

Justice Delayed? The Nkanu Igbo and the Nigerian Army Occupation: 1967-1970

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the experiences of the Nkanu Igbo during the civil war. The Nigerian-Biafran Civil War was savagely contested by both sides of the divide. The seceding Biafra had borne the brunt of the pogrom, the counter coup d'état that decimated its officer corps in Nigeria and the sporadic outbursts of sectarian and ethnic cleansing that preceded the declaration of the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. In less than three months of the commencement of hostilities, Biafra lost its capital, Enugu, with all its stores. Enugu and its environs are peopled by the Nkanu Igbo and with the retreat of the Biafran forces, civil populace predominantly of the Nkanu Igbo came under the Nigerian army occupation from September 1967 to January 1970. The occupation of Nkanu Igbo was horrendous, with the civilian population subjected to inhuman treatment such as summary execution of suspected Biafran partisans, enforcement of pass system and arbitrary commandeering of young women as sex slaves by the Nigerian army. Unfortunately, this heinous crime against humanity has not received any scholarly attention. This paper is anchored on Mixed Method. Generally, emphasis is on qualitative method for interpretation of results. Tools for data collection are secondary data, newspaper reports, in-depth interviews and expert judgments. The sample is taken from a small group of people from 55 years and above. This group is over the age bracket of 10 years within the scope of study.

Keywords: justice, civil war, occupation, war crimes, Nkanu Igbo, butcher, Nigerian army.

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Introduction

Nigeria is an amalgam of over 250 ethnic groups. Under the strong arm of the British colonizers, this behemoth appeared to hold the hope of a great nation in the making. Six years after independence the cookies started to crumble. The January 15, 1966 coup d'état set the ball rolling. The killings of some of the emergent independent leaders were misconstrued, ethnic motives, rather than poor governance ascribed to their elimination. The Igbo people were stigmatized became targets of sectarian violence in most Northern Nigeria cities between May to October 1966. The Igbo returned *enmasse* to their region, abandoning their jobs, businesses and properties. After half-hearted attempts at peace building particularly the renegeing of January 1967 Aburi Accord, the Republic of Biafra was declared on May 30, 1967.

On July 6 1967, the Nigerian military leader, Lt.Col. Gowon, declared war on the seceding Biafran Republic. The overrunning of Nsukka Division the border town of Biafra to the North and the capture of the strategic Opi junction exposed the vulnerability of Enugu, the Biafran capital. Enugu was within the shooting range of the federal forces and the subsequent bombardment was terrifying. Despite the propaganda of the Biafran government of its ability to defend Enugu, the people were thrown into panic. The Biafran leader, Lt. Col. Ojukwu did not embark on systematic retreat of Enugu until it was too late. Rather Ojukwu sent to the war front, Biafran recruits armed with machetes to confront armoured personnel carriers and well-armed, better fed and motivated federal troops. Many inexperienced Biafran combatants perished at the war front. Retreat is strategic to lure unwary opponent into an ambush. Yet, Biafran regime refused to retreat and evacuate important stocks that could have sustained the war for over a year. Enugu was abandoned with all its markets and resources for the federal troops to loot.

On the 27th September, 1967 the federal forces were within the periphery of Enugu, the Biafra capital. Yet, Enugu was not evacuated. The next day, on the 28th September, the federal troops were within five miles of Enugu and were massively shelling the town. Like the University town of Nsukka, the people began to evacuate in a hurry leaving behind valuables and government movable properties. Col. Ojukwu had left Enugu on the 26th barely 48 hours before the federal forces entered Enugu (Madiebo,1980). On 28th September, 1967 Enugu fell to the federal forces. The Biafran troops left behind to defend the capital had neither food nor ammunition to halt the onslaught. It is still a miracle how the Republic held on for more than two years even as the capital became a government on the wheel.

