of war equipments used by the Biafran state in prosecuting the war.

Post-war Ihiagwa saw some community self-help efforts geared towards restoration and rebuilding of war-torn infrastructure. Emerging from the war, there arose the need to complement the unsuccessful reconstruction and rehabilitation programme of the Nigerian State. The 3R programme of Gen. Yakubu Gowon was crafted to take care of the effects of the war, but the implementation pointed to the contrary. In order words, the post-war reconstruction programme was designed with an underlying intent to fail.

In order to combat the challenges posed by the war and the post-war situations, the community devised means of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure. New institutions were also put in place to rise up to the occasion as provided by modern reality as exposed by the war. These institutions aimed at repositioning the community also came with its own challenges which the community had to grapple with. In situations like the above always created new leadership, while distorting the existing ones. This usually bred rancor and acrimony, especially when it had to do community leadership. Ihiagwa in the course of repositioning also had a fair share of these crises.

Urbanization comes with its positives and negatives. Establishment of public and government institutions in Ihiagwa seems to be detrimental to the community's development efforts. This is because public utilities and infrastructure provided did not take cognizance of the growing population, thereby leading to the overstretching of existing ones. Social vices that are associated with population explosion occasioned by urbanization had its toll on Ihiagwa community within the period of this study. They eroded the old known peace and traditional value system Ihiagwa is known with. Traditional institutions were adversely affected in response to the demands of the modern times. Despite all these challenges, Ihiagwa always rose to the occasion to tackle any threat posed to its existence by any factor or forces, both internal and external.

Endnotes

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