

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

The historic amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 gave birth to Nigeria. The amalgamation exercise remains a reference point in Nigerian historical development. The paramount reason why the British lay hold on Nigeria was economic. Odeh notes this:

...the move toward amalgamation was not informed by the desire on the part of the British to create Nigerian Nation state, rather their concern was the efficiency of colonial administration. Thus the amalgamation exercise was meant to tackle the inability of North to balance its budget at a time its Southern neighbour had a robust surplus.¹

Ajala buttresses Odeh's position thus:

As a matter of emphasis, the British Colonial Office that appointed Lugard to amalgamate the two separate protectorates was only concerned to combine the North's financial deficit with the South's annual surplus and to unite the competing railway networks.²

Statistical evidence gleaned from historical sources further justified the centrality of economic factor in the 1914 exercise. For instance, as at 1910, the protectorate of Southern Nigeria had a surplus of 372,904 over the estimated budget for the year, while the revenue for the region for the same year stood at £1,933,235, and the expenditure at £1,592,282, with a surplus of 340953 for the year.³ In 1910-11, the revenue generated by the protectorate of Northern Nigeria stood at £273,989, while the expenditure stood at £565,760 which was a deficit of 290771.⁴ Arising from the budget discrepancies, Joseph Chamberlain in 1895 announced to the parliament that Britain should think of judicious use of British funds.⁵ This is a reflection that whatever policy the colonial government put in place, the interest of the

British citizens came first. Though Lord Grey, the colonial secretary during the Lord John Russell's administration comment that "the surest test for the soundness of measures for the improvement of an uncivilized people is that they should be self-sufficient"⁶ may be interpreted by philanthropist scholars to suggest the welfare of the people, finance was cardinal among Lugard's reasons for amalgamation. Lugard himself notes that:

The North, largely dependent on the annual grant from the imperial government, was barely able to balance its budget with the most parsimonious economy, and was starved of the necessary staff, and unable to find funds to house its officer's property. Its energies were concentrated upon the development of the Native Administration and the revenue resulting from direct taxation. Its distance from the coast (250 miles) renders the expansion of trade difficult. Thus, the anomaly was presented of a country with aggregate revenue practically equal to its needs, but divided into two by an arbitrary line of latitude. One portion was dependent on a grant paid by the British tax payer, which in the year before amalgamation stood at £136,000 and had an average of £314,000 for the 11 years ending in March, 1912.⁷

The British intention therefore was to stop the use of British tax payers money for the administration of the North. The South which has always been the focal destination of the European from slave trade to legitimate trade and even oil exploration had a robust economy. Ezonbi Boumo *et al* notes this thus: "the income from various sources principally the import tax on liquor had been more than ample to cover the cost of administration and a respectable surplus had been shown for several years."⁸ This is contrary to the North where the sale of liquor was prohibited as a serious crime in Islam. This economic decision of amalgamation was in short, in favour of Britain and it fundamentally reconstructed the political map of Nigeria in favour of the North.

The way and manner the 1914 amalgamation was constructed leading to the lopsided nature of the Nigerian polity has remained one of the major sources of conflicts over one hundred years of it. The policy of indirect rule and western education are two major legacies of colonial divisiveness of Nigeria. The political and structural imbalance following the

amalgamation soon began to bore bitter fruits after independence and this culminated into the Nigeria – Biafran war of 1967-1970. The paradox of amalgamation is that though it sowed the seed of division, it served as an instrument of union against the colonial master, which the people used to agitate for independence that was granted in 1960.

Having amalgamated Nigeria, the British started the policy of indirect rule in the North under the supervision of Lugard to address the fear that the policy of colonial government may lead to total disappearance of Islamic culture.⁹ In short, it was an attempt to have a single administrative policy after the unification of 1914 that made Lugard to introduce indirect rule in the East or Igbo land, though paramount chief and traditional rulers had not existed in the area. The system met serious reaction from the people culminating into the popular Aba women riot of 1929. The policy was not expensive. The system was based on the recognition of native chiefs to administer the people directly.

Lugard notes that:

The policy of government was that these chiefs should govern their people, not as independent but as dependent rulers. The orders of government are not conveyed to the people through them, but emanate from them in accordance where necessary with instruction received through the resident. While they themselves are controlled by government in matters of policy and of importance, their people are controlled in accordance with that policy by themselves. A political officer would consider it as irregular to issue direct orders to an individual native, or even to a village head, as a General commanding a division would to a private soldier, except through his commanding officers... This system is clearly only adapted in its fullest application to communities under the centralized rule of a paramount Chief, with some administrative machinery at his disposal, and find its best exposition in the Moslem communities of the North.¹⁰

The acephalous nature of some parts of the South especially the Igbo land was enough for the British government to know that the North and South would need a different political structure. This is a reflection that the amalgamation united two different political units with different economic, social and political backgrounds. Before the coming of the British

colonialist, the Igbo lacked a centralized political institution. The Yoruba and the Hausa on the other hand had experienced centralized political institutions.

Another instrument used by the British in creating division in Nigeria is Western Education. The missions like Catholic and Anglican missions were the agents of spreading Western education. The North, because of its Islamic background, did not embrace education early enough. Iweze observes that, "Christian missions... were the agencies through which western education was spread."¹¹ The South no doubt enjoyed educational advantage over the North. Before 1930, out of the 26 secondary and teacher training schools in Nigeria, 23 were located in Yoruba and Igbo land.¹² Since western education was geared toward white collar jobs in the colonial administration, the South dominated it. The spreading of education was what the European used to justify their coming to Africa in so called civilizing mission. As the North could not produce enough educated elites to occupy administrative positions created by the colonial government, the South seized the opportunity to occupy these positions.

In the North, because Islam is a total way of life and the Quran was initially written in Arabic, it was necessary for Arabic study to spread in the North. This was how Arabic learning became paramount among the Northerners. The Qur'an form of education is widespread in the North.¹³ To have effective colonial rule, before 1900, the colonial administration had directed the Christian missionaries to limit their evangelical activities to the South and non-Muslim or Pagan area of the North.¹⁴ Consequently, when the benefit of western education became glaring to the North, the South had already gone ahead of the North. By 1960, when the primary school enrolment in the North was just 282,849 pupils, the figure for the South was about 2,629,770, accounting for 90.1 per cent of the national... total population".¹⁵

The political dimension of disparity in Western education between the North and South Nigeria reflected in 1953 when Anthony Enahoro, a leading member of Action Group

move the motion for Nigeria independence on March 31, 1953 that Nigeria should be independence in 1956.¹⁶ The motion was supported by Action Group and members of National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon at the Federal parliament in Lagos. To the surprise of the Southern parliamentarians, the Northern People Congress rejected the motion. The leader of NPC, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello countered the motion with a phrase “as soon as practicable”. The motion for independence was rejected by the Northern politician because they feared that the Southerners were more educationally advanced and that they would take over the administration of the country from the colonial master. This led to a strain in the relationship between Southern and Northern leaders. The Northern delegates were jeered and insulted by hostile crowd in Lagos. The Northern delegates were not happy with the experience “and in an Eight point Programme in Lugard Hall, Kaduna, they sought for secession. Because of the hostile attitude toward the Northern delegates in Lagos, there was tension in the North. The tension culminated into the popular Kano riot of May 16, 1953.¹⁷ The leadership of the nationalist movement was dominated by Southerners because of the high influence of Western education in the South. Olusanya notes this:

Another peculiarity in the nationalist movement was the predominance of southerner at the outset as leaders of the movement, a factor which tempts some scholars to question the whole basis of nationalist movement. The predominance was due to such factors as the early opportunity for Western education.¹⁸

The differences created by western education were therefore fundamental in series of events that ended in the Nigerian civil war.

The British were only interested in the administration of Nigeria only to the extent that it fulfilled two main aims: political control and economic exploitation. It was necessary to adjust as changing circumstances demanded to preserve the colonial interest through a system of power conflict among the various ethnic groups that made up the country.¹⁹ Before

the 1914 amalgamation, the Northern protectorate had no legislative council; the governor of the region governed by proclamation. Even when the protectorate of the south had no legislative council before 1906, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos had legislative council. With the unification in 1906 of Southern and Lagos protectorate, the Southern region now had a legislative council even though the unofficial members of the council only came from Lagos.²⁰ It must be emphasized that at this time around, the North had not dreamt of this political breakthrough as observes by Lugard that:

Prior to amalgamation, Northern Nigeria had neither Executive none Legislative council, while the laws affecting the whole of the protectorate of southern Nigeria where passed by legislative council of the colony of Lagos.²¹

The absence of a central legislative council after the 1914 unification affected the unity of the country as the platform for unity among different ethnic group was denied. The institution that would have brought them together to discuss the issues affecting the whole country was not in place. The central administrative council created by Lugard was not all embracing and even when Hugh Clifford, succeeded Lord Lugard in 1919, the legislative council he introduced had no representative from North under the 1922 constitution.²² They had 46 members out of which 10 were Nigeria and out of the 10 Nigerians, 4 were elected (one from Calabar and three from Lagos). The aim of the legislative council was to help in strengthening the colonial administration (to ensure co-operation from the natives). There is no doubt that the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution was significant in the political history of Nigeria as it led to the emergence of party politics in the country.

Be that as it may, the isolation of the North from the Legislative council created by the constitution went a long way to deepen disunity in the country.²³ When Sir Bernard Bourdilion came as Governor General in 1939, he divided the country into three provinces by

splitting the south into Eastern and Western province. He left the North intact. The Richard constitution of 1946 introduced regionalism in Nigeria by creating three regional houses in the Western, Eastern and Northern regions. Apart from introducing regionalism, the East and West each had a unicameral legislature while the North had a House of Assembly and a House of Chiefs. This is a reflection that the policies at the time did not promote national integration in Nigeria²⁴ as the constitution provided for three unequal regions in the country. The Northern region is larger than the Western and Eastern region put together. This unequal division polarised the country as in seeking for redress, the South were united against the North. On the other hand, the North was united against the South to maintain the imbalance. This development set the stage for the war under discourse. Udida notes that:

The seeds of the crises that led to the Nigerian Civil War were sown by the 1945 Richard constitution which created three regions in line with the federal system of Government that, as it was argued, best fitted the country. The regions created in the Northern and Western parts of the country coincided largely with the three major ethnic nationalities that dominated the Nigerian political scene: the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Ibo in the East and Yoruba in the West. Ethnic chauvinism was apparently encouraged as the region competed among themselves for office and dominant position in the government, civil service etc.²⁵

In this kind of environment those who did not get the position are bound to feel that they are being denied by those who got the position. Ibeanu supports this that: “every group uses its unique endowments to pursue and enforce its interest.”²⁶ Dzeka observes thus:

Ethnicity as an agency of self-assertion allows member of the group to stand for their rights or even complain that their share of economic and political resources of the state are grossly inadequate compared to those of other groups. It is one of the most effective and least costly means of uniting a group to fight for their rights and demand privileges and justice. This seemingly innocent position of the role ethnicity plays in plural societies to advance the cause of its members has been reduced to dangerous dichotomies that most often result to violence.²⁷

The unequal division of the country by the colonial administration cannot be denied as responsible for the trend that has been entrenched in Nigeria politics, because the division afforded the Northern region more representatives in the legislature. Nyor notes that “the fear of being confined to the bottom of the interethnic ladder of inequality generates division and destructive social and politics divides”.²⁸ Most of the conflicts we have witnessed in the country have been the result of this faulty colonial legacy. The division places the North in a position that it will dominate the political structure of the country, which Southern region has being resenting. The Northern region that benefited from the colonial political division of the country denounced the Southern resentment. The unequal division made the Northern Region to have about 50 percent of representative from 1949-1950.²⁹ In the same vein, in the 1954 election, half of the 184 seats were allocated to the Northern region, 42 to each of the Western and Eastern regions; six to Southern Cameroon and two to Lagos.³⁰

It may be recalled that prior to the 1914 unification, the area possessed different centralized and decentralized independent states. The centralized independent political units are the Oyo Empire, Kanem Borno Empire, the Sokoto Caliphate, the Benin Kingdom, the city-states of Niger Delta, Ife Kingdom, Kwararafa Empire and the segmentary societies of Eastern Nigeria.³¹ These cacophonies of many nations were merged together as one nation state in 1914 by Lord Lugard. The Colony and Protectorate of Lagos was first unified with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906. The Southern was later unified with the Northern protectorate in 1914.³²

The attainment of political independence in October 1, 1960 was greeted with a lot of expectation that appears to have been dashed on the rock. Armstrong affirms this thus:

Political independence usually comes with obvious expectations. Oftentimes there is euphoria on the parts of the citizenry who are expectant of positive transformation - a development which will not exclude them but make them partners in the process of nation building.³³

The expectation evaporated when Nigeria became engulfed with ethnic antagonism after independence. This seeds of tribalism sown by the 1945 Richard Constitution which created three regions³⁴ resulted into various crises such as the census crises of 1952 and 1962, Western regional crisis, the federal election crisis of 1964 and the consequent first military coup of January 1966.

It is the opinion of several scholars that the January 1966 coup was one of the major remote causes of the Nigerian Civil War against the backdrop of the tribal nature of the execution of the coup. Mainasasa affirms this, that:

There was thus a perfect alibi for staging a coup to topple the elected government of the federation. But the way and manner of the operation exposes the real intention of the coup makers. Redemption of the country was not their aim. Their purpose was to prevent a section of the country, the North, from effective participation in the government of this country. This was to be accomplished through the physical elimination of the entire political and military elite of the North.³⁵

Emefiena on the other hand rejected the notion that the January 1966 coup was Igbo coup and argued that:

Uwechie solicits explanation for the branding the Nzeogwu's coup an 'Igbo coup' for which the entire Igbo people must pay a heavy and recurrent political price while Major Gideon Orkah's coup of April 1990 was not seen as Tiv Coup.³⁶

Be that as it may, Emefiena and other scholars agree that the Western regional election crisis of 1965, Tiv riot of 1964, the federal election of 1964 and the corruption of the first republic were remote causes of the war. Arising from the northern conception of the January 1966 coup as an attempt by the Igbo to eliminate the Northerners from the political administration of the country, the July counter coup of 1966³⁷ which brought Yakubu Gowon as the Head of State was staged. Obasanjo, contends that the counter coup was to "revenge upon the East by the North."³⁸ The end result of the political upheaval across the country was

Ojukwu's declaration of the State of Biafra from the federation on May 30th, 1967.³⁹

When the war broke out, Esan people under the then Mid-West Region regarded it as battle between the Hausa and the Igbo and so perhaps, Esan recorded no or low military presence until the Biafra incursion into Mid-West on 9th August, 1967. Ejoor, at the wake of the war insisted that the Mid-West would not be a base for attacking Biafra. When the federal troop arrived, they received the support of the local population of Mid-Westerns, (Esan inclusive).⁴⁰ The reverse was the case with the arrival of Biafra troops. The question is what would have been responsible for friendly attitude toward the federal troops while denying the Biafran troops this same friendly attitude? The Biafra invasion of Mid-West on 9th August, 1967⁴¹ drew the region into the war. This prompted the federal government to put machinery in motion to liberate the Mid-West from Biafra incursion on 21st September, 1967.⁴² This made Mid-West including Esan to become militarized and, because of this, life was no longer the same in Esanland.

It is worthy of note that the war experiences constitute exceptional drama in Esan land history. Even though the Biafra incursion was brief, it affected the economic and social life of the people even with the presence of the federal troop people became afraid to go about their normal business. It is this exceptional historical experience of Esan people occasioned by the Nigerian-Biafra War and how the post-war reconstruction programme affected Esan people in the period under review that is the thrust of this study.

Statement of Problem

Several academic works on the Nigerian Civil War focused on the role of the major ethnic groups such as the Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and the Yoruba and its impact on them to the

neglect of minority groups. Though of late, it appears attention is gradually shifting to the minority groups, not much has been done on Esan and the civil war. In other words, the Nigerian-Biafran war experience which is one of the major events in Nigerian history has not been discussed in relation to Esan. Scholars such as Madiebo, Efiang, Emifienna and Obasanjo only made mere mention of Esan under the Mid-West in their analysis of the Nigerian Biafran War without adequate attention to it. The problem of this study therefore is to unravel the role of Esan in the war and the effects of the war on Esan society. The work aim to document the experience of the Esan for posterity. In achieving this, the study would attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

a. who are the Esan?;

b. what was the role of Esan in the war?;

c. what were the effects of the war on Esan people?; and,

d. in entirety, the study attempts to establish that in spite of the significance of the minority groups in Nigerian civil war, particularly Esan, their role in the war has not been reconstructed. Therefore, an attempt is made by this study to fill the gap that has since existed in the historical narrative of the Biafra war.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a historical documentation of Esan land and the Nigerian-Biafran war, 1967-1975. This is important because the history of the Esan people has been written without looking at the Nigerian-Biafra war experiences of the people. The aim of this research is to address this dearth of information on Esan Civil war experience. Scholars have concentrated on the Mid-West and the civil war leading to generalization.