The Occupation of Enugu and its Environs

The horrors experienced by the Igbo domiciled in the North were the issues that precipitated the Civil War. As the railway linking Enugu to North brought home Igbo refugees with tales of woes, the people were irked. The People wanted peaceful parting of ways through break up of Nigeria or outright war to achieve Biafran independence. Unfortunately, nobody envisaged the magnitude of modern warfare. The fall of Enugu on the 28th September 1967 invariably led to its

occupation. Enugu and Nkanu are intertwined as Nkanuland constituted more than 85% of Enugu metropolis. Thus the entire outskirts of Enugu belong to Nkanu Igbo. The collapse of Enugu invariably put Nkanuland at risk. The Nigerian army quickly distributed itself to all parts of Enugu and its environs for effective policing and occupation. An observer noted that the people hated the Nigerian army occupation but could not express it openly. The reason adduced was that the people witnessed the offloading of the bodies of those who were killed during the pogrom in the North and as such regarded the Nigerian army as an enemy force, which had come to complete the pogrom (Nnamani,2007). By January 1968 the last resistance by Biafran BOFF (Biafran Organisation for Freedom Fighters) and Rangers in Akegbe-Ugwu was consequently crushed.

Biafran partisans who were sympathetic to Biafran cause contributed in no small measure to keep the war raging in the face of excruciating difficulties and pains. These die-hard Biafrans were found among BOFF and Rangers. The BOFF were young boys who could not be enlisted in the army but were trained to penetrate the enemy line and carry out guerilla attacks while the functions of the Rangers was also to carry out sabotage operations against the federal forces. They engaged in the conscription of civilians into Biafran army and would eliminate anybody fraternizing with the enemy forces. In Nkanu, Nwankwo Ani of Ogui Nike, Titus Nweke and Nwanu Okoroafor of Amurri((Nnamani,2007) were a few of those killed by BOFF for alleged fraternization with the Nigerian army.

Some wealthy chiefs who were Biafran sympathizers supported the cause not only with their wealth but also recruited young boys to be trained as Biafran soldiers. The driving forces in Biafrans wanting to fight back were: first in defence of their fatherland to maintain Biafran sovereignty, to prevent the impending genocide and finally to maintain the territorial integrity of Igboland. The Biafran propaganda kept on recounting the woes of Igbo massacred in the North claiming that the war was for total annihilation of the Igbo. The people had to employ the old instinct of self-preservation by fighting in the face of grave difficulties. Therefore, the people hated the federal forces even in cases where they had shown kind overtures. There were occasional attempt to poison their palm wine in Ozalla and Agbani. Barriers were created along the paths of the Federal army through cutting down trees, digging trenches to impede movement by the federal forces. In extreme cases, some federal soldiers who lost their ways were ambushed and killed. According to Igwe Edwin Ogbonna :

our people's immediate reaction was to join the Biafran army. Our people reacted further by cutting down trees, thus creating a barrier to the military penetration of the villages. These include major roads such as Ugbawka-Amodu roads. They went further in their resistance, by digging trenches to hinder their vehicular movements on the major roads. Our people ambushed and killed them in their attempt to covering the pits and removal of the obstacles along the roads. This helped in delaying them in

their attempt to penetrate major communities. Many villages laid ambushes on numerous track roads, waiting for stray federal soldiers. Our people also joined Rangers. These Rangers helped the Biafran troops in their campaign to prevent the federal troops from occupying an area or help in recapturing of lost areas(Nnamani,2007).

Nkanuland proved difficult to be controlled by the invading forces. The civilians posed a stiff wall of resistance. They were mainly employers of the railway station. They witnessed the horrors of September-October massacre that saw the influx of dead and traumatized Igbo from the North. As a warlike group in pre-colonial Igboland, they awaited with eagerness the invasion of the Nigerian army but unfortunately, the Nigerian side fought with armoured cars and ferret while they relied on machetes and borrowed dane guns from their wealthy folks. Those who sympathized with the Biafran cause or fought on their side were tortured, punished or killed while the older ones were detained.

The occupation of Nkanu Igbo was marked with brutalities. Women were forced into marriages or raped, valuables were looted whereas any good house got burnt .One of the hallmarks of the occupation was the imposition of pass laws. In a war situation, pass was generally issued to monitor the infiltration of the liberated areas. This was because cross-border infiltration to the federal camps by young Biafrans was common. Part of Ojukwu's strategies in setting up of the Biafran Organisation for Freedom Fighters(BOFF) was to train young boys as spies to operate behind enemy lines and for sabotage operations. The Nigerian soldiers were attacked. They lost some of their members through guerilla attacks by BOFF or Rangers. It was alleged that their food, water and palmwine were in most cases poisoned by BOFF or Rangers operatives. This happened in Udi, Ozalla and Agbani. Young boys were trained to infiltrate enemy camps. The Nigerian soldiers unwittingly recruited those boys not knowing they were spies. These Biafran secret agents may stay for few weeks and disappeared into thin air in which they ferry information back to the Biafran army. It took time before the Nigerian soldiers discovered that those stray, hungry looking kids were "Ojukwu boys" and started shooting them on sight. The Federal soldiers would interrogate those "boys" soldiers captured and had their mouths slit open and returned to the Biafran side as a deterrent for other er recruits (Gould,2013).