The lack of historical publications on Esan Nigerian-Biafran war experiences could be as a result of the fact that Esan is small and the people a minority group. The Mid-West has been studied by various scholars in respect of the war. The war and its impact on Esan land has not been given the attention it deserved. The specific aim of the study shall be to examine the role Esan played in the war

Significance of the Study

The significance of this work is that the Nigerian Biafran War experiences of Esan people need to be examined. This research is an attempt to narrow down the Mid-West civil war experience to a particular ethnic group of the region (Esan people). This can go a long way for future planning. Obaro Ikime notes:

Economic development can only take place in an atmosphere of political stability...herein, I submit, lies one way in which history can contribute to national development: reminding ourselves of what has happened in the past, how this happening continue to influence present practice and what options are available for future planning.⁴³

Since the civil war has continued to influence the social, economic and political processes of the country, the study is necessary. The work stresses the need to use the lesson from this research for the overall development of the Esan people and the country in general. The study will provide a guide for policy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, those in academia will find the research useful as well as provoke further research on the area. Finally, it will add to the existing literature on the Nigerian-Biafran War.

Scope of the Study

The study covers the period 1967 to 1975. The year 1967 has national importance because it was the year the war started. Although the war ended in 1970 with Federal

Government declaration of “no victor, no vanquished”, the reconstruction programme after the war which was started in 1970 also affected Esan people and is relevant to the country's economic and political history because a high percentage of the estimate and programmes of the second National Development Plan of 1970-1974 was set aside for the reconstruction of war-affected areas. The research examines the impact of the war up to 1975 and this is because the reconstruction programme in the Midwest which affected Esan people was carried out by Ogbemudia's administration which was terminated in 1975. In the same vein, the Gowon's administration which carried out the national reconstruction which also impacted on Esan people ended in 1975. The study is Esan land and the Nigerian-Biafra War, 1967-1975. The invasion of Mid-West by the Biafra on August 9th, 1967 and the federal government retaking of the Mid-West on September 21, 1967 brought the war to Esan's domain. This invasion of Mid-West had impact on the Esan people as life was no longer the same due to the militarization of the area. The Esan people constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Edo State. It presently covers five Local Government Areas of the states: Esan South East, Esan West, Esan North East, Igweben and Esan Central Local Government Areas. The study will cover all this aforementioned Esan Local Government Areas.

The reconstruction of the tradition of origin and the social and political organization of the Esan people in pre-colonial days will take first place in the study. This is because there is need to have a good understanding of the people under review. The turbulent issues in the nation after independence that gave rise to the war will also be examined by the study. The Biafran incursion into Midwest and the role the Esan people played in the war and effect of the will be covered. Besides, the study will further examine how the reconstruction programme affected Esan people and the case of abandoned property in Esan land. The effects of war on Esan will be finally examined. This will provide a step towards moving away from the era of generalization that has dominated post-civil war publications in Nigeria.

Methodology and Sources of Material

The study makes use of a variety of methods although qualitative research method is given priority. This method will enable us to use analytical approach to gain insight to the subject.⁴⁴In adopting the above method, primary and secondary sources of data collection shall be applied. Of importance in the primary source shall be oral interviews of individuals that participated in the war such as military officer, advisers, opinion leaders and prominent politician and people that witnessed the war. Interview of policy makers, elder statesmen, prominent scholars and archival materials shall also constitute primary sources. Journals, books, newspapers, unpublished theses, dissertation and conference papers shall constitute secondary sources. Internet shall constitute tertiary sources.

Be that as it may, the method did not limit itself to qualitative method alone as historical investigation requires other disciplines' services. This means we shall apply quantitative subsumed in inter-disciplinary approach in the collection of data. In reconstructing pre-colonial Esan history, the use of oral tradition in which case event that have pass from generation to generation for a period beyond the life time of the informant shall be applied.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept clarified here are civil war, post-war reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation as they underline the analysis of the study.

Civil War

For a proper understanding of the concept of civil war, it necessary we understand the concept of war. Many scholars have seen war in different perspectives. Hoffman Nickerson states that "war is the use of organized force between two human groups pursuing

contradictory policies, each group seeking to impose its policy upon the other.”⁴⁵ In other words, the goal of war is to implement a group policy by force. War can also be defined as act of violence intended to make an opponent act to fulfill one's will. The most famous concept of war was put forward by Karl von Clausewitz. He states that “war is continuation of politics by other means.”⁴⁶ It is not only a political act but also a political instrument. The political goal is the object of the war, while the means of attaining the goal is the war. This means that the use of violence force is a means to an end. It means war is a tool used to achieve a particular objective.

War can be basically categorized into two, intra-state war and inter-state war. Inter-state war is war between or among nation states. For example Iran and Iraq War (1980-1988),⁴⁷ Iraq and Kuwait (1990),⁴⁸ and Vietnam War (1954-1975).⁴⁹ Intra-state wars on the other hand are wars within the confines of a state or country. Intra-state war is what is referred to as civil war. Civil war can also be seen as when a country is at war with itself. Joshua and Jon see civil war as:

War between factions within a state trying to create, or prevent, a new government for the entire state or some territorial part of it. (The aim may be to change the entire system of government, to merely replace the people in it, or to split a region off as a new state).⁵⁰

The 1860 U.S. Civil War, Eritrea and Ethiopia (1980)⁵¹ and the Nigerian Civil War are examples of civil war. Civil wars are the most brutal wars and this is because in most civil wars, there is ethnic dimension to it. Furthermore, people fighting their fellow citizen act cruelly than those fighting people from another country.⁵² The Nigerian-Biafran War of 1967-1970 was a war between the Eastern Region and the Federal government of Nigeria.

Post-War Reconstruction

The post-war phenomenon clarified here revolves round reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation. The end of war is followed by reconstruction. Iweze notes that "post war reconstruction involves the rebuilding of socio-economic frame work of society, and reconfiguring the enabling conditions for a better functioning peacetime society, using the framework of transparent governance and rule of law."⁵³ The formal signing of peace agreement mark the beginning of post-war reconstruction. When peace agreement hold and military violence subsides, the focus of aid shifts from emergency relief to long-term social and economic development."⁵⁴Post-war reconstruction is undertaking to rebuild the destruction occasions by war.According to Iweze, "it is conceptually tied to wider processes of peace building, mark as activities undertaking for the purpose of preventing, alleviating, or resolving violent or potentially violent conflict."⁵⁵ At the end of the Nigeria civil war in 1970, the Gowon administration started the process of reconstructing areas destroyed as a result of the war.

Post-war reconciliation is a process of beginning a good relation at the end of violence conflict. It a process of creating trust and understanding after a sustained violence. It is an essential in the process of building lasting peace. Reconciliation "involves a very long and painful journey, addressing pain and suffering of the victims, understanding the motivation of the offenders, bringing together estranged communities, trying to find a part to justices, truth and ultimately, peace."⁵⁶The process of reconciliation is common occurrence between brothers and sisters, husband and wife, between friends and nations or communities that disagree or fought war. At the end of the Nigerian civil war, the Gowon administration immediately embarked on the process of reconciliation which was meant to build a better relations between the estranged groups. As part of the reconciliation process, "General Gowon promised to usher in an era of peace and brotherliness in Nigeria."⁵⁷

Post-war rehabilitation means forging of new life out of ruins of war. Rehabilitation in criminal justice can have another understanding from post-war rehabilitation. Pugh sees post conflict rehabilitation as:

A process of social, political and economic adjustment to, and under pinning of condition of relative peace in which the participants, especially those that have been disempowered and immiserated by violence, can begin to prioritize future goals beyond immediate survival.⁵⁸

Post-war rehabilitation is one of the post-war measure aim at consolidating peace and security after violent conflict. The primary objective of post-war rehabilitation is to restore the people to their pre-war conditions. As part of the effort to rehabilitate the war victims after the Nigerian civil war, "the Gowon administration set up the National Rehabilitation Commission by Degree No 41."⁵⁹

Theoretical Framework

The Nigerian-Biafran war is vast in historical and theoretical considerations. The theoretical considerations will adequately analyze the circumstances and situations in our area of study. The vastness of the theoretical framework notwithstanding, we seek to provide some fundamental ones for a better understanding of the role the Esan people of the defunct Midwestern Nigeria played in the Nigerian-Biafran war. The war was tied to high process of actors maximizing gains and ethnic identity. Hence, the theoretical framework that emerged are game theory and psycho-cultural conflict theory.

The Game Theory was developed by Osker Morgensten, John Neuman, W.A. Riker and Thomas Shelling.⁶⁰ The theory can be applied to a wide range of human's behavior. In

conflict situations, Game theory can be used to analyze the reason behind the decision of actors or people. In the words of Adam Hayes,

Game theory is theoretical framework for conceiving of social situation among competing players. In some respect, game theory is the science of strategy or at least the optimal decision-making of independent and competing actors in strategic setting.⁶¹

Plano and Rigos see game theory as "a body of thought dealing with rational decision strategies in situation of conflict and competition when each participant or player seeks to maximize gains and losses."⁶²

The use of the theory to explain Esan position in the war is justified by the strategic position Esan took in the war. Esan was of the view that if Biafran can invade her domain without her consent, which role will they play under Biafra regime? John Locke posited that;

For I have reason to conclude that he who would get me into his power without my consent would use me as he pleased when he had got me there, and destroy me too when he had a fancy to it, for nobody can desire to have me in his absolute power unless it be to compel me by force to that which is against the right of my freedom, i.e make me a slave. To be free from such force is the only security of my preservation, and reason bids me look on him as an enemy to my preservation.⁶³

Esan decided to support the federal government because they felt that under Biafran they will be less recognized. To crown it, the Midwest where Esan was located is oil producing region and the creation of twelve states by Gowon did not affect Esan's political position in the Midwest. Consequently, they adhered to the decision of large part of the region to support the federal government in the war.

The psycho-cultural conflict theory emphasized the role of cultural identity in conflict. The theory contends that people's ethnic cultural affiliation can be a bases of violent conflict. In human relations, there have always been ethnic and cultural characteristics which mark off certain groups from the others. Ademola notes that identity that is based on ethnic

origin is one of the most important way of explaining violent conflict.⁶⁴ One of the theorist of psycho-cultural conflict theory is Marc Howard Ross and he "defines identity as originating in shared, deeply rooted world views that shape group members' relationships with others, their actions and their motives."⁶⁵Ross further notes that in ethnic conflict "...those core dispositions which invoke security, fear and deep-seated threats to identity are used by groups and individuals to interpret the motive of opponent..."⁶⁶Ethnic identity create a solidarity among members of a particular groups and exclude those who are not members. The group can share a common culture and history and this unit the group. Any threat to the group is perceived as risk to its identity. Other theorist of Psycho-cultural conflict are Irobi and Horowiz. Irobi argues that "ethnic groups which were discriminated against always resent the group that tried to put them in a disadvantage position."⁶⁷The use of this theory to explain Esan Nigerian civil experience is justified by the fact that the Biafran incursion into Midwest was perceived by Esan and other non-Igbo groups in the region as the enthronement of Igbo regime to the detriment of Esan and other non-Igbo groups. Esan thus resisted the incursion. The end result was conflict between the non-Igbo group like Esan and Western Igbo. This is why Esan was among the groups that resisted Biafran in the Midwest.

Literature Review

The relevant literature comprises of writings by scholars on Esan land as well as literature on the Civil war which have direct bearing on the area of studies.

Efosa Oseghale in *Benin Factor in Esan Origin Traditions* gives account of the history of origin of Esan communities. The author maintains that there are traditions in Esan and Benin supporting the claim that Esan originated from Benin. He traces the origin of Esan to Benin as a result of the tyrannical rule of Eware the Great. Oseghale affirms that Eware's war like nature caused "mass movement of people out of the city. Amongst these fleeing

groups were the founders of Esan.”⁶⁸ The book is a good source for examining the origin of the Esan people.

Ryder in his work, *The Benin Kingdom* examines the problems of origin of Benin and affirms that the origin of Benin cannot be easily determined. He argues that the easiest way of constructing the origin of Benin is oral tradition. His work further examines the relationship between Benin and Yoruba and reveals that Eweka was probably of Yoruba origin. Ryder attributed the expansion of Benin Empire to the military capability of Ewuare the Great. He affirms that Ewuare conquered Afemai, Owo, Akure and Western Igbo⁶⁹ and even though Esan was not mentioned among the places Ewuare conquered, we seem to tread on firmer ground in looking at the origin of Esan when we examine the reign of Ewuare.

Afigbo in *Igboland Before 1800* gives an account of the origin of the Igbo and reveals that Igbo like Edo, Yoruba and Idoma is among the languages linguists called the ‘Kwa’, “a sub-group of Niger-Congo group of Negro languages.”⁷⁰ The work also reveals the high place of Nri in the making of Igbo culture and that Nri carry out ritual function in the coronation of the Oba of Benin. This means there is early contact between Benin and Igbo. Afigbo further reveals the formidable military power of Ewuare the Great. Afigbo affirms that under Ewuare, Benin extended beyond Edo region to Ekiti, Afemai and Western Igbo⁷¹ but did not mention Esan as among the places he conquered. The interest of the study in the book is the reign of Ewuare the Great and the places he conquered.

A.I. Okoduwa in *Archeology and Esan origin* reveals that the construction of Esan origin through oral account only cannot trace the origin of Esan beyond 500 years ago. He further maintains that tracing the Esan origin in line with the manner in which the Esan fled from Benin due to the tyrannical rule of Ewuare was Benin tradition. Okoduwa argued that the geographical area of Esan has been occupied by people before the coming of migrant

from Benin as a result of Ewuare's autocratic rule.⁷² The work is relevant to this study especially in constructing the origin of Esan.

Efosa Oseghale in *Intra Esan Peace-time Relations: The Economic Dimension up to the Eve of Colonialism* examines economic relation between and among the Esan polities up to the eve of colonialism. He affirms that Esan people were predominantly subsistent farmers and that the markets were small until the contact with the European. The study further reveals that the legitimate trade stimulated Esan economy as the people produce palm oil in large quantity due to the availability of market for it. Oseghale also reveals that the various communities in Esan became larger as a result of influx of migrants from Benin. This means that the Esan people already existed before Benin migrant came to Esan land. The work examines further the role played by economic factor in Esan diplomacy.⁷³ The interest of the study in this book is origin of Esan and pre-colonial Esan economy.

Okoduwa in his book, *The Role of Agriculture in Pre-colonial Esan Economy* reveals that pre-colonial Esan society hinged on agriculture on which other aspect of the economic activities were based. He affirms that “Esan people are Edo speaking people” and “Esan communities were made up of over sixteen kingdoms headed by kings known as Enijies.”⁷⁴ He further affirms that Esan agriculture started in ancient time and also discusses external influence in Esan agriculture. Okoduwa went further to evaluate the role traditional religion played in Esan agriculture as the people are expected to offer sacrifice to land before planting.⁷⁵ He did not make reference to the role the culture of the people played in the security of farm harvest. Unlike today, in pre-colonial Esan societies, farm harvests are stored in the farm where no one secures them.

Martins Meredith in his book, *The State of Africa: A History of the Continent since Independence* gives an account of the various African countries from the promising era

of independence to the major upheavals in the continent. In Nigeria's case, he affirms that despite the promising start of independence, Nigeria was soon engulfed with ethnic fear, suspicion and jealousy. The book paints a horrifying picture of the civil war and also blames the politicians of the First Republic for giving the military reason to consider playing a political role. He said that Azikiwe and Balewa appealing for military assistance in their political conflict had given the military opportunity to consider playing a political function in the country.⁷⁶ It is a good book for examining the causes of the Civil war.

Emefiana Ezeani in his book, *In Biafra Africa Died* examines the history of Nigeria where he reveals that there was no nation called Nigeria in the world before the amalgamation of 1914. The book further affirms that secession was not only an Igbo affair because the Midwest at a time contemplated severing relations with the Federal government. He maintains that even though the Midwest did not secede from the federation when East did, for the Midwest to attempt breaking from Nigeria proves that secession was not only an Igbo affair.⁷⁷ The book is a good source for examining the Midwest position in the crisis.

Mainasasa in his book, *The Five Majors: Why They Struck* condemned the work of Ben Gbulie, *Nigeria Five Majors*, Ademoyega, *Why We Struck* and Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafra War* for blaming the First Republic politicians for all the ills in the country that led to the January 1966 Coup. He maintains that the Igbo element in the military only used the politicians' excesses as an excuse to stage a coup with the intention of preventing the Hausa from the political administration of the country. Mainasasa argued that the way and manner the January 1966 coup was executed showed that they were not out to redeem the country but, prevent the North from participating in the political administration of Nigeria.⁷⁸ In maintaining the above position, Mainasasa did not reveal the role played by some Igbo like Ojukwu and Ironsi in preventing the coup from succeeding.

Fredrick Forsyth in *Emeka*, revealed the role played by Ojukwu in making the coup not to succeed in Kano. The author gave vivid description of Ojukwu self-sacrifice in preventing the coup from succeeding.⁷⁹ The interest of the study in this book is examining the role Igbo played in making the January coup not to succeed.

Olayemi Akinwumi in his book, *Crises and Conflict in Nigeria* gives account of the various crises which rocked the country since she gained independence from Britain in 1960. The book reveals that conflict has become synonymous with Nigeria since 1960 not because the country lacks the will to govern themselves peacefully, but because the political structure Britain handed over was deficient from the beginning. The book criticized the British colonial master for not building a structure that can withstand the post-colonial shock. Akinwumi maintains that the problem of religious rivalry, ethnicity, fragile federal structure and educational gap could have been addressed by British colonial master before independence. In summary, the book showed how the colonial policies became the causes of post-colonial conflict.⁸⁰

Udoh and Emezie in *The Military and Politics in Nigeria* agree with the notion that ethnic loyalty was paramount to Nigerian after independence. The book affirms that the "one Nigeria" Ironsi stand for after the first military coup was seen as furthering Igbo interest. The book revealed that "regionalism and ethnicity may precipitate crisis leading to direct assumption of power by military."⁸¹ The book notes that this was the true situation in Nigeria when in January 1966, the military staged a coup. The interest of the study in the book is the causes of the civil war.

Udida Undiyaundeye in "Issues and Causes of the Nigerian Civil War" in M. A. Adejo,(ed.) *The Nigerian Civil War: Forty Years After, What Lesson?*, traces the causes of the Civil War from the Richard Constitution which enthroned the politics of regionalism into

the country. The book revealed other causes such as the Action Group crisis of 1962, 1959 general election and the January 1966 coup. The book revealed that the January 1966 coup was initially welcomed by all until the one-sided nature was known. Udida affirms that this feeling of the Northern element would have been assuaged if Ironsi had punished the coup plotters. The book further maintains that the way and manner Ironsi carried out the promotion in the army rekindled the fear of the Northerners that there is a calculated attempt by the Igbo to dominate the politics of Nigeria.⁸² The interest of the study in the book is the factors that led to the civil war.

Terhemba Wuam in "A Re-Examination of the Causes of the Nigerian Civil War" in M. A. Adejo, (ed.) *The Nigerian Civil War: Forty Years After, What Lesson?* argued that the regionalization of the political parties gave sign of what was to come. The book further chastised the January 1966 coup plotters for being responsible for the cause of the war. The book also argued that the one-sided killings in which the North lost principal military officers and politicians was a factor in the causes of the war. The book reveals that the initial celebration all over the country was subdued when the pattern of killings was revealed and this factor led to the counter coup of July 1966.⁸³ The causes of the war is the interest of the study in the book.

Elechi Amadi in *Sunset in Biafra* reveals that Biafra overran the Mid-West in twenty-four hours with the support of Western Igbo officers of Midwestern origin. The book presents the position of Awolowo on the war. Awolowo urged the Yoruba to give maximum support to the federal government to crush Biafra.⁸⁴ The book is a good source for examining the role played by some ethnic groups in the Biafran incursion of Midwest.

Godwin Alabi-Isama in his book, *The Tragedy of Victory* gives an account of his war experience. The book is historical as it starts from his process of joining the army, military

training, his United Nations engagement in Congo and the 1966 events which finally led to the Civil War. The book sees the attack on the Midwest as the greatest mistake Biafra made. He argues that there are better objectives than invading Midwest. The book affirms that Benue would have been a better option which would have given secessionist group a very good line of defense. The writer also reveals that the Biafra invasion of Midwest divided the region's loyalty as the Igbo speaking part of the region joined Biafra while the non-Igbo joined the federal government.⁸⁵ The book is a good source of information on the true situation in the country immediately after independence and a good account of the war. The book is also a good source for examining the Midwest invasion.

Raph Uwechue in *Reflection on the Nigerian Civil War* examines the January 1966 coup, excesses of politician in First Republic and the minority problem and secession. The book also proposed a loose federation of six states to form United States of Nigeria. The book argues that the Eastern Region lost the sympathy of Nigerian who had initially supported the region's course due to the secession. Uwechue affirms that secession is not a way out of the problem facing the country because it has not addressed the problem of minorities and domination which was the reason for seceding from Nigeria.⁸⁶ This may be the reason why the Esan nationality did not give their loyalty to the Biafra. The federal government had given them a region of their own (Midwest) which saved them from the problem of domination from the Yoruba ethnic group. The book is a good source for examining the minority issue as the Esan constitute a minority ethnic group in the country.

Alexander Madiebo in his book, *The Nigerian Revolution and Biafra War* gives an eye witness account of January and July coups that preceded the Civil War. He blames corruption and tribalism as the factors that made military intervention inevitable and advanced reasons for the failure of Biafra. The book made it clear that the federal troop did not experience delay in injecting Biafra out of Midwest from the Northern part of the region.

Of great importance to this study is that Madiebo mentioned how the federal troop passed through Esan land to Benin in the effort to chase Biafra out of Midwest.⁸⁷ The account of the war is the interest of the study in the book.

Olusegun Obasanjo in his book, *My Command* examines the causes of the war and blames the corruption of the First Republic politician and tribalism as some factors that led to the war. He demonstrated how the federal troops passed through Ekpoma without revealing the attitude of the Esan people toward the troops. This was unlike the way Obasanjo revealed the hostile attitude of some parts of Western Igbo toward the federal troop in a place like Umunede and Agbor.⁸⁸ The author would have let us know if the Esan people felt safer in the hands of Biafra troops or the federal troops.

Philip Efiog in *Nigeria and Biafra* reveals that Nigeria had been degenerating since independence and this culminated into widespread political disorder in the country. Efiog gives account of the January 1966 and July 1966 coups and maintains that the popularity of the officers who took parts in the January coup was a factor for not punishing the plotters. The book affirms that the Biafra operation in the Midwest was a miscalculated venture and that the federal troops got the support of the civil population in the region.⁸⁹ Efiog did not reveal the attitude of Biafra troops toward the civil population of Midwest because of their loyalty to the federal troop.

Adewale Ademoyega in his book, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Military Coup* reveals the political and military implications of January 15th, 1966 coup. It is this coup that provoked reactions which led to the events that culminated in the civil war. The author examines the political, economic, social and diplomatic Ideology of the coup plotters. The book put the blame of Nigeria political problems on the way and manner the country was administered by the British colonial master.⁹⁰ The book however attributed the immediate

cause of the civil war to personality clash between Ojukwu and Gowon. This book is a primary source because the author was among the five military officers that planned and executed the January coup.

A. Ojiefoh in his book, *Uromi Chronicle 1025-2012* give an account of Esan origin and migration. He went further to give account of the economic viability of Uromi in Esan land. In analyzing Uromi and the civil war, Ojiefoh only looks at the activities of the federal forces in Uromi while neglecting the activities of Biafran troops in the area.⁹¹

Max Siollum in his book, *Oil, Politics and Violence* examines the role oil played in plunging Nigeria into the civil war. He argued that the discovery of oil in Nigeria became an impediment to the country democratic process as it served as a magnet which brought the military to power in 1966. He added that the Nigeria military threatened the corporate existence of the country 18 month after taking over the country. In the civil war that followed the crisis, Siollum described the Biafra forces invasion of Midwest as a disastrous political mistake by Ojukwu's government.⁹² The book is a good source in examining the role played by oil in the war.

Arthur A. Nwankwo in *Igbo leadership and the future of Nigeria* examines the Eastern Region declaration of the sovereign state of Biafra and suffering the war visited on the Igbo people. Nwankwo further examines the use of starvation as a weapon of war by the Federal Government and other Federal Government post-war policies such as currency exchange and the indigenization decree which pulled the Igbo from the commanding height of the economy of Nigeria. The writer did not mention the implication of the Federal Government policies meant to destroy Igbo commanding economic position on other groups in the country.⁹³

John de St. Jorre in his book, *the Nigerian Civil War* gives a firsthand account of the civil war experience on both the federal government and the Biafra. The book is very useful

as it also examines the activities of both the federal forces and Biafran troops in the Midwest where⁹⁴ Esan is located. The objectivity and detachment the writer exhibited is the strength of the book.

Samuel Ogbemudia in his book, *Years of Challenge* gives account of his tenure as Military Governor of Midwestern state. He also reveals the role he played from the Biafran invasion of the Midwest to the federal troop's liberation of the state and the challenges of post war reconstruction and rehabilitation in the Midwest. Ogbemudia further submits that the Biafran plan to invade the Midwest was in collaboration with the Western Igbo army officers who dominated the 4th Area command at the time. The book focuses on Biafran atrocities in the Midwest and the role played by non-Igbo groups like Esan in the resistance movement against the secessionist in the state.⁹⁵ The book is useful in examining Biafran incursion into the Midwest and the post-civil war reconstruction in the area.

In his book, *A History of the Nigerian War, 1967-1970*, Cervenka examines the politics of relief in the war. The author maintains that throughout the duration of the war, the problem of human starvation, disease and suffering received the highest attention. Cervenka further submits that both the federal government and the Biafran leaders exploited the suffering of the civilian population of the Eastern region for their political ends: The Biafran leaders believed that the suffering would rally international support for the Biafran cause and the federal government believed that it would force Biafran to early surrender.⁹⁶ The book is useful especially the focus on the civilian suffering which initially made the Esan people to sympathize with the Biafran cause before the Biafran invasion of the Midwest.

Philip Effiong in his book, *Re-integration: True or False* examines what the Federal Government should do to restore a sense of national belonging to the Igbo people. He suggest that for the federal government to win the peace, they should explore the ingenuity of the

Igbo. There are people who have gained from the war. But there are those who have lost everything they had as a result of the war. Effiong advises the federal government to give emergency relief to the Igbo people in form of food, drugs and clothing as this will make the people to have confidence in the federal government.⁹⁷ The writer did not consider that other groups in the Midwest that suffered as a result of the war deserved relief from the federal government.

R. B. Alade in his book, *The Broken Bridge* reveals that rebel propaganda drew the attention of several countries to the humanitarian need of the Biafran civilians. Humanitarian organizations like UNICEF, The World Council of Churches, the Oxfam, Save the Children Fund, the International Committee of the Red Cross and Caritas provided humanitarian relief to the civilian population ravaged by the war. Alade further revealed that the federal government latter alleged that the relief agencies were being used by Biafra to purchase arms and this led to strained relationship between the federal government and the relief agencies.⁹⁸ Some scholars have argued that it was the strained relationship that developed between the federal government and the Christian Relief Organizations that led to the government coming out with the policy of taking over schools from the missionaries after the war. As parts of government post war policies, schools in Esan were also affected.

In *The Social History of Nigeria Civil War: Perspectives from Below* Axel Harneit-Sievers, Jones O. Ahezuem and Sydney Emezue clearly examine the effects of the war on the lives of ordinary people. The author explains that the civil war is too important and since it has affected too many people, remembering it from the angle of political and military leaders will not make us to know the reality of the war. The author reveals that in reconstruction and rehabilitation in the Eastern states, the people's self-help was more important in the post war reconstruction process. The strength of this book is the documentation of individual

experience. Even though, Esan land is not mentioned in the book, it will give us the opportunity to compare individual experience in Esan and the Eastern states.⁹⁹

Chinua Achebe in his books, *An Image of Africa* and *the Trouble with Nigeria* bemoans Nigerian leadership for her problems. In his view, Nigeria has not been fortunate in her choice of leaders. According to him, Nigerian leaders, rather than being selfless, are fortune seekers. Most scholars have seen the failure of leadership as the cause of the civil war.¹⁰⁰

In *Because I am Involved*, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu blamed tribalism as the major obstacle to the unity of Nigeria. He laments that tribalism has made Nigeria to look like a house divided against itself. If Nigeria is divided against itself, the country cannot stand. Ojukwu rejected the notion that the January 1966 coup was an Igbo affair. He maintains that it is irony of history for the coup that was dismantled by General Aguiyi Ironsi in Lagos and in the North, by another Igbo man; (Ojukwu) could be seen as an Igbo coup.¹⁰¹ The book is useful to the study as the author is one of the main actors in the war.

On the whole, the available literature has not dealt with the subject of this thesis. A detailed account of the impact of the civil war on Esan land is thus basically a virgin subject.

CHAPTER TWO

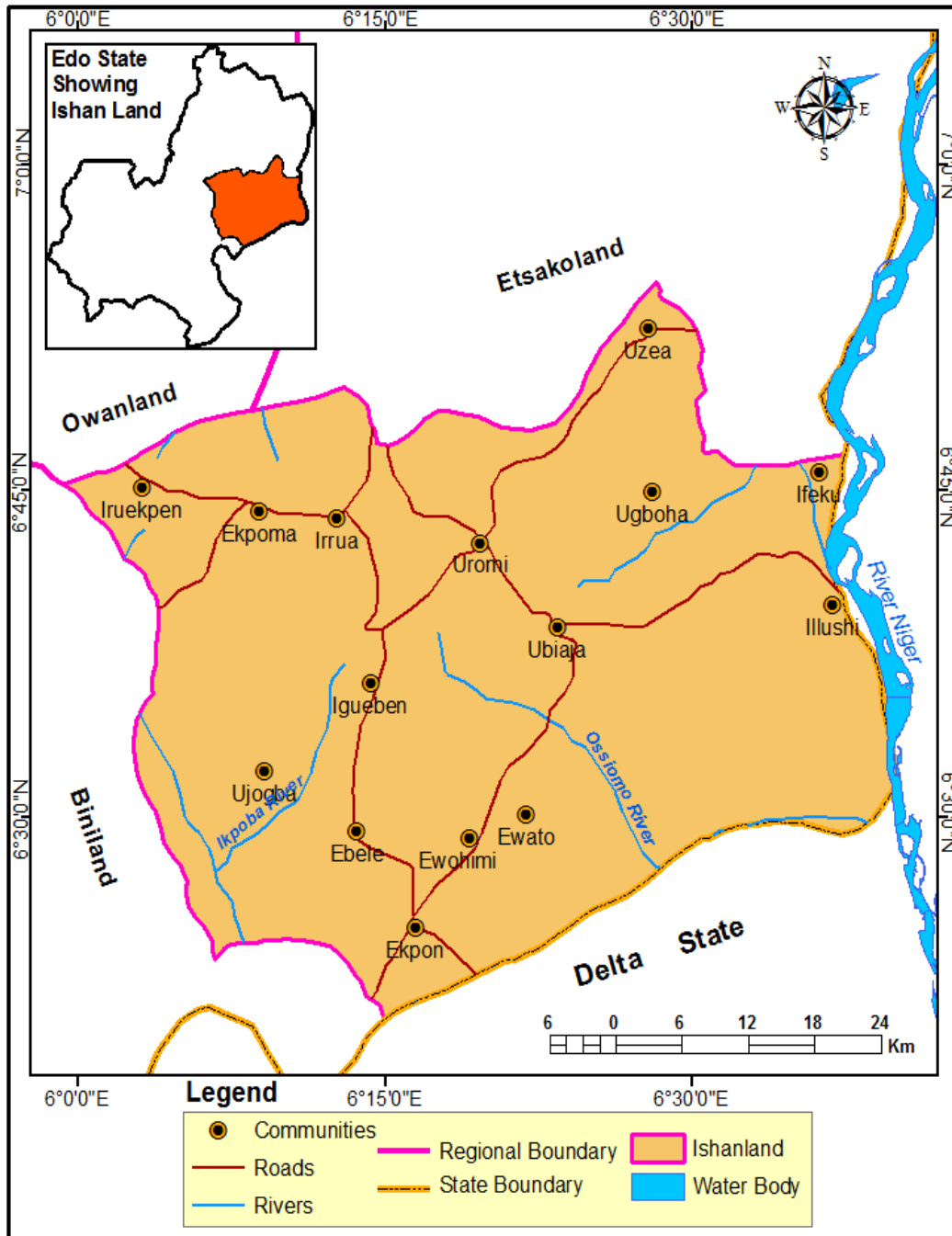
ESANIN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, 1500-1966

Esan is the second major ethnic group in Edo state and is located on a plateau of about 134 metres above sea level. Esan people occupy a land mass of about 1,858 square kilometres north-east of Benin, the Edo State capital.¹⁰² The 1963 Census put the population of Esan at 270,903.¹⁰³ The people are presently located in five local government areas: Esan South East, Esan North East, Esan West, Esan Central and Igueben. Esan is bounded in the West by Orhionwon Local Government Area while on the North by Etsako East and West local government areas. On the south, the area is bordered by Ika, Aniocha and Oshimili North local government areas of Delta State and on the East by River Niger and Ibagi local government area of Kogi State. The people of Esan are predominantly farmers even though there is existence of other economic activities such as hunting, basket weaving, blacksmithing and cloth weaving.¹⁰⁴ The area was colonized by the British and was under the Benin Province in colonial times. Esan was located in the Western Region when Nigeria had three regions and was located in Mid-Western Region when the country became four regions. When the Nigerian-Biafran war broke out in 1967, the area was under the Midwestern region.