The surprised attacks and loss of men and ammunition by BOFF and Rangers provoked the Nigerian army to slaughter Biafran partisans like goats. To safeguard the so-called liberated areas, movement passes were issued to civilians. Because of the casualties suffered, the Nigerian army had to screen and fish out these die-hard Biafrans. Pass was imposed for their security. The pass law stipulated that every male child within the age of seven years must possess a pass with attached passport photograph. This pass must have the details of the bearer. It was first issued to males but later adult females possessed it. According to Chief Anthony Nwobodo Agbo, who was appointed the Sariki or war chief of Amechi Awkwunanaw during the war by Lt. Col. T.Y Danjuma, he used to issue this movement pass to enable the people

move freely to Enugu town and also to enable the people access the relief materials (Agbo, personal communication, June 11, 2016).

The Nkanu Igbo were issued with such pass to aid their movement and secure jobs with the Red Cross. Chief Anthony Agbo is praised today for saving a lot of lives through issuance of passes. Those issued with pass were safe from Federal forces harassment and could move anywhere within the 'liberated areas'. Nevertheless, the imposition of passes gravely restricted people's movement. This became a scourge on its own. It contributed to the scourge of starvation because without a pass, those farther inland could not easily scavenge for food nor had access to relief materials. A pass therefore was a paper issued to an individual as an attestation of his/her loyalty to the federal authority. The pass system endured even after cessation of hostility under the strict scrutiny of the victorious federal forces. To obtain the pass, people had to be subjected to rigours. The individual in need of a pass had to subject him/herself to clearance by the Sariki. Again, being conversant with the heinous activities of some of these war chiefs saddled with the power to issue those passes could only mean that it was definitely meant for their cronies. As Chief Edward Onu posited that movements were restricted and only supporters of the federal cause who had passes were allowed to have food and medical aids (Nnamani, 2007). Majority of the people who moved farther into the hinterland because of fear of possible genocide could not possess those passes thereby adding to the grave difficulties on ground within the period.

Collaborators, Saboteurs and Attempted Annihilation of Freeborn in Nkanu

The instinct to survive especially during a war could lead to betrayals. Wives betrayed their husbands while kinsmen betray their kith and kin. During this period of intense difficulties, there were no shortage of saboteurs, cowards and turn-coats. This group of people acted as collaborators and saboteurs against their people. They were regarded as traitors who when faced with difficulties sabotaged their people. In Nkanu, they capitalized on their interaction with the occupation forces to settle old scores. The collaborators it was alleged helped troops as guides and led them through the various communities. Some of these collaborators were later appointed war chiefs and most of them spoke Hausa language fluently. Because they were villains, they undermined their people, abused their powers and committed heinous crimes. In order to please their pay masters, they blackmailed previously well to do Nkanu people before the Nigerian soldiers as Biafran sympathizers.

These quislings gained the confidence of the occupation forces and were made war chiefs/Sariki thereby displacing the real chiefs. Some notable collaborators were Peter Mba-Egbo, Daha-Egbo, Ogbuebo from Amankazi, Boniface Nwobodo and Simon Ugwu from Amurri. They gave lists of their enemies to the Nigerian military men accusing them falsely of being Biafran soldiers (Nnamani, 2007). Pa Joseph Eze the pre-war chief of Amurri was accused of aiding the Biafran troops. The Nigerian military executed him. Prominent men suffered most during this epoch. It was difficult for them to escape both sides. A rich man could be accused by his enemies

as a Biafran sympathizer and got killed by the Nigerian side or viewed as collaborator and killed by the Biafran BOFF. Titus Nweke and Ambrose Nnaji fell in the bad books of the 130 Battalion of Biafran troops stationed in Agbani. Titus Nweke tried to curtail the excesses of the Biafran soldiers. His enemies concocted stories of his aiding the Nigerian army and was beheaded at Eke Ogbaku by the Biafran troop (Nnamani,2007).