Origin and Migration

In most pre-literate societies, (Esan inclusive) the matter of origin and migration is very controversial. This is due to the fact that many African communities define themselves through their tradition of origin, which is the basis of unity. Tradition of origin cannot be ignored because they are parts and parcel of the mental and intellectual equipment which communities use to define who they are.¹⁰⁵

MAP 1: MAP OF ESAN



Source: Obot Ibanga, Cartographer, Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Benin, Benin-City.

Among Esan tradition of origin, the Benin tradition enjoys prominence. Okogie has it that the word Esan is a Benin word meaning jump or flee. He affirms further that before the

use of the word Esan to describe the present geographical location of Esan, many important groups like Ubiaza(Ubiaja), Uromun(Uromi), Ekunma(Ekpoma) were already in existence without a common name.¹⁰⁶ Esan migration from Benin took place in the 15th century when Oba Ewuare enraged by the death of his two sons enacted obnoxious laws forbidding sexual intercourse, cooking or washing for three years. The hardship associated with the new laws made many people to leave Benin¹⁰⁷.

Oseghale in his submission maintains that the Benin tradition of origin is wide-spread among Esan tradition of origin. He affirmsthat:

Esan traditions of origin stated that at a point in the history of Benin,certain groups left the kingdom to form new settlements. Some of the emigrant groups eventually settled north-east in different partof what later became Esan. These emigrants... were either criminalor discontented and dissident Binis, or were royal emissaries or Equerries sent to form new settlement by the Oba of Benin.¹⁰⁸

Osaghale also affirms that the hardship created by Oba Ewuare obnoxious laws occasioned by the mysterious death of his two sons made many citizens of Benin to flee to places beyond the reach of the Oba. Among the fleeing people were Esan ancestors¹⁰⁹. These emigrants established the early Esan chiefdoms which include:

Ekpoma (Ekumma)
Uroni (Uronmun)
Ubiaza (Ubiaja)
Ugboha (Uwoka)
Ewohimim (Orikhimi)
Ewu (Eilu)
Uzea
Emu (Emihun)
Irrua (Uruwa)
Ohordua (Okhuodua)
Ebelle (Ebene)
Amahor (Amaho)
Ohalo
Izen
Ugbegun¹¹⁰

Bradbury affirms that the word Esan is a corruption of the Benin word esafua, which means those who fled. Many early Esan communities were founded by immigrants from Benin who left to escape the oppressive laws enacted by Oba Ewuare¹¹¹. Bradbury also supported the Esan Benin tradition of origin when he stated that Esan cultural and social characteristics are closely related to that of Benin. Esan traditional political framework is similar to that of the Benin kingdom.¹¹² Ekpoma like other communities in Esan trace their origin to Benin.¹¹³ Tradition has it that the founder of Egoro, Ekpoma and Opoji came from Benin with a title of Ogie from the Oba.¹¹⁴

The Benin tradition of the origin of Esan has been contradicted by Esan scholars. They argued that the geographical location called Esan had been occupied by people before the reign of Oba Ewuare. There are evidences in the pre-colonial history of Esan that Esan land had long existed before the 15th century. According to them Benin palace historians have continued to maintain that the Esan people originated from Benin to maintain superiority over Esan. This was attested to by Okoduwa: “Bini traditional or palace historians who are essentially imperial in their outlook see the origin of Esan as beginning from the reign of Oba Ewuare”¹¹⁵. Afigbo affirms this thus:

For all these reasons small-scale societies adjoining ancient kingdom or empires like Benin were considered, without much argument, as dependencies of those empires, or in any case the political systems of such small scale societies were regarded as political derivations from the systems of the said empires. For the same reasons the history of these empires, became also the histories of the small scale societies on their frontiers, or at least the major source for explaining every important aspect of the life of those society – the origins and migrations of their people, their political structure and dynamics, their economic systems, their art, dance and overall cultural heritage.¹¹⁶

The various intelligence reports on Esan by the colonial master uphold the tradition that Esan people migrated from Benin. In this various intelligence report, the colonial master pre-occupation was the problem of administration hence, the quest for proper historical knowledge was not in them.

This is how the history of Esan people became a kind of footnote to the history of Benin Empire. The campaign for the creation of the Mid-west emphasised the cultural and ethnic

unity of the region which tended to be strengthened by the concept that the entire region was under the Benin Empire. The entire regions history including Esan was viewed as adjunct to Benin history.¹¹⁷ Afigbo called this “The Benin Mirage.”¹¹⁸ There is need for scholars to question this existing Benin tradition of origin that Esan originated from Benin word Esanfua meaning those that fled. However, Ehiabhi provided explanation why the region history is predominantly about Benin. This is hinged on the concept of Edorisagbon and Obayanto which means that Benin is the originator of human culture and race and therefore that the Oba of Benin possesses the universe. This development has influenced the construction of history in the region especially Edo speaking communities like Esan.¹¹⁹ Okojie contradicts the concept that Esan originated from Benin when he affirms that:

It would at first appear that Ishan (Esan) did not originate until after 1440, when Oba Ewuare imposed his selfishness and wickedness on the great Benin stool. No, before this time, there where inhabitants scattered in the jungles now comprising Ishan as evidenced by our own Ishan (Esan) folk lore featured Ogiso the common name for Bini rulers before the great Oranmiyan.¹²⁰

It will be rational to say that the migrants that left Benin as result of Oba Ewuare tyrannical reign must have met people that can be called aboriginal. The migrant must have understanding of the place as argued by Okoduwa: “that naturally people hardly migrate to place unknown.”¹²¹ This false assumption that societies have originated from kingdoms and empires that were built by immigrant princes is not only peculiar to Esan. Nigerian historiography is dominated by this school of thought.

There is tradition of origin among the Ewohimi, Opoji, Uromi and Ewu that their ancestors came out of the ground or sky. The Ewu have aseparate tradition of origin, that after the arrival of their ancestors from the sky, he was conquered by Oba of Benin who gave their leader the title of Onogie. This myth of origin is still connected to Benin.¹²² Bradbury recognised the fact of multi-directional migration other than Benin. He affirms that some Esan groups came from Ife and Ifeku Island but were later absorbed by conquest or

peacefully into Benin Empire.¹²³ Another tradition has it that the Esan people were among the Hebrews who fled king Herold's murder of children in 4th Century. They settled in Egypt briefly from thence they travelled to Sudan from where they came to Ife through Nupe land. From Ife, they moved to Ugboka (now Benin) and they made farms. After the farming season, they harvested all their crops and went back to Ife to meet Obaigodo and when they returned back to Ugboka, Obaigodo lorded himself over them as the Ogiso (king of the sky).¹²⁴ The shepherds and hunters that first settled at the place felt threatened by the Obaigodo lordship over them and because they were afraid of Obaigodo tyrannical rule, they jumped into the bush. These groups of shepherds and hunters that first came to Benin who resisted the imposition of Igodo leadership jumped into the bush. Egharevba in Ojiefoh "asserted that the Esan people are early Benin people who fled when Obaigodo imposed himself on them and name the settlement Igodomigodo".¹²⁵

Irrua is believed to be one of the Esan groups that migrated from Ife at about the sametime with Benin. Irrua migrated from Ifeku, an Island on the River Niger. From there Amilele took them to Benin to see Oba Ohe who gave his daughter, Urowa to Amilele in marriage. They came back and settled in a place which they name after Amilele new wife, Urowa.¹²⁶ The fact cannot be disputed that before the coming of Benin migrantsto Esan, there were groups in the place that were already established. As attested to by Okojie: "practically all the ruling house of Ishan came direct from Benin to rule the people they found... already truly established".¹²⁷ The first Enijie of Esan has family ties beyond the reign of Oba Ewuare of Benin and some Enijie claimed that their descendant ruled before the founding of the Eweka dynasty.¹²⁸

The origin of Uromi has been traced to Idu civilization which began in 599AD. This civilization traces its origin to Uhe civilization which thrived across the Niger in about 550AD. The civilization was under the leadership of Idu and the death of Idu at about 599AD

led to persecution against Idu's family members. This made Idu descendants to migrate toward the bank of River Niger. The children of Idu were Akha, Efa, Emehi, Uwa, Iro, Ehi and Ose. The process of migration continued until Akha died and was buried in 600AD. The place where Akha was buried became known as Irua and Esan the son of Ehi remained in this place where his uncle was buried. This place became the centre from where other Esan migrated.¹²⁹ If this account is accepted, it will reverse the Benin tradition which claimed that Esan originated from Benin.

The tradition that Esan migrated from Benin covered about 500 years. The fact that there are communities in Esan that can trace their ancestors more than 500 years showed that Esan existed before Ewaure regime. This means that before the migrant from Benin, Esan land already existed with different names. The influx of Benin migrant only made them to have a common name, Esan which is a Benin word Esafua. Despite this situation, the Esan people speak the same language with little dialectical difference

Religious Beliefs

The Esan people believed in god of earth, god of Iron, god of trees and god of fruition. Be that as it may, they believe in the supreme God, without whose blessing the request on lesser gods cannot be granted. The supreme God has no shrine in Esan but, his name is called on any occasion.

Ancestral worship played a major role in the spiritual life of the Esan people. Esan customs, moral codes and the general laws guiding the people revolved round ancestral beliefs. The fear of ancestors and their worship cement the family and the village as a separate group. The practice also played a role in safeguarding marriage as married women are afraid of committing adultery, a social crime the ancestor take seriously. In Esan, adultery ranges from mere handshaking, touch of married women cloths to the actual indulging in sex. The man on the other hand, looking adulterously at his relative wife can also incur the anger

of the ancestors and the end result was falling sick. The person will have to confess his or hersin or die. Apart from adultery, the fear of ancestors makes the people to behave justly. The people are conscious that the ancestors demand honesty and brotherly love from them.¹³⁰ The ancestral worship is a general practice in Esan land. All the children worship their late father through the first son. The first son held the family *Ukhuere* (a short stick tied with cowries) which represent the spirit of the dead father. It must be emphasised that the first son alone can touch the *Ukhuere* and use it to bless other family members when the need arises. If any of them wants to worship the father, he has to do it through the first son.¹³¹ The Esan believed that the ancestors are intercessors between them and God and through their ancestors, they could get whatever they want from God. There is the taking of oath (*ukoven*) by neighbouring villages and this make them to live in harmony and not plan evil against each other. *Theukoven* ensures that there is cordial relation between villages that have taken the oath. Crimes like stealing, lying and using bad charm against each other cannot take place between the parties.

Hero worship is held in high esteem in Esan land. They include a man who sacrificed himself to serve his people, hero of war, founder of the community. They are represented by shrine at death and can be worship.¹³² In Esan land various items such as kola nuts, yam tubers, cowries, goat, etc are usually offered to various object of worship. When the gifts are offered the Chief Priest (*Ohen*) invokes the spirit to accept the offerings.¹³³

The god of the earth (*Anyanoto*) is associated with the fertility of the earth. In Esan land, in pre-colonial days, the community offered sacrifices to the god of the earth before planting and if there was poor harvest, the goddess of the earth is appeased with various items among which were cowries. The iron worship called *Idigun* whose chief priest is Ogun is worshipped by Esan. Oaths are regularly taken on it and is dreaded in Esan society.¹³⁴

The notion of reincarnation (*iroso*) in Esan indicates the existence of the ancestor somewhere which is predicated on the belief that the guardian spirit of the family continues to appear from one generation to another. Akhigbe sees reincarnation as a situation in which the deceased person reincarnates in their grandchildren, great grandchildren, brother, sister, cousin, aunts and nephews, uncles and nieces. He attests further that the belief in reincarnation in Esan is incontestable.¹³⁵ People were told either through divination or the possession of special mark in the ancestor who reincarnated in them. This is made manifest in the name given to the children. Some are given the direct name of the ancestor that reincarnated in them. This is why in Esan traditional setting, when a child is born, a diviner is consulted to ascertain the ancestor that reincarnated in the child.¹³⁶

The Coming of Christianity and Islam to Esan

Esan people are also Christians and Muslims. In early 20th century, the Catholic missions reached Esan land. They came with the French and British merchants and adventurers and first settled in Lokoja and after moved to Asaba in 1888. This led to the creation of Apostolic mission of the Upper Niger with Msgr. Canlo Zappa as its first Vicar Apostolate. In 1908 Zappa sent two French fathers, Frs. Clement Barnwarth and Joseph Corbeau to Ubiaja and later to Uromi to propagate the Catholic faith.¹³⁷ The 1935 Ishan Division's Annual report has it that:

The church missionary society and the Roman Catholic Mission are the only two operating in the division...one Roman Catholic father is stationed at Uromi and one in Ubiaja who divide the division between them.¹³⁸

In 1945, there were nine European and American missionaries resident in Esan Division. In the same year, due to increase in new converts the expansion of Ubiaja Catholic mission was carried out by the mission. The expansion of the new mission in Esan, like other parts of Nigeria, was because the Christian mission were engaged in rendering other social services like provision of schools and maternities. For example, in 1945 St. John Bosco, a Catholic

College started the training of teachers in Ubiaja. In the same year, the mission started to devote parts of their resources to maternity services in Esan Division. By 1932, considerable progress had been made in the spread of Christianity in Ekpoma. In 1932, the missions have 14 churches in Ekpoma district. The Christian teaching was anti-traditional religious beliefs of the indigenous people. Converts refused to take parts in works or ceremonies which have to do with observation of indigenous religious beliefs.¹³⁹ This end result is the division of Esan into rival groups. Writing about a fictional Igbo village, Chinua Achebe affirms this:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.¹⁴⁰

This was basically true of Esan. The missionaries came to Esan like in other parts of Nigeria and branded our religious believe as bad; and the new convert among Esan people also held their own traditional religion as bad. Be that as it may, there are Esan people that still hold tenaciously to their traditional belief and the Christian convert served as opposition to this group of people. Consequently, the coming of Christianity adversely affected the unity of Esan people.

The Nupe through the Kukuruku raided some parts of Esan land. The areas mostly affected are Ewu, Irua and Ukhun. The traces of Nupe influence can be seen in the adoption of Islam and the Northern style of dress especially in Ewu and Irua.¹⁴¹ The 1932 intelligence Report on Irua clan in the Benin Province has it that the inhabitants of Irua adopted Islam in 1897.¹⁴² Islam was accepted by some Irua people who hoped to use it to obtain favour from the Onogie. Unlike the new Christian convert who refused to take part in Esan traditional religious ceremonies, the new Islamic covert still “attended and takes part in the various pagan festivals”.¹⁴³ This means the coming of Islam, unlike Christianity, did not divide the

Esan society into rival camps. This perhaps, may be the reasons why the parts of Esan with high concentration of Muslim like Ewu, have not experienced religious crisis.