These collaborators served as war chiefs thereby displacing the pre-war political structure of the people. As some of the men were mischievous, there were others who were praised today for working assiduously for the good of the people. Elder Jack Nnamani and Chief Anthony Agbo wrote their names in the sands of time as they protected their people's property during the occupation. They were said to have effected the release of people incarcerated by the occupation army. They always questioned the rationale behind their detention. It was alleged that Elder Jack Nnamani usually blackmailed the occupation forces that they promised the people that no harm would befall them if they returned home. It should be recalled that the dislodgement of Biafran forces and the ferocity of Nigerian Air Force bombardment made the people scampered for safety in dense forests. These places were called *agu*(uninhabited farmlands which were not motorable). People hid in such places to escape executions, rape and forced marriages. As each community was liberated by the federal forces, they appointed war chiefs with the express order to cajole people out of their hidings to embrace the 'liberators'. In Nkanu, the people viewed such gestures with utmost suspicion. It was an irony that those who later mustered the courage to return from hiding were always harassed at every turn. Young men were executed and labeled "Ojukwu boys" while women were raped or forced into marriages, houses were burnt, stalls were looted, tobacco was a prized booty, storey buildings were destroyed with dynamites to name a few. All wealthy men who sought refuge in Biafran controlled zone were Biafran sympathizers and therefore, their buildings were destroyed.

The collaborator in Oruku Nkanu East L.G.A was alleged to have presided over the elimination of over thirty young men from that community (Nnamani,2007) Oruku community witnessed a massive execution on the day the Nigerian army entered the town. Those young men were labeled Biafran collaborators by the federal informants. This was similar to what happened at Aba where the Nigerian Soldiers massacred more than two thousand civilians (Achebe,2012). In the words of Kanayo Nnamani "our people were the major cause of the death of most of the people" (Nnamani,2007,p.104). In Amurri, Dawa Nwegbo, Ogbuebo and Peter Nwegbo excelled in directing the federal troops into the community and saw to the elimination of Chigbo-Ogbu a Biafran Ranger from Amankazi Eziokwe Amurri (Nnamani,2007). They worked with the Nigerian soldiers, collected bribes and gave them information on young girls and newly married women in hiding. An informant narrated a story of a young girl of about 18years from Umuigbo Amurri whom the Nigerian soldiers forcefully took away from her parents. Her mother wept bitterly that they should leave her daughter who was her only child. The Nigerian soldiers insisted on forcefully taking the girl. Peter Nwegbo an accomplice threatened the poor woman that he was going to kill her if she refused her daughter being taken

away; after all, they were not interested on the mother but the daughter. The embittered mother was lucky because in the midst of the fracas, a more senior federal officer appeared on the scene and inquired over the reason for the commotion. The woman tearfully narrated the problem to him. The soldier was enraged and asked Peter Nwegbo and his Nigerian soldier accomplice if that was what they usually do. He lambasted them that instead of searching for young men, they were busy conscripting young girls who were the only hope of their aged mother. Consequently, he ordered that the erring soldier should be punished(Nnamani,2007). The poor mother in the story had the blessings of mother luck on that fateful day. Again, the story depicts that not all the Nigerian soldiers were rapists. Most of the officers conducted themselves well but the rank and file was despicable.

These people who acted as guides helped the Nigerian army to effectively occupy Nkanuland and its environs. All recognized chiefs in Nkanu area ran away and were afraid of being killed. They were Igwe Chukwuani of Ozalla, Igwe Ofor Nnaji of Obe, Igwe Nnamani of Agbani among others. Hence, they left their duty posts and in its stead, collaborators and saboteurs were appointed war chiefs or Sariki. However, some of the Sarikis acted in good faith by protecting their various community, encouraged them to come out of their hidings, arbitrated between their people and federal forces in case of misunderstandings among many other good deeds. The good ones were actually in the minority. Sariki Ogbuebo and Dawa brought Nigerian soldiers into Amurri where they burnt houses. Amechi Awkwunanaw was invaded around November 1967. The invaders set up a camp and launched attacks from there as people fled Amechi Awkwunanaw. It was alleged that their invasion of Amechi Awkwunanaw led to the burning of buildings of prominent men such as Nnaji Nwobodo, Nwankwo Ugwu Aniede, Chief Mba among others. Chief Mba was accused of being a Biafran supporter while his compound was a secret meeting point of Biafrans. It was alleged that he fled to Nومه and later died in 1971, shortly after the war. He could not survive the loss of his wealth. Any household the head of the family was not present when the Nigeria soldiers visited became a Biafran sympathizer. At times the Nigerian soldiers would leave a message that the owner of the compound should report to the Nigerian army camp at Eke-Otu. If after few days and the owner had not surrendered to the army of occupation, the army would eventually plant dynamites around the building and demolish it.

The day they invaded Amechi, it was only Chief Jonah Agbo's one storey building that was spared. Chief Jonah Agbo was neither a Nigerian collaborator nor saboteur. But he was smeared and blackmailed by a descendant of slaves, Nwanyani; that he (Chief Jonah Agbo) was a Biafran sympathizer. Nwanyani and his fellow collaborators were on a vengeful mission to eliminate all prominent Amadi(freeborn) in Amechi Awkwunanaw through branding them as Biafran partisans. Nwanyani alleged that Biafran troops stock-piled weapons and met regularly at Chief Jonah Agbo's house. This descendant of slaves, Nwanyani, wanted Chief Jonah Agbo's house demolished on false allegation of aiding the Biafran war efforts. However, after the Nigerian troops had planted dynamites around the building, a curious officer wanted to search the building for the alleged

weapons but stumbled on a wall picture in the living room in which Chief Jonah Agbo had taken with the Emir of Zaria. The officer brought the picture down and took a closer look and discovered that it was the Emir of Zaria and further inquired whether the owner of the building about to be demolished was in the picture and they pointed at a young man squatting in front of the Emir. He ordered his men to remove the dynamites from around Chief Jonah Agbo's house. That picture spared the building and most likely those associated with the owner of the building. But because they had forcefully broken into the building, the door was left ajar and people looted every conceivable item in the house (Oguejiofor Agbo, personal communication, May 30,2016).

Chief Jonah Agbo was lucky but other prominent men of Nkanu who deserted their houses were not lucky. His stint with Emir of Zaria during his stay in the North saved his property. On the other hand, people lost years of painstaking acquisitions. On the whole, they burnt fourteen houses on that fateful day. They equally engaged in killing spree and subjected the remnants to various kinds of punishments. As Achebe opined that Nigeria had not succeeded in crushing the spirit of the Igbo people, but it had left us indigent, stripped and stranded in the wilderness (Achebe,2012).

Every society has its own cleavages and issues. But these issues should be submerged during a national catastrophe like Biafran/Nigerian Civil War. Unfortunately some people felt that they should capitalize on the differences existing in Nkanuland and punish their former overlords. They thought joining forces with the Northern soldiers would liberate them. Indeed they were mistaken. The Hausa/Fulani society was the most stratified society where the nobles lord it over the serfs mercilessly. According to Chief Christian Achi Nnaji of Agbani, the Nigerian army entered Nkanuland through the ex-slaves of Nkanu origin who had lived in the North and spoke Hausa language fluently. They manipulated the Nigerian army of occupation into fighting the Amadi(freeborn). One of the ex-slaves, Nwonovo Obunne of Umuowo Agbani took the invading troops to Agbani Beach where the soldiers looted palm oil and palm kernel. He alleged that all Amadi were Biafran partisans and accordingly blackmailed them before the Nigerian army. All prominent Amadis were alleged to be against the Nigerian army and most of them were eliminated based on false accusations by the ex-slaves and their descendants (Achi Nnaji, personalcommunication, May 31, 2015).

The planned annihilation of prominent Amadi men taking refuge at Akpufu was aborted by BOFF. Those earmarked for execution include: Ezekeil Nnamokoh, First Nkanu LGA Secretary, Chief Fidelis Nwatu (FECO) Igwe of Ihuokpara, Chief Emmanuel Nnaji (Ancoto), Igwe of Amagunze and Chief John Igwesi, Igwe of Obuoffia Awkwunanaw. Others to be killed include: Chief Nnamani Nwatu, Customary Court Judge, Nnamani Nwonoekwe, Igwe of Akpufu, Nnam Nwannamani and Nwatu Nwa Judge. Indeed, when the ex-slaves' plot to eliminate the Amadis failed, the Nigerian army's anger turned against them. The federal troops killed Ogonnia Ogbodo of Akpufu and Mike Nwede Onovo Obunne of Umuowo Agbani. These ex-slaves were butchered by the Nigerian army for attempting to

betray them to the Biafran army. The total number of Nkanu people butchered by the Nigerian army occupation at Agbani was not less than eighty (80) persons (Achi Nnaji, personal communication, May 31, 2015). These people were not killed but "slaughtered" like goats by bloodthirsty federal troops for allegedly aiding a national Igbo cause. This heinous crime and massacre of Nkanu Igbo remain a big dent on world conscience. The Nkanu Igbo are powerless to confront and demand for justice from the Nigerian government. But this was a crime against humanity and all those who abused their position should be made to account for it or posthumously by the International Criminal Court, ICC. Besides the brutalities against Nkanu men, the women were turned into sex slaves, many of them raped. Some were forcefully taken to the North by the Nigerian army occupation after the war.