The Onogie of Irua, Alhaji William Okoeguale Momodu II, noted that his grandfather, Eromosele the Great was converted to Islam through an Agbede princess whom he loved. The princess told him that the condition under which she would marry him is when he gets rid of his shrine and Charms and Eromosele the Great accepted and burnt the charms and the shrine in the presence of the princess. He finally converted to Islam and the princess married him. This was how Eguare in Irua was Islamised and the Onogie of Irua from Eromosele till date have since been Muslims.¹⁴⁴

The fact cannot be denied that the coming of Christianity and Islam have not weakened the social political and traditional beliefs of the people of Esan. Despite the influence, Esan people still hold tenaciously to their traditional beliefs. The degree which some Christians and Muslims still observe traditional rites showed the high premium they place on their traditional beliefs.

Socio-Political Organisation

The most important political unit of Esan society is the chiefdom ruled over by hereditary king called *Onogie*. In each kingdom, the Onogie serves as a unifying factor as he is respected by everybody in the kingdom. Each chiefdom has many villages and the village housing the Onogie court is called *Eguare*.¹⁴⁵ This is why in virtually all Esan chiefdoms, there is Eguare. The villages are divided into wards (*Idumu*) and the ward is not the current electoral political ward but means a quarter in the village. Depending on the genealogy, some Idumu are not allowed to marry each other, for example Idumuogede and Idumuaneni forbid marrying each other in Ugboha.¹⁴⁶ All members of an Idumu have a common ancestor and a large Idumu forms an Egbele. In a situation where the members of the Egbele were not members of a single patrilineage, marriage is permissible.¹⁴⁷

The village is headed by an Odionwele, the oldest man in the village and this is irrespective of family or quarters. A stranger is not qualified to be Odionwele even if he is the oldest person in the village. The Odionwele and the Edion (the oldest men in the village) form the village council and the council is presided over by the Odionwele.¹⁴⁸ All social and spiritual matters affecting the village are presided over by the Odiowele. In some cases minor issues are attended to in his house but issues concerning the whole village are attended to at village square meeting. The council handles issues like adultery, and disobedience against the native laws and the custom of the people. Serious matters like rape, murder are attended at the Onogie palace.

The smallest social unit is the family (*Uelen* or *Unuoa*). The family is made up of the man, his wives, children, younger brothers and sisters and mother. The married brothers remained members of the family. The family unit is headed by Odion-Unuoa (Omijiogbe). The man speaks on-behalf of the family and he is in custody of the ancestral shrine. Some matters such disobeying seniors and truancy can be handled and settled by the family. Idumu is formed by many family units and a large Iduwu or several Iduwu form an Egbele. In Esan land, there are rooms for appealing from family to Iduwu and Idumu to Egbele. When the issue cannot be resolved by the Egbele, the matter is transferred to Odionwele and when Odionwele cannot resolve the matter, it is move to the Onogie palace (Eguare).¹⁴⁹

The Uromi 1936 intelligence report has it that the native administration in Uromi is similar to those of other Esan Chiefdoms or groups. The report reveals that the village population was divided into *otu* or age-grades as follows: Edion, Igene and Egbenuguele.¹⁵⁰ The compositions of these groups are the male population of the village. Okogie revealed the composition thus:

Edion (elders) these are men of over 45 in age
Igene- men of 35 – 45. In some parts this age grade is known as Igbama or Oboigbaoto or Okuokhinioto. All these names appropriately mean that this grade consists of men beyond

the age of being frightened but not too old to be physically handicapped by senility. In other words, they were the men of war. Egbonughele— men of 12 – 35.¹⁵¹

The Edion are the oldest men in the village and they are all members of the village council. The Egene are able bodied men. They carry out the heavy work such as building houses and serving as the military force. The oldest among them is the head and is referred to *Odion Igene*. The Egbenugele are the youth and they carry out lighter functions such as clearing the road, sweeping the village and assisting in farm work.

It is discernible from the above discourse that in Esan chiefdoms, there is traditional government in place headed by the Onogie in which ascension to the throne is by primogeniture. The political structure of Esan cannot be described as sedimentary or stateless like the Igbo traditional political system. Despite the sovereign nature of the various Esan chiefdoms, economic factor served as integrative elements that bond them together. This is why Oseghale affirms that economic factors “foster the spirit of oneness, brotherliness and perhaps more importantly neighbourliness among Esan polities”.¹⁵²

Esan Economy

Agriculture: the fertile nature of Esan’s soil promotes agricultural activities. The cultivation of cash crops for export and local consumption flourished highly in the area. The economic activities practiced in Esan before the civil war revolved around agriculture. Okoduwa affirms this: “pre-colonial Esan society depended on agriculture which provides a suitable foundation on which other economic pursuits were based”.¹⁵³ In the same vein, Osagie also maintains that: “in spite of the existence of other economic activities such as cloth weaving, basket weaving, blacksmithing and hunting, Esan was basically an agricultural society”.¹⁵⁴ Apart from this factor, land (*otor*) was surplus and not scarce in Esan. The main crop cultivated was yam which like in Igbo and some other parts of Nigeria is the king of all crops. In the pre-colonial era, the social status of a man in Esan depended on the numbers of barn he was able to put in place after the farming season. The crop was cultivated mostly by men. The most popular diet in Esan land is pounded yam, (*ema*) is prepared with yam. Pounded yam is the only diet for celebrating the new yam festival and such other traditional ceremonies like burial and age-grade initiation. It is generally accepted in Esan that the only food acceptable to the ancestors is the pounded yam. “There were three main species of yam; they include white yam, (*D.rotundata*) which had three varieties locally known as *asukwu,oli* and *elebun*; yellow yam (*D.cayanesis*) and water yam (*D.demeroru*).”¹⁵⁵

Cassava is another important food crop cultivated by the Esan people. This crop is an alternative to yam and grown mainly by women. Cassava was cultivated mainly by women because compared to yam, it is easy to cultivate, less labour intensive and suitable for various soil and climatic condition. The cassava was processed into garri which is the commonest food that can be found in all houses in Esan before the civil war. It can also be processed into tapioca which is not as common as the garri. Other main food crops cultivated in Esan were beans, pepper, groundnut, cocoyam, plaintain, banana, melon. Crops like melon, pepper and groundnut are cultivated by women.

Another important staple food crop cultivated by Esan people was rice. It was cultivated by both men and women. Ekpoma has long been known for rice production in Esan land. In December, 1941, the colonial administration opened a Rice Mill at Ekpoma which the rice growers in the place showed great interest in.¹⁵⁶ Ugboha and Uzea were also into rice cultivation before the civil war. While Uzea transport their rice to Ekperi to mill, Ugboha mill their rice at Illushi. Before the war, there was massive rice cultivation at Illushi and individuals owned rice mills in the area.¹⁵⁷

Palm tree was an important tree crop in Esan land. It grew without the inhabitants of the community cultivating it and, as a result, it was communally owned by the community on whose land it grew. It can be processed into palm oil or tapped for wine and the wine is Esan's traditional drink used for festivals and other ceremonies. The kernel nuts from palm tree can be processed into local cream and the chaff can serve as source of firewood for cooking. It is interesting to note that no by-product of the palm tree is a waste, from the trunk to the palm fronds at the top. The trunk are used as seat in village squares and for constructing local bridges. Soap is made from the chaff and brooms are made from the fronds. The importance of the fronds in Esan culture cannot be over emphasised. The frond is used to place an injunction on land in dispute or trespassed until the disagreement surrounding the land is resolved by the community or village head.¹⁵⁸

With the coming of the colonial master, there was a dramatic change in the Esan economy. This time around, because the objective of the colonial authorities in Esan and Nigeria in general was sourcing for raw materials for their home industries, they implemented measures aimed at achieving these objectives. One of these measures is diversion of the attention of the Esan farmer from food crop to cash crop. In the words of Osigie: "As the people embarked on the production of cash crops to meet the needs of the British industries, they were compelled to relegate the cultivation of food crops to the background".¹⁵⁹ With this development, Esan began to cultivate tree crop like palm tree, rubber, and cotton. Some of these tree crops like palm tree originally grew wild without any input from the inhabitants of the community where they grew.

Another measure aimed at facilitating the objectives of the colonial authorities was the establishment of forest reserves. With the forest reserve, Esan nay African were permanently dispossessed of their land. The 1941 Annual Report on Esan Division reports as follows:

One Clan Native Authority Forests Reserves of 4.66 square miles was constituted during the year bringing the total of clan reserves to 35.33 sq. miles. Approval for a joint reserve in the Irua and Uromi Clans was received.¹⁶⁰

The forest reserves made land scarce for food crop cultivation and gradually Esan was rid of food supply and the end result is food insecurity in favour of the cultivation of cash crops for British industries.

Apart from cropping, fishing was also an important aspect of agriculture in some parts of Esan. The River Niger and Aliko River provided some parts of Esan like Illushi, Amalu, Ifeku with considerable fishing resources. Uto River also provided considerable fishing resources to Uroh and Iyelen. There are various streams and ponds in Ifeku, Illushi, and some part of Uzea. Egbefo and Eboime affirm that:

Fishing was engaged in by those living in banks of River Niger in Ozigono, Ido, Ebelle and Ekpoma. Here men engaged in fresh water and Open River fishing leaving the marketing and preservation of unsold fish to their wives and women fishmonger. The fishes caught added to the people's protein and others not immediately consumed were preserved either by smoking, drying or salting and sold to traders from parts of Iboland, Benin Kingdom...¹⁶¹

Fishing ponds and streams were either owned communally or by particular families. Fishing rights were the exclusive prerogatives of the owners who could either carry out the fishing themselves or sold it out to interested fishermen who fish at certain periods of the year, especially in dry season between January and March.¹⁶²

Local Industry: The people are skilled in local crafts like cloth weaving, blacksmiths, carving and weaving. Canoebuilding was restricted to Ifeku, Illushi, Iyelen and Uroh communities. Cloth weaving was among the local handcrafts Esan people are known for. The weaved cloths (*ukpon-ododo*) was popular and profitable and reached a high degree of excellence before the Nigerian Biafra war. Cloth weaving was dominated by women who learnt it from their mothers, relatives or other member of the community reputed for the art of cloth weaving¹⁶³. The *ukpon-ododo* was highly respected and the rich cultural heritage which Esan people are endowed was sartorially made manifest by the traditional attire of *ukpo-ododo*. The cloths are mostly used in Esan traditional festivals and coronation. Okojie notes: "Uromi and Ohordua women dominated the art of weaving cloths in Esan."¹⁶⁴ The cloth weaving industry experienced decline with time. The reason for this was the fact that the Esan women could not withstand the competition from cloths made in Lokoja, Okene and Kano. Although Kano has been popular in West Africa for cloth weaving before the coming of colonial government, the introduction of cotton growing through British Cotton Growing Association expanded the cloth weaving industry in the North.

The products find its way to Esan and elsewhere. The cheapness of the cloths from Northern region made many people to patronise them instead of the costly one produced in Esan¹⁶⁵. Another reason for the decline in local cloth weaving industry was the large imports of European textile into the country. This had a devastating effect on Esan economy and Nigeria in general as the European textiles have squeezed the Esan local textile manufacturer out of the market. The end result of this is unemployment as the local producers cannot withstand the competition with European giant textile producers.

Blacksmithing (*owenan*) was important to the economy of Esan as the tools created are used for farming and hunting. Before the civil war, the Awka blacksmiths dominated the

industry in Esan. They were mostly at Illushi where local farmers and hunters got most of their tools from. This does not mean that there were no indigenous blacksmith in Esan before the arrival of Awka blacksmith. According to Okoduwa: “By the end of 15th Century, blacksmithing had developed in many parts of Esan. Among them were various centres like Ewoyi in Uromi, Idumigun in Ekpoma, IdumuaBekhae in Ugboha”.¹⁶⁶ From these centres various tools for hunting and farming were made. It must be emphasised that the coming of Igbo-Awka blacksmith to Esan brought the word *ojogun* which is now generally accepted word for blacksmith in Esan. *Ojogun* has silenced *owenan* which is the Esan word for blacksmith. The Esan engaged in pottery, especially the women who produce different sizes and shapes of ceramics for social and economic purposes. According to Okojie, the women of Ibore in Irua, Idegun in Ugboha and Uzea dominated the pottery industry in Esan.¹⁶⁷ The products include pots, bowls, jars, smoking pipes and the product served different purposes such as fetching and storing water, storing palmwine, fermenting cassava, cooking, serving and storing food, for cooking and administering herbal preparations for the cure of various diseases and for religious rituals. The Esan also engaged in basket and mat making. The baskets are used for carrying farm products and other items. The mats are used for sleeping and burying corpses. Despite the competition they face with European goods, a few local crafts such as mat and basket making, cloth weaving and pottery have continued.

Trade and Commerce

In pre-colonial Esan society, most farmers produced their food. Despite this, the need for exchange has always existed. Thus, the surplus of the farm produce such as plant and animals and even local crafts were exchanged for other goods in the local market. Geographical, climatic differences and natural endowment made this trade inevitable.

The lower parts of Esan such as Illushi, Ifeku and Amalu have marine advantage. Thus, they exchange fish and early crops harvests like yam, rice, potatoes and maize with orange and other fruits from the upland parts of Esan. Oseghale affirms that: “As the use of money was not known, exchange was by barter.”¹⁶⁸ Field research indicates that trade by barter continued in Esan after the introduction of currency especially between the upland parts of Esan and the riverine areas such as Illushi and Ifeku. There was also the trade between Esan and the Igala which was promoted by geographic and climatic differences. Early planting of crops by the Igala resulted to early harvest which find their way to Esan

market through Illushi port. Esan's season of planting starts during the period of harvest of most Igala crops like okra, pepper, groundnut, maize, rice, and vegetables. Although, places like Illushi and Ifeku have marine advantage, the bulk of the marine need of Esan people came from the Igala across the Niger before the war. The differences in season of harvest and geography promoted inter-group relations.

There was *EkiOzigono* of Illushi which was a market of every four days by the bank of River Niger. This market attracted traders from all parts of Esan and even across the Niger. It must be emphasised that this market attracted traders from Lagos, Port-Harcourt, all parts of the Eastern region and across Edo. There were other prominent markets in Esan such as *Ekiroleke* of Uromi, *Eki Adava* of Ugboha, *Eki Ibike* of Ekpoma, *Eki Agbado* of Ewohimi, *Eki Ughelehanlenof* Ewu and *Ekirolele* of Ubiaja. While *Eki Agbado* of Ewohimi attracted traders from Western Igbo and Eastern Igbo, *Eki Ibike* of Ekpoma attracted trader from Kukuruku, Benin, Etsako and Igbira. The aforementioned people's market also attracted Esan traders. Thus, trade promoted relations between Esan and her neighbours.

In pre-colonial days, the markets were small and were attended by members of the village and people were restricted to their village market for fear of attack and of being sold to slave merchants.¹⁶⁹ Before the Nigerian Civil War, Esan markets expanded and witnessed inter village and inter-chiefdom trade and also traded with other ethnic groups such as Ekperi, Igala, Kukuruku, Benin, Agbor, Western Igbo communities and the Igbo across the Niger. The expansion of the markets was occasioned by the emergence of urban centres which gave rise to trading activities and communication. Another reason for the expansion of trade was the introduction of currency by Europeans which removed the bottlenecks in the barter system and cumbersomeness of traditional currencies like the cowry.¹⁷⁰

Market days and market are significant among the Esan people. Esan markets are held every four days and the market days are structured in such a way that two nearby villages do not have their market the same day. Only chiefdoms that were far apart could have their market the same day. According to Okojie, Esan market days were as follows:

Day 1: Ekpoma, Ibore, Okhuesan, Ugboha, Igueben, Ekpon etc.

Day 2: Irua, Opoji, Ebelle, Ubiaja, Ohodua etc.

Day 3: Uromi, Iruokpen, Ewohimi.

Day 4, Ewu, Illushi, Igor, Ewatto etc.

From the above, each market was held after every three days which is once every four days.¹⁷¹ Apart from buying and selling associated with market, it also means a resting day in Esan. On market day, even when farmers have no article to take to the market, they stay at home to rest. The market day is also the day some important issues affecting the village are attended to. From the above, it is certain that the Esan people engaged in other economic activities apart from farming. While farming, they engaged in other income yielding ventures as adjuncts. For example we have Esan farmers who are traditional medicine practitioner and musicians.