However, it should be noted that the struggle between freeborn and slaves in Nkanu predated the Nigerian Civil War. In traditional Nkanu settings, there were two distinct groups of people-freeborn(Amadi) and domestic slaves(Ohu). As an agrarian enclave, the wealthy farmers owned a large number of slaves who constituted the labour force. The relationship between the domestic slaves and their freeborn overlords was generally symbiotic. The domestic slaves performed some feudal services to their masters as a token of appreciation for the land granted to them. They therefore, devoted two of the four-day Igbo week to work for their masters among other obligations (Obi-Ani,1999)

The two groups never intermarried, as their marriage was a taboo in Nkanu. It was not a surprise that during the civil war, these former slaves presented themselves as friends of the 'liberators' guiding them into the villages, blackmailing their former masters as Biafran sympathizers and tacitly using the Nigerian soldiers to fight their war against the freeborn(Amadi). Thus in Nkanu the ex-slaves and their descendants constituted a stumbling block to Biafran war effort. They saw an opportunity to overthrow the old order and avenge their second-class status by collaborating with the enemy-the Nigerian army. Wealthy and influential Amadi in Nkanu were special targets. As they hid from invading Nigerian army, they also scamper for cover from vengeful ex-slaves who saw an opportunity to exert a pound of flesh from their former masters- the Amadi. The war was nightmarish for the Amadi of Nkanu.

The 'Butcher' at Agbani

Wars bring the worst in man. All the bestialities come to the fore in men. The aggressive instincts in man are resurrected. Wars turn men into cannibals, brutes and psychopaths. Suddenly an easy going man becomes a monster overnight. All the repressed prejudices, hatred and violence are awakened among combatants at war fronts. The Jews were hounded, gassed and over six million of them eliminated in the great holocaust orchestrated by Adolph Hitler during the Second World War. In 1994 the Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi faced genocidal attacks from their neighbours, the Hutu. The Nigerian-Biafran Civil War enthroned such monstrous human beings like Sergeant Clement Yilda. His atrocities had been mystified among the Nkanu Igbo where he reigned as a tyrant that tormented the people during the civil war. Most

informants characterized Sergeant Yilda as a bloodthirsty monster, lacking human compassion and most likely devoid of good education or any at all.

Yilda was a victim of his own beastly nature. In a polarized society such as Nkanu, some ex-slaves capitalized on their closeness to the army of occupation to falsely accuse their former masters of being Biafran sympathizers. Without any credible evidence Sergeant Yilda condemned these men to death. It was the nature of execution that petrified Nkanu people. Sergeant Yilda subjected his victims to horrifying death. He slaughtered his victims through the slashing of throat or by cutting the private part at a public square (Achi Nnaji, personal communication, May 31, 2015). In short, he terrorized Nkanu people through his callous, crude and dastardly method of using sharp knife to kill his victims. Nobody brought to Yilda's torture chambers survived or escaped his brutal death method. Hundreds perished at Yilda's hands. It is the general consensus of Nkanu Igbo that Sergeant Yilda and his accomplices and their superiors that allowed such a reign of terror should face the International Criminal Court, ICC.

Why Justice Delayed?

Wars create monstrous situations. The worst in man unfolds. Soldiers at the heat of battle may have become mentally deranged without their superiors taking note of their health deterioration. As long as their aggressive tendencies are directed at the opposing forces, little or no action is taken until it is too late. Those scenarios resonated during the Nigerian-Biafran civil war. Many soldiers particularly from the Nigerian occupation forces behaved outrageously towards the Biafran partisans and civil population without any official reprimand. The Nkanu Igbo were brutalized, tortured, most alleged Biafran partisans slaughtered in the most barbaric form by Sergeant Yilda. These victims of occupation army have not received justice almost fifty years after cessation of hostilities.

The victorious Nigerian army received accolades at the end of the war in January 1970 while some of their Biafran counterparts were detained in solitary confinement for more than a decade for alleged sadistic behavior. Despite General Yakubu Gowon's diplomatic posturing of "no victor no vanquished" proclamation and the supposedly effusion of reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction, the Nkanu Igbo had a raw deal after the war. The "butcher" at Agbani, sergeant Yilda continued to serve in the Nigerian army as if nothing happened. There was no military board of inquiry on the atrocious behavior of Nigerian soldiers. The Nkanu Igbo had no platform to ventilate their grievances and seek for justice. The Gowon regime did not apologize for the horrendous havoc perpetrated by his soldiers. Nearly fifty years after, the Nkanu Igbo are still awaiting justice.

The so-called 3Rs(reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction) of public utilities like schools, hospitals, postal offices and private properties never received federal or state government attention in Nkanu. It was through the people's self-help efforts and doggedness that schools were rehabilitated and hospitals restored in the area. The Agbani railway beach the Nigerian army looted the palm oil and palm kernel holding, did not receive any compensation after the war. How the owners picked up the pieces

of their lives did not worry the Gowon military government? After all, the Nkanu Igbo had been vanquished. The looting of Enugu, that halted the military campaign against Biafra for over a month, deserves official query. Who were the beneficiaries of the loot? Did the Gowon military government uncover those behind the looting of Enugu, and what punishment did it met out to them? In the spirit of reconciliation, the military regime ought to have paid compensation. Unfortunately, the vanquished Nkanu Igbo did not receive any compensation to restart their vandalized businesses, their destroyed homes and psychological traumas they passed through at the hands of occupation forces. It is not late to atone for such criminal negligence by a government that boasted of not knowing what to do with petro dollars. Compensation could be in form of monuments, industries to assuage the people that suffered from the deliberate government policies to stagnate and retard them at the end of the war.

What about war crimes committed against Nkanu Igbo? The Nigerian government should set up a panel of inquiry to investigate the alleged barbaric slashing of throat and private parts of Biafran partisans by Seagant Yilda at Agbani during the war. The nature of the killing of over eighty (80) able-bodied Nkanu Igbo on alleged sympathy for Biafra was horrendous, wicked and inhuman. Those involved in this crime should be unraveled, and punished if they are still alive or condemned posthumously. An inquiry should be able to account one by one name of the victims of this heinous crime and a cenotaph built with their names inscribed on it. The Nigerian army and government should tender an apology to the families of the victims of naked brute power exercised by its officials. Reconciliation would remain a smokescreen unless effort is made for genuine atonement.

The current wave of agitation for actualization of Biafra is an indictment on the hollow nature of post-war reconciliation in Nigeria. The Igbo have been discriminated against in employment into the civil service, armed forces and public corporations since the end of the Biafran war. The policy of quota system has been used to deny them admission into colleges and universities. As many Igbo people drifted into the private sector of the Nigerian economy, their businesses are target of incessant vandalism and riots outside their region of origin. Politically, the rest of Nigerians are afraid of entrusting them with the highest political office in Nigeria, not because they lack the competence but fear of Igbo retribution. This fear is germane due to years of discrimination against the Igbo. But this fear can only be allayed by entrusting and abolishing discriminatory practices in public institutions. Nigeria cannot progress unless merit is the watchword and justice seen to be done at all points. The injustice of occupation forces in Nkanu Igbo should be the starting point. Let us start with apology and monuments recognizing the various atrocities across the length and breadth of Igboland as a token of reconciliation.

Conclusion

War is a harbinger of the bad and the ugly. The Nigerian army occupation of Enugu environs was reminiscent of the evils of war. The soldiers rampaged the area thoroughly, raping women with impunity and looting life time treasures of the people. The civil population became willing tools in the hands of the occupation army. The

Nkanu Igbo blackmailed perceived enemies before the federal troops who wasted no time in executing many people on trumped up charges of supporting Biafran war effort. To some of these Igbo turn coats, the federal occupation would never end. The likes of Sergeant Yilda became cruelty personified. The little power some of the federal troops wielded was overtly abused to the detriment of the hapless civilians. The war created monsters like Yilda who slashed the throats of his Nkanu victims with relish. To many Nkanu Igbo the war stole the humanity of the Nigerian soldiers and set many families more than half a century back.

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