Education

The Esan are among the educational advantaged groups in Nigeria. The reason for the educational advancement of the people was that Esan was among the places in Nigeria where the earliest schools were opened. By 1905, the first Government School was opened

at Irrua. In 1906, Government School Uromi was opened, 1908, Government School Ewu was opened; 1910, Government School Ekpoma was opened.¹⁷² Since colonial education was geared toward providing clerical jobs to the natives, the Esan held a high percentage of these jobs. This was unlike the Hausa land which was relatively untouched by western education. The British colonial administration was not interested in giving Nigeria sound higher education. All that they needed was simply the type of education that would make the people to know how to read and write to enable them hold subordinate positions in the Colonial Administration. In 1925, for instance, Lord Lugard argued that the prime necessity in Africa was mass education rather than higher education for a selected few. Similarly, in 1933, J.E.W. Flood of the Colonial Office contended that what was desired at the time was not a University trained African, but an ordinary individual with some training not too removed from the daily round and the common task to take part in local life and local habits of thought.¹⁷³

These arguments were peripheral to the real intention of the colonial master for denying African sound education. They had hoped to use African in subordinate position in the colonial administration to save cost and maintain stability. Africans were needed to serve in junior position as clerks and assistants in colonial offices. For this assignment primary school education was sufficient.

Despite the conspiracy on the parts of the colonial master to retard educational advancement of the people of Nigeria, Esan people began to make effort early enough to advance education. For instance, when Government School Ekpoma was handed over to the mission in 1941, the building of Government School, Irrua was extended by Irrua people at their own cost to accommodate standard V and VI.¹⁷⁴ In 1950, the colonial administration of Ishan Division had expressed fear over the rising cost of primary education in Esan.¹⁷⁵ The rising cost was occasioned by increase in enrolment. In the same year, the Education department in Esan Division examined the rate of Education in Esan and came out with the following statistics:

Table 1: Primary School Enrolment in Esan, 1950-1955

School and Enrolment	1950	1955
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Junior Primary School	90	110
Possible enrolment in Junior Primary School	16,000	17,600
Percentage of Junior Primary Children at School	37%	72%
Average enrolment per Junior class	15	30
Senior Primary School Standard II – VI	17	40
Enrolment in Senior Primary Schools	2000	5400
Possible enrolment in Senior Primary Schools	5000	6300
Percentage of Senior Primary Children at Schools	12 ¹ / ₂ %	30%
Average enrolment per Senior Primary Class	14	30

(Source: NAI/B.P.2816/2, "Education Rate Esan Division", 1950)

“On this assumption the total salary bill for all Ishan Primary Schools would rise from roughly £20,000 in 1950 to roughly £50,000 in 1955.”¹⁷⁶ In Esan like in other Colonial Division, there were three sources of revenue for running the schools – Government grant, school fees and local public funds. This is in keeping with the principle that the cost of education should be shared between the central Government, Local Government and the parent of the pupils. From the above, the income from the Central Government can rise but the colonial government was conscious of the implication of the rise in school fees. This was disclosed by a sub-committee of the rates of Education in Ishan Division:

The sub-committee felt arise in school fees is impossible and that any attempt to charge more would reduce the numbers attending school, whereas we can only avoid disaster if numbers are, in fact, very greatly increased.¹⁷⁷

The committee concluded that the short fall in funds for running the school can only be bridged by increasing the contribution from local government and the Central Government since to increase school fees would reduce the numbers of pupils. This should not be mistaken as an act of magnanimity. The colonial administrator found out that it would be

difficult for them to run the school without the revenue generated from school fees which would reduce when school fees is increase and increase when the fees is reduced.

In 1950, when it was discovered that the fund needed to run primary school Education had increased as a result of the expansion of schools and it was clear that such fund could not come from the central government, local government and school fees, the Colonial Administrator imposed Education rate which was the annual output paid by each taxpayer to Local Education fund. The Native Authority Ordinance was amended to make it legal for the Native Authority to levy the rate to support schools in Esan Division.¹⁷⁸ The expansion of schools in the area was as a result of the burning desire in Esan people to acquire Education. Parents sent their children to school not minding that the children would have used the time to contribute to the expansion of their farms. The Christian missions especially the Roman Catholic Mission were the instruments through which Education was spread in Esan. Roman Catholic Mission School Ewossa was started in 1920.¹⁷⁹

Being under the Western Region was also instrumental to the educational advantage of the Esan people. Before the creation of Midwestern Region on August 9, 1963,¹⁸⁰ Esan land was under the Western Region, the region which enjoyed educational advantage over other regions in Nigeria. Under Awolowo, the region witnessed the introduction of free primary education programme in 1955.¹⁸¹ The programme revolutionized education in the region. The importance of primary education cannot be over emphasised. It is the foundation on which other levels of education are built. It affects other higher level of education (secondary and tertiary). Esan embraced Awolowo's free education scheme. Before the Civil War, Sacred Heart Teacher Training College Ubiaja and Teacher Training College Igweben were the highest educational institutions in Esan. The people of Esan attended higher institution at University of Ibadan, Nsuka, Yaba Tech and elsewhere.

Urbanization

In Esan, urban growth is an important social feature that had started before the Nigerian-Biafran war. To this extent, many rural settlements transformed into urban centre before the war. In colonial times, the need to establish administrative centres propelled urbanization in Esan land like other parts of Africa.¹⁸² By 1950, Ubiaja was already an emerging town being a district headquarters of the Colonial Administration.¹⁸³ Apart from being District headquarters of Esan Division which today comprises Esan North East, Esan South East, Esan West, Esan Centre, Igweben, Owan West, Owan East, Etsako West, Etsako East and Akoko Edo LGA, Ubiaja was also Local Government Headquarters under the Western Region. Apart from being headquarters of Ishan Division under the Midwest, Ubiaja was also one of the seven Judicial Divisions in which the region was divided.¹⁸⁴ This is why Amiens categorised Ubiaja "as the political mother-town of Esan people."¹⁸⁵ Other urban towns before the war were Irrua, Ekpoma, Uromi, and Illushi. Before the war, telephone service was available in Ubiaja, Irrua, Uromi, Ekpoma and Ewohimi.¹⁸⁶

Even though the aforementioned Esan towns were not among the principal urban centres in Nigeria in 1963,¹⁸⁷ some of them especially Uromi was near to be categorise as major town in Nigeria. Uromi like Lagos in Nigeria, is the economic headquarters of Esan people. The town showed a strong trend toward economic modernization before the war. The place had much pull on migrants from other parts of Esan, Edo, Igala, Yoruba, and Igbo. Uromi is to Esan people what Onisha is to Igbo people.¹⁸⁸ The economic viability of Uromi is the reason why the place was home to a lot of Igbo people before the war. Even the Colonial government took note of the economic viability of the place hence U.A.C. and John Holt shops were located in Uromi.¹⁸⁹

Another economically viable town where many tribes rose and fell in Esan is Illushi. This place is important because of the location along the Bank of River Niger and this singular reason facilitated trade between the place and the Igala people across the Niger.

Okojie described Illushi as "Ishan's only port."¹⁹⁰ In the same vein Akubor affirms that Illushi market "serves as melting pot for traders from Aboh,Igbo land, Esan, Onisha and Itshekiri, Usobo and Benin as well as Nupe trader from the North."¹⁹¹The difference in natural environment encourages trade at Illushi being a border town between Igala and Edo. The early harvests from across the Niger finds their way into the market. On the other hand, the Esan people take their harvest to the market as from October to December which is the planting season of the Igala people from across the Niger.In colonial times, John Holt and U.A.C. made use of the Illushi Port.¹⁹² They established warehouses in the place and, through the warehouses, their goods found their way to other parts of Esan and elsewhere. Before the construction of Onitsha Bridge in 1964 by Dumez Construction Company,¹⁹³ Illushi port served as the channel through which Esan traders got their goods from Onisha.¹⁹⁴ Trade contributed to the rapid growth and development of Illushi like other riverside town such as Warri, Lokoja, Asaba and Onisha. All the towns along the Niger served as ferry terminals, port and trading stations.

Migration

The social condition of Esan people was marked by movement from their home to other parts of the country. Esan people are highly receptive and adaptive to change. Places like Uzea and Ugboha migrated across the River Niger to farm due to differences in natural endowment between Esan and across the Niger. The annual alluvial deposit from the River Niger promoted early planting immediately the River starts drying. This attracted some parts of Esan to cross the Niger. It must be emphasised here that the Esan people did not migrate to across the Niger for lack of farm land.They were moved by the early planting and early harvest which also yields higher income.¹⁹⁵

Esan migration to other parts of the country such as Enugu, Lagos, Kano, Warri, Kaduna and Port Harcourt before the war was occasioned by the early educational advancement of the people which made them to move to urban areas to seek employment that were not readily available in their localities. Osoba affirms that "areas which show a strong trend towards economic modernization... have had almost from the beginning of colonial rule as much pull on migrants from the south as their counterparts in the south have had on northern migrants"¹⁹⁶ The Lyttleton constitution divided Nigeria into three autonomous regions in which Esan became part of the West with Ibadan as capital.¹⁹⁷ Consequently, Ibadan became the destination of employment seekers from Esan being the headquarters of the region.

Esan in Politics and the Creation of Mid-West

The political history of what later became Nigeria including Esan was by 1906 under the British colonial administration. "By 1910, save for patches of resistance in the region, the entire Esan area had succumbed to British rule."¹⁹⁸ Osagie notes that the Esan were among the groups that resisted the British incursion into their domain. According to him, after the conquest of Benin in 1897, it took the British forces another seven years before they could bring the Esan people under the British control.¹⁹⁹

After the British conquest of the area, Esan became one of the four Divisions under the Benin province. The British ruled the people of Esan through the indirect Rule System. Indirect Rule entails ruling the people through their existing traditional Rulers and institutions. Ishan Division had initially six districts- Ewohimi, Uromi, Ubiaja, Irrua, Ekpoma and Ora. The Ora district was occupied by the Ivbiosakan people. But with the transfer of 5 Ivbiosakan villages to Kukuruku in April, 1945, Esan became five districts.²⁰⁰ "The changes made Ishan a cohesive political unit, all clans now having the same administrative structure."²⁰¹

The involvement of Nigerian in the Second World War created political consciousness in Nigerian. Olusanya captures this thus:

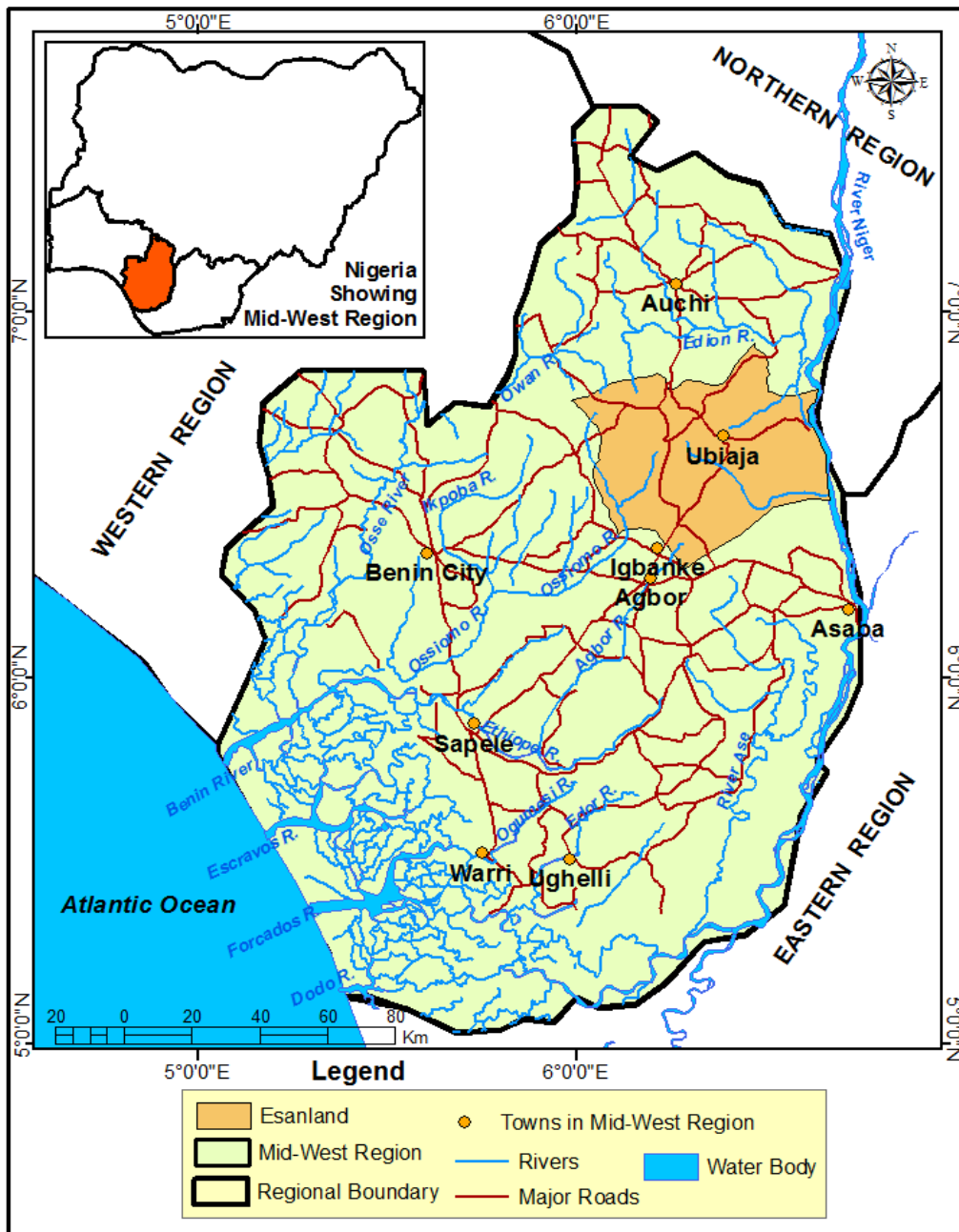
The outbreak of the second World War, the close involvement of Nigeria in that war... and the allied propaganda which emphasized democracy and the right of all peoples to choose whatever form of government they would like to be under stimulated considerably political awakening in the country.²⁰²

Although Sir Bernard Bourdillion had already started the process of a new constitution for the country before he retired in 1944, the sensitivity to the Nigerian political awakening paved the way for subsequent constitutional Developments.²⁰³ The Landmark of the constitutional development was the 1951 constitution when regional government was adopted. "The regional arrangement was the feature of local administration up to the post-independence period."²⁰⁴

The introduction of regional assemblies by Macpherson Constitution in 1951 set the tone for the selection of representatives for Ishan constituency into the Western Regional Assembly. "The election to the new regional Houses of Assembly and Chiefs under the new constitution took place between August and December 1951."²⁰⁵ In the election, Anthony Enahoro was overwhelmingly elected into the House of Representatives under the platform of Action Group. The Post of House of Chiefs was contested between two Ewohimi sons- Zaiki Enosegbe II, the Onogie of Ewohimi contested under NCNC and Chief Obhi-Ebo Odigie contested under the AG. At the end of the election, Chief Obhi-Ebo Odigie also won under the platform of Action Group.²⁰⁶

Esan politicians played a major role in the creation of Midwest in 1963. Enoseigbe II, the Onogie of Ewohimi, Shaka Momodu and Dr. C. G. Okojie were everywhere in Esan canvassing for support for the creation of the Midwest. The Midwestern Nigeria became the fourth region in Nigerian Federation on 9th August, 1963 as a result of the plebiscite conducted in July 1963. The creation of the region was sequel to the report of the Willink

Commission set up in 1958 to examine the desirability of creating more regions from the existing three regions. It was later constituted as Midwestern State following the creation of twelve states on May 27, 1967 by Gowon. The state stretches from the Bight of Benin in the south to the north, where it maintains boundaries with the then Western, EastCentral, Kwara and Rivers States.²⁰⁷ Prior to the creation of Midwest, the area formed part of the then Western region with Ibadan as the capital. The area comprised of Edo, Urhobo, Ibo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Etsako, Esan and Owan. Despite its linguistic and ethnic differences, the people have a common historical origin traceable to Benin. Nearly all the paramount rulers in the region have ancestral connection with the Oba of Benin. The chiefs of Benin have their counterpart in other parts of the region. For instance, the Iyasere of Benin which is the Prime Minister to the Oba of Benin could be found in Asaba, Abo and Ika areas.²⁰⁸



MAP 2: Mid-Western Region of Nigeria Showing Esan Land, 1963-1967

Source: Obot Ibanga, Cartographer, Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Benin, Benin-City.

With the creation of Midwest, Esan became one of the 14 administrative division of the region and Benin City became the capital. The constitution which came into force in 1964

introduced a parliamentary system of government and a bi-cameral legislature consisting of a House of Assembly and a House of Chiefs.²⁰⁹

Chief Dennis Osadebe became the premier of Midwest in 1964 after his party, National Council of Nigeria citizen won the first general election conducted in the region. In Dennis Osadebe's cabinet, Shaka Momodu was Internal Affairs Minister while Dr. Christopher G. Okojie was the Minister of Works. Similarly, Chief Odiase of Irrua was the parliamentary secretary to the Premier. This time around, party politics in Esan were influenced by Action Group (AG) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC).²¹⁰

Esan has always stood for unity of Nigeria right from the period of Nationalist Movement. In March, 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro, a leading member of Action Group in the House of Representatives, moved a motion for attainment of Nigeria Independence in 1956. The Northerners' reaction to the motion was a threat to secede from the country.²¹¹ The Northerners also tried to secede from the country in August 1966 after removing Ironsi from power. The Northern Delegation submitted a paper to the ADHOC Constitutional conference that any region has the right to secede from the country.²¹² Similarly, "in the Western region it must be noted threatened to secede from Nigeria if the colony of Lagos was not merged with the West."²¹³ Esan people are among the groups in Nigeria that never attempted to secede from the country before the Nigerian civil war.

Esan/Igbo Relation before the War

The early urban growth of Esan served as pull to the Igbo as they move to different parts of Esan for businesses and other engagements. Many rural settlements were transformed into urban centres before the war. In colonial time, the need to establish administrative centres propelled urbanization in Esan like other parts of Nigeria.²¹⁴ Afigbo notes:

One other development traceable to this early period of colonial rule remains to be discussed. This was the rise of nascent urban centres around administrative headquarters - be they divisional or provincial headquarters.²¹⁵

Ubiaja was already an emerging town by 1950, being a district headquarters of the colonial administration. Ubiaja was also a Local Government Headquarters under the Western Region.

Uromi was another town where a lot of Igbo settled before the war. Uromi like Lagos in Nigeria, is the economic headquarters of Esan people. The town showed a strong trend toward economic modernization before the war. The place had much pull on migrants from other parts of Esan, Edo, Igala, Yoruba, and Igbo. Uromi is to Esan people what Onisha is to Igbo people.²¹⁶ The economic viability of Uromi is the reason why the place was home to a lot of Igbo people before the war. Even the Colonial government took note of the economic viability of the place hence U.A.C. and John Holt shops were located in Uromi.²¹⁷ Osoba affirms that "areas which show a strong trend towards economic modernization... have had almost from the beginning of colonial rule as much pull on migrants..."²¹⁸ Illushi is another area that had much pull on Migrant from the Eastern region and this can be attributed to the fact that Illushi is the only Esan port. Before the war, the area had showed a strong trend toward economic modernization. Apart from trading, the Ibo dominated some local industries before the war. For example, the Awka blacksmith dominated the blacksmith industry before the war. They were mostly at Illushi because of the economic viability of the area.

The River Niger served as a major channel which aided Igbo migration to Esan and Esan movement to the Eastern region before the war. Before the construction of Onisha Bridge in 1964, the Niger became a channel through which Igbo move to Esan and beyond. Iweze notes that "the tendency of Igbo to migrate to other parts of the country and beyond had been attributed to the people's high degree of adaptability and receptivity to change".²¹⁹ In migrating to other places, the Igbo hold tenaciously to their culture and tradition. However, their culture may have been modified by their host community as they have influence the culture of where they migrated to.²²⁰ For example, the coming of Igbo-Awka blacksmith to

Esan brought the word *ojogun* which is now generally accepted word for blacksmith in Esan. Ojogun has silenced *owenan* which is the Esan word for blacksmith.

Esan land on the other hand was rural area and lack employment opportunity before the war. The people were engaged in farming and the lack of white collar job in the area made the people to migrate to different areas in search of better job opportunity other than farming. Although before the war, most job seekers' destination was the North, the ingenuity of the Igbo also served as pull to the Esan as some of them move to the East to acquire skills in different fields such as motor mechanic, welding and trading and equipment operator. However, the North served as pull to both the Esan and the Igbo before the war. The reason for this was that the educational imbalance created by the colonial legacy made the Northerners to lack the educational requirement to handle the administrative jobs after independence.

In Todaro's theory on rural-urban migration, migration is predicated on economic indices. The difference between urban and rural income is a propelling factor. Consequently, the migrant moves to areas with better economic opportunity. This is why Todaro notes that "the migrant is much rational and calculative in his decision to shift to a particular city."²²¹ The expected wage and the probability of obtaining job is a determining factor in the choice of the migrant destination. Mabogumjie model also called the system model maintains that rural-urban migration in Africa is determined by the relationship between urban and rural system. In his submission, there are factors which push migrant to move to a place. The information of abundant available jobs will influence migrant movement to the place and lack of job in a particular area will also induce movement of people away from the place.²²²

CHAPTER THREE

NIGERIAN-BIAFRAN WAR, 1967-1970

When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, there was high expectations considering the euphoria which ushered in the independence. The challenge before the country was how to devise strategy that will protect the interest of all groups in the state. However, within six years, the country was engaged in a civil war which lasted from 1967 to 1970.

Immediate Causes of the War

The 15th January 1966 coup led to series of events which finally ended in the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970. The coup was led by five majors and the five majors were led by Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogu, Adewale Ademoyega, Donatus Okafor, Chris Anuforo and Emmanuel Ifeajuna. The coup which was meant to eradicate corruption, tribalism and nepotism led to the death of prominent Northern and Western politicians and officers.²²³ Those killed were: Alhaji Ahmadi Bello, Premier of Northern Region, Brigadier S.A. Ademulegun, Col. R.A. Shodeinde and Kur Mohammed, The Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Finance Minister, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, Brigadier Z. Maimalari, Lt. Cols J.Y. Pam, Col. A.C. Unegbe and A. Largema. Another prominent person killed was Chief S.L. Akintola, Premier of Western Region.²²⁴ Major General Oluleye notes that the Yorubas in the group had acted faithfully by killing Akintola but the Ibo among the groups betrayed the cause by sparing the life of Dr Michael Okpara. He affirms further that Nzeogu planned to clean the entire nation but some few Igbo officers in the groups thought otherwise.²²⁵

The news of the coup was initially received with nationwide celebration. People were happy with the hope that the coup would end the high rate of corruption and ethnic tension in the country.²²⁶ But when the pattern of killing was revealed, the coup created another serious

political problem in the country. Nzeogu was disappointed with the general development of the coup, especially the development in the south. Madiebo notes:

Nzeogwu was utterly disappointed with this development and began to plan a deliberate act on the south to crush Ironsi's men. He blamehis failure on certain officers who had failed to implement their parts of the coup even though they had given their full support during the planning stage.²²⁷

This showed that Nzeogu was not happy with the one sided killing of the coup. The Northerners began to see the coup as an attempt by the Igbo to dominate the politics and the army of Nigeria. The reasons was that apart from the fact that the coup brought Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo to power as head of state, the plotters did not kill the Premier of the Eastern Region.

Ademoyega notes:

By 1965, Nigeria had only one Major General, that is J.T Aguiyi Ironsi, the GOC of the Army, there were three Brigadiers (Ademulegun, Maimalari and Ogundipe), three Colonels (Adebayo, Kur Mohammed and Shodeinde), and a few Lieutenant-Colonels and many Majors. The senior officers, which is, Colonels and above, were totally committed to the Balewa Government and were pre-occupied with sustaining Balewa in power and preserving themselves in the upper hierarchy of the Army.²²⁸

The Northerners had maintained that since the coup had planned to eliminate senior officers why was Ironsi not killed? The accusation of the Northerners sounded contradictory due to the fact that the coup was foiled by Ojukwu in Kano and Ironsi in Lagos, both of Igbo extraction. Nzeogu had announced on January 16, 1966 that Ojukwu would be disposed as soon as possible for being enemy of the coup.²²⁹ Moreover, an Igbo officer, Col. Arthur Unegbu was killed because he refused to hand over the keys of an armoury. Undiyaundeye argued that "The gloomy mood in the Northern region would have been cleared if Aguiyi Ironsi, who became the head of the state had acted swiftly to punish the mutineers that were held in different prison across the country".²³⁰ Elechi Amadi notes that "from this point I had a strong feeling that there would be serious inter-tribal conflict."²³¹

The council of Minister handed over the government to Major General Aguiyi Ironsi on the 16th January, 1966 and on the 17th January 1966, Ironsi approved Governors for the regions: Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi for the West, Col. David Ejoor for the Midwest, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu for the East and Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina for the North. It must be emphasised that Nzeogwu had surrendered to Aguiyi Ironsi on the condition that they would be granted amnesty.²³² Before January Coup, Nigerian National Alliance, NNA were secretly planning what look like coup against the Easterners. Opia affirms this thus:

On January 13, 1966, the Sarduana who had been on pilgrimageto Mecca, returned to the capital of the North, Kaduna. The following day there was a secret meeting between the Saduana, Chief Akintola and the commanding officer of the first Brigade, Brigadier S. O. Ademolegun. The later was in fact in command of the entire Nigerian Army. Previously the Federal Minister in charge of Defence, Alhaji Muhammed Ribadu had cleared the way for NNA action by ordering the army commander, Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, to take his accumulated leave. The Inspector General of Police, Mr. Louis Edet, had been ordered on leave and the Deputy Inspector General of Police had been sent into premature retirement in order that he might be replaced by an Hausa, Alhaji Kam Salem.²³³

With this, if the January 15th coup had not taken place, there was already a secret coup against the Igbo race in Nigeria and this the Igbo would not have tolerated. It therefore means that the civil war would have still been inevitable without the Nzeogu coup.

Indeed the Igbo would have resisted all attempts to subject them to the background. Aja-Akpuru-Aja affirmed that "Conflict index includes; actions and responses that seek to put the interest(s) of the other party in a disadvantage position."²³⁴ In the same vein John Locke notes: "and hence it is that he who attempt to get another man into his absolute power does thereby put himself into a state of war with him..."²³⁵ The South would have resisted all the attempt to subject them to political slavery. We are not justifying coup as means of changing a failed government, but "when the young army officers struck on January 15th all the element to justify a sudden and violent change of leadership were present."²³⁶

Ironsi did not handle the reaction of the Northerners with caution or was insensitive to the way they see the coup and went ahead to promulgate Decree No. 34 on May 24th, 1966.²³⁷ He placed Igbo officers in strategic commands. Of twenty-one officers promoted to the rank of Colonel, eighteen were Igbo. Equally baffling was the way he surrounded himself with Ibo bureaucrats and advisers.²³⁸ Scholars are unanimous that Ironsi's greatest mistake was Decree 34 which abolished regionalism and federal structure replacing it with unitary Government. The scrapping of regional civil service meant that an Igbo man could become a civil servant anywhere in the country and likewise Hausa and Yoruba. The rationale behind the thinking was to "remove the last vestige of intense regionalism"²³⁹ which had bedevilled the country. The matters handled by the Decree were issues which Ironsi has set up a committee to look into but did not wait for the report of the committee before promulgating the Decree. The manner in which it was done made the Northerners suspect the intention of the Decree. However, if one wants to be objective, it is proper to see the way Ironsi handle the situation as failure of statesmanship rather than Igbo plan to dominate the politics of the country. Raph Uwechue argues that Ironsi did not put the coup plotters on trial because doing so would provoke anti-government reaction from the people especially the South and other people that welcomed the coup.²⁴⁰

The promulgation of the Decree 34 led to serious political upheaval in the North on 29th May 1966 in which Easterners were killed and their property destroyed.²⁴¹ The "Decree was seen by the Northerners as part of a master plan by the Igbo to have a total control of both the military and politics of the country."²⁴²

Counter Coup of July 1966

The widespread killings of Igbo in the North following the promulgation of Decree 34 resurfaced as a result of the counter coup of July 29th, 1966. The coup brought Lt Col. Yakubu Gowon, a northerner to power as the Head of State.²⁴³ In the coup, Major Aguiyi

Ironsi and his host, Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi and many officers were killed.²⁴⁴ According to Obasanjo, the motive of the coup was to "revenge upon the East by the North."²⁴⁵ This time around, it was obvious that the coup was meant to enthrone Northern leadership. After the death of Aguiyi Ironsi, Brigadier Ogundipe became the most senior officer in the Nigerian Army and since he was not a Northerner, the coup plotters refused to hand over to him. Lt. Col. Gowon, being the most senior officer from the North was made Head of State by the plotters.²⁴⁶ Those who led the July coup had demanded that the North should secede but Gowon and other few elements in the North opposed the dissolution of the country.²⁴⁷ In Gowon address to the nation, his emphasis was on Nigeria unity but the widespread killing of the Igbo and other Southerners contradicted Gowon's sentiments of the nation's unity. On the 30th July, "Eight officers ranging from Major to second Lieutenant and fifty-two other ranks from warrant officers downwards were killed."²⁴⁸ The killing of the Igbo still continued even when Gowon promised that he would restore law and order in all parts of the country. By 1966, about 50,000 Igbos including men, women and children were massacred in Nigeria²⁴⁹ In the massacre, other Nigerian from the South, including Esan people were also killed by the Northerners in the country. Other minority groups in the East like Ijaw, Ibibio and Efik were also killed as a result of the vengeance directed at the Igbo.²⁵⁰ As the killing became unbearable, the Igbo started reprisal attack on Northerners living in the Eastern Region.²⁵¹ John Locke posited long ago: "It being reasonable and just I should have right to destroy that which threatens me with destruction."²⁵²

In October, Ojukwu ordered that all the Non-Easterners in the East should leave the region.²⁵³

It must be emphasised here that when this order was given, some other ethnic groups in the region like Edo and Esan also moved out of the East. Gowon's first actions when he came to

power were meant to please the North and the West. It is inevitable that he would have to

please the North because his rise to power challenged the Hausa/Fulani. Obaro Ikeme notes:

They reacted quickly by setting up a group known as leaders of thought led by Aliyu Makaman Bida who succeeded Amadu Bello as the leader of NPC; Aminu Kano, leader of NEPU, a party opposed to NPC and an ally of NCNC during the first Republic; and Joseph Tarka, a Tiv and a leader of UMBC, another opposition party which allied with AG in the first Republic.²⁵⁴

These men became the symbol of Northern solidarity. The movement was to make sure Gowon served the interest of the North. Decree 34 suspended by Gowon was meant to serve the interest of the North. The North had rebelled against the Decree 34 on the ground that it was meant to serve the interest of the south. In the same vein, Gowon had to release Awolowo, Enahoro and other prisoners to placate the West,²⁵⁵ so that the North would be saved from fighting multiple enemies.

An Ad Hoc Conference summoned by Gowon was attended by representatives of all the regions of the federation to consider the way forward. But the Eastern delegate was withdrawn from the conference as a result of fresh riots in September.²⁵⁶ With the continued killing of Igbo people, Ojukwu was no longer willing to see reason in any peace meeting called by Gowon's Government. "He boycotted meetings of Supreme Military Council and refused to send delegate to any further constitutional conference."²⁵⁷ The refusal of Ojukwu to participate in further peace meetings indicated the readiness of the Eastern region for war. "The national peace committee made up of eminent Nigerian was established in April, 1967",²⁵⁸ to avert the problem and yet there was no headway. Some eminent Obas from the West also visited the East as parts of the effort to put a stop to the crisis.²⁵⁹

After all the efforts to resolve the conflict failed, at the initiative of the Ghana's Head of State, General Ankrah, the parties to the conflict gathered at Aburi in Ghana in January, 1967 for a peace meeting. The Federal Government delegation was led by Gowon while the

Eastern region delegation was led by Ojukwu. Offodile notes that "It was the failure to respect the terms of Aburi Accord that led to the war."²⁶⁰ Obasanjo affirms that all other members of the delegations except Ojukwu was ill prepared for the meeting. Some federal delegations refused to go because of the short notice.²⁶¹ Some people have argued that Ojukwu had his way in Aburi because of his intellectual and mental wizardry. At first it appears as if the Aburi meeting has produced a working solution to the conflict but the issue of the interpretation separated the parties apart. In Aburi conference, Ojukwu was the only one that came with clear objectives, consequently he proposed an agenda for the meeting which was accepted.²⁶² If Gowon had respected the Aburi Accord, the war would have been averted. Ademoyega affirms thus:

Ojukwu had scored all his points at the meeting, if Gowon were to be faithful to the resolutions, the Nigerian civil war might have been averted. But as was usual with him, as soon as Gowon stepped down in Lagos, he gave his ears to the federal civil servants and to his masters, who had advised him that he had conceded too much to Ojukwu. There and then he was prepared to dishonour his own word and break the terms of Aburi agreement.²⁶³

Ojukwu had made it known to the Council at Aburi that "centralization is a word that stinks in Nigeria today."²⁶⁴ The Aburi Accord was implemented as Decree No. 8 on 17th March, 1967 but before the Decree was issued, Ojukwu refused to attend the Supreme Military Council meeting in Benin to rectify it. He did not attend the Council meeting "because he had earlier rejected the draft of the Decree which made a mockery of the Aburi resolution."²⁶⁵ Section 70 and 71 were the most offensive clauses of Decree 8. This section gave the Supreme Military Council power to declare a state of emergency in any parts of Nigeria with the approval of the Head of State and three governors. Section 71 further gave the Head of State and three governor's power to legislate for the region during the state of emergency without the approval of the region's governors.²⁶⁶ This time around, the die was cast and Ojukwu was bent on war if Aburi Accord was not implemented.

On 5th May, 1967, a National Conciliation Committee headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo arrived Enugu and held peace talk with Ojukwu. This meeting which was the last minute peace effort could not produce any result that could put a stop to the impending war. Philip Effiong affirms that Awolowo assured Ojukwu of Western support and the fact cannot be denied that this Awolowo promise must have gone a long way to strengthen Ojukwu determination to secede.²⁶⁷ Awolowo was not the Governor of Western region even though he had a strong political affluence in the region. This promise to Ojukwu at that time should come from the Governor of the region. The Eastern regions stakeholder were surprised on 12th August 1967 when Awolowo categorically called on Yoruba to support the Federal Government to crush the Biafra. Based on the Awolowo action, some Easterners tend to generalise the situation by saying Yoruba cannot be trusted. Awolowo should be singled out for condemnation rather than the whole Yoruba. The situation is like the Hausa seeing Aguiyi Ironsi's failure of statesmanship as failure of Igbo race.

Gowon had hoped to divide Nigeria into twelve states to address the crisis. He planned to separate the oil producing part of Niger-Delta from the Eastern Region. Under this plan, the Eastern Region would be composed solely of the Igbo ethnic group. These plans were meant to destroy the economic base of the region and with the hope that it will humble Ojukwu.²⁶⁸ The plan to create states out of the Eastern region was a weapon to fight the war. Ojukwu had made it clear at Aburi that the people had lost confidence in the Nigerian Government and because of this no promise from the government would be taken seriously by the Easterners. In the words of Ojukwu at Aburi:

So we find ourselves in a position where there has been a mass population movement. The basis oneness was destroyed and I submit to this meeting that of people from the East today, no matter what promises we make here indeed, no matter what results we make here, the people of the East will not go back to any part of Northern Nigeria.²⁶⁹

In May 1966, despite the senseless and indescribable killings and the provocation felt by the people of the East, they heeded the appeal of Aguiyi Ironsi, Ojukwu and Northern Emirs to go back to the North. Ojukwu in a banquet in honour of the Emir of Kano who few days after the killings, was installed as Chancellor of the University of Nigerian, Nsuka, said: "The innocent blood thus shed will be accepted as the supreme purchase of price for the solid and everlasting unity of this country."²⁷⁰ Many Easterners heeded and returned to the North with the hope that all would be well. But the massacre of Igbo in the North after the July 29th coup was unprecedented in human race. This is why Ojukwu told them at Aburi that no matter what promises made, the people of the East would refuse to go back to the North. This time around the Igbo had been provoked. Ojukwu was realistic in suggesting a forum of government that would move the people apart until temper cools down. Ojukwu said thus:

In all sincerity, in order to avoid further friction and further killings, I do submit that the only realistic form of government today until tempers can cool is such that will move people slightly apart and a government that controls the various entities through the people of their areas. It is better that we move slightly apart and survive. It is much worse that we move closer and perish in the collision.²⁷¹

The above reflects a highly decentralized or a confederal government which was suggested by Ojukwu and accepted by all parties at Aburi. Decree 8 which gave the Head of State power to declare state of emergency in any region with approval of three governors negated what Ojukwu suggested and was accepted at Aburi. The state of emergency clause was planned in such a way to cage Ojukwu because the other three governors were already on the federal side. Ojukwu was the man alone that the conspiracy was meant for.

Declaration of Republic of Biafra

The failure of Gowon to adhere to the Aburi resolution and the lack of integrity on the part of the Nigerian Military Government in the negotiation toward a united Nigeria, pushed Ojukwu to take extreme measure to create the republic of Biafra. Iweze affirms thus:

On March 31, 1967, Ojukwu threatened a unilateral action to implement his own version of the Aburi agreement, and thus began the process of secession. He promulgated a number of Edicts:

Revenue Collection Edict, the Legal Education Edict and the Court of Appeal Edict. Under the Edicts, the Eastern Regional Government appropriated all the federal revenue collected in the region. Ojukwu also seized and took over all the Federal Government departments, corporation and property in the region and became increasingly defiant and generally behaving as a sovereign. The Federal Government retaliated by blocking all ports in the East.²⁷²

The promulgation of the Edict made the spirit of fighting the war high in the East. All those who were robbed of their possessions and traumatized fled to the East and in their hopelessness yearned seriously for the war. There were also people who lost their relatives in the pogrom in the North. By May, 1967, the people of Eastern region preferred secession to any other form of political association with other parts of Nigeria.²⁷³ On May 27th, 1967, the consultative committee was summoned by Ojukwu and after reviewing the events in the country, from 1914-1967 mandated Ojukwu to declare the sovereign state of Biafra.²⁷⁴

Tension was at fever pitch when Gowon created new states on 27 May, 1967. The Federal Military Government claimed that he took the decision in its determination to maintain the corporate existence of the country and in "pursuance of its duty to ensure freedom and protection for all sections of the Nigerian community. The states were created by Decree No. 27 on May 27, 1967."²⁷⁵ Out of the 12 states created, 3 were created from the East. The Easterners regarded the creation as a reprisal against the Biafra. It was meant to unite the minority in the East against the Biafra agenda and also polarise the region.²⁷⁶

Following the creation of 12 states, on 30th May, 1967, Ojukwu declared the Eastern region the Sovereign State of Biafra. This announcement created jubilation all over the East. Ojukwu declared on the aforementioned date thus:

Now therefore, I Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, by virtue of the authority, and pursuance to the principles recited above, do

hereby solemnly proclaim the territory and region known and called Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and territorial water shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of "The Republic of Biafra".²⁷⁷

Ojukwu maintained that his action was informed by the Federal Government lack of commitment to the Aburi agreement. Gowon tagged Ojukwu's action as "rebellion which must be crushed"²⁷⁸ claiming that he had the duty to preserve and protect the unity of the country. In anticipation for war, Biafra mobilized heavily along her Northern border. The war began with the Federal Government launching of attack on the Republic of Biafra on the 6th July 1967. The world was told that Biafra would be crushed within 48 hours.²⁷⁹ Major General Gowon ordered police action to crush Ojukwu's rebellion. But the actual execution of the police action remained questionable. President Mohammed Buhari on June 5th 2018 reiterated the ideal of police action when he said "Gowon promptly instructed Nigerian troops that they are not fighting enemy but their brothers." According to him, this timely instruction constrained the Nigerian troops from unleashing terror on the Biafra forces.²⁸⁰ Perhaps, this was the reason why few days after the war began, the Biafran forces carried out air raid on Yaba, Apapa, Idah and Oturkpo but the federal forces were reluctant to carry out retaliatory air strike. This was interpreted as weakness and Biafran reaction on Radio was enough to make impatience person lose anger.²⁸¹ Who started the war? This is a question many scholars have been asking. The answer to this question is a straight forward one. Elechi Amadi notes; "The East had rebelled and had broken away; the only way to bring them back was by force of arms and that meant shooting."²⁸² Two out of the three governments loyal to the Federal Government were opposed to the use of force on Biafra but they could not oppose the mobilization for war because of the state of emergency in force. Despite this, the Military Governor of Mid-West, Brigadier Ejoor, held his ground by refusing to let the state to be used as launch ground against Biafra. He was convinced that his officers were not ready for war against Biafra.²⁸³ Bringing Biafra back was a task the Federal Government was bent on

achieving. The oil wealth of the region was a factor in this regard. Undiyaundeye affirms thus:

From the humble beginning of production of 1.8 million barrels per day in 1958, by 1967 the production had soared to 109 million bpd bringing in approximate revenue of €1.8 million and €142.1 million respectively.... Secessionist authorities would have been producing between 170,000 bpd(1969) and 1.3 million (1973) on the high side and earning a revenue of between €7 million (1969) and €90 million (1973) on the low side and between €7 million (1969) and €130 million (1973) on the high side. This would have given secessionist authorities a balance of payment surplus of between €27 million (1969) and €74 million (1973). The secessionist gains from petroleum would have been Nigeria losses since secessionist gains would not be available for redistribution.²⁸⁴

While the oil factor may have contributed to Biafra's determination to secede, it also contributed to the federal government determination to fight to the finish to bring her back. "Without Eastern Nigeria, Nigeria oil output and revenue would reduce by 45%, the foreign exchange availability would also reduce by 40%."²⁸⁵ This provided economic incentive for both the leader of the Federal Government and leader of Biafra to fight. This is why oil remained the flash point in the unhealthy relationship between Ojukwu and Gowon.

Clearly, the Federal Government needed money seriously. It cannot be denied that Ojukwu also needed money seriously. The Eastern army that returned to the East did not come with arms, but the Northern soldiers that left the East went with their guns. Fredrick Forsyth affirms thus:

The Northern born component of the Garrison of Enugu was repatriated to the North by rail, and in accordance with the terms of the 9 August concordat, they were allowed to take with them their arms and ammunition as a protection against being waylaid en route. These arms were then supposed to be sent back after the troops had gotten home. But once in Kaduna, the troops from Enugu kept their weapons and no more was heard about them. Elsewhere the Eastern-born troops were clamouring to return home. Apart from the fugitives of 29 July and the succeeding days, there were other groups who were still intact from the North some of them were sent home, but without arms or escort, and were forced to submit to repeated molesting on the way...²⁸⁶

In the cause of negotiation, the Federal Government succeeded in creating arms imbalance between the Eastern region and the Federal Government to the advantage of the Federal Government. Philip Effiong notes that:

There was very little ammunition available for a planned counter attack, and there was precisely little one could do without ammunition. The promised artillery pieces and heavy mortar by Col. Ojukwu were nowhere to be found, and the few weapons that were available lacked even the first line ammunition with which to feed them. It was a very gloomy picture. This spectre of lack of adequate ammunition and armaments was to haunt the planning staff of Biafra High Command till the end of war.²⁸⁷

Before the Military open confrontation between the Eastern region and the Federal Government, the Eastern region was already being fought strategically by the Federal Government. The region was strategically and calculatively disarmed before the war started. With imbalance in arms, Ojukwu clearly needed revenue to buy arms to fight the war. According to Undiyaundeye:

It was apparently in an attempt to sort out this financial problem that Ojukwu ignited the war when on 12 June 1967, seized Stanley Gray, Shell-BP Manager demanding that the half yearly royalty of €7 million be paid to him. To give teeth to his request, Biafra troops took over all the company installations, including the Port Harcourt refinery.²⁸⁸

At the end, Shell did not pay Ojukwu the money he requested from the company. Wuam highlights the position of oil on the war. He notes that Ojukwu and his people "might have considered secession a viable option after reflection on the oil field located in the region."²⁸⁹ This means that the discovery of oil in this region on January 15, 1956 by Shell D'Archy which later became Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)²⁹⁰ has a role to play in the war.

However, before the outbreak of the war, the Biafra tried to address the problem of arm imbalance with the Federal Government by importing arms and ammunition from France, Spain and Portugal.²⁹¹ Madiebo remarks:

In attempt to demonstrate the strength of Biafran Army, Colonel Ojukwu took some top civilian to the firing range of the First Battalion at Enugu and there, some newly acquired machine guns and automatic rifles were displayed.²⁹²

The Federal Government underestimated the power of Biafra to fight the war. The Nigerian government was conscious that the Biafra prosecution of the war would depend heavily on the importation of arms through the Atlantic Ocean and took the necessary actions and strategy to frustrate this. The Nigerian Navy was used to blockade the sea to prevent shipment of arms and other necessary supplies to the Eastern region.²⁹³ The Federal Government cancelled all flights to the region and even notified the international community that there should be no flight to the region without clearance from Lagos.²⁹⁴

With the declaration of the Republic of Biafra, Ojukwu had a lot of problem to contend with. Some of the problems were artificially created by the Federal Government. The creation of states polarised the region and also shrank the economic base of the region. There was also the problem of Ojukwu self-centred nature which alienated Biafra supporters in and outside the region.²⁹⁵ The problem of influential Igbo like Nnamdi Azikiwe not supporting the war was a strong blow on Ojukwu. Azikiwe cited in Okechukwu Ibeanu et al condemned the war thus:

One of the tragedies of the present war is the emotional involvement of many patriots, including intellectuals and university students... In view of my political past, I have vested interest not only in the preservation of the precious lives the men and women of all the various linguistic groups that constitute Nigeria and Biafra, but I also have a duty to my conscience and to humanity to expose evil and not condone it.²⁹⁶

On the 3rd of September, 1969, Mbadiwe and other Biafrans in London criticized Azikiwe for taking position against Biafra. Zik was criticized for maintaining "that there was no genocide against his own people... When a blockade by air, sea and land is mounted against a whole people, this single act by itself constitutes genocide."²⁹⁷ The group also went further to

condemn Zik's accusation that Ojukwu was responsible for prolonging the war. Mbadiwe affirms this thus:

Azikiwe's statement that as a result of his recent visit and contacts with Lagos, he noticed a considerable degree of flexibility on the side of Lagos Government. I assume that he must put forward a peace plan to both General Ojukwu and General Gowon and found Ojukwu inflexible and Gowon flexible. If so let him publish such plan to the world and point out where General Gowon was flexible and General Ojukwu inflexible.²⁹⁸

Obiechina had earlier reiterated the need for the region to be united when he said: "There is no substitute for the creation of a mass movement which will embody the whole of Biafran people."²⁹⁹ The bulk of the personnel in Nigerian Navy including the Commander, Rear-Admiral J.E.A. Wey came from the Eastern region. Brigadier Ekpo, the Chief of Staff supreme headquarters of the Armed forces of Nigeria is Efik from the Eastern region. Many members of the Federal troops fighting in the East are from the Eastern region.³⁰⁰ Before the proclamation of the Biafra State, both the Federal Government and the Eastern region prepared and mobilized their forces for the war. The war broke out on 6th July, 1967 and on 9th August, 1967, the Biafran forces invaded the Midwest state.

Biafra Incursion into Midwest

The declaration of the Eastern region as the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 made the civil War unavoidable. "Everybody expected now that War would follow. Hence both Biafra and Nigeria were feverishly getting ready."³⁰¹ In Biafra, since their real enemies were Northerners, their defensive efforts were geared towards protecting the northern border³⁰² and the Federal Government also concentrated on the northern border between Nigeria and the East. Consequently, the war broke out in Garkem, a town on the northern border.³⁰³ With Brigadier Ejoor's refusal to allow his region to be used as launching ground for Federal troops

against Biafra, it became inevitable that the northern border would be focal point in the beginning of the war. Ademoyega affirms this thus:

The Military Governor of Midwest state... Brigadier Ejoor, assiduously held his ground, refusing to let his state be used as a launching ground for Federal Military operations against Biafra... This was a proof of courage in a situation where many stooges would, too quickly bow down to a superior authority under the pretext that they had no choice.³⁰⁴

The war was originally intended to be fought with troops from the North. Obasanjo affirms this:

In planning and concept the war was intended to be fought by the troops located in the North and they were to be supplied mainly from Kaduna.³⁰⁵

Perhaps, this was to address the problem of lack of sincerity on the parts of other region like the Midwest and the West to fight with the East. The pogrom was an act committed by the Hausa/Fulani against the Easterners in particular and Southerners in general. Consequently, the Midwest and the West also suffered in one way or the other from the Hausa/Fulani onslaught. Gowon had ordered repatriation of troops to their region of origin on August 9th, 1966³⁰⁶ and this made Northern region to be occupied solely with troops from the Northern region. These troops were the greatest enemy of the Easterners and were perceived to be the formation that can fight the East with determination. Major General Oluleye affirms this:

The strategy also took into consideration the current politics which made the war non-national but between the Northerners and the Ibos as the Western states was yet undecided and was still sitting on the fence while the Mid-Western state Military Administration proclaimed the neutrality of the state by not allowing the state to be used as a battle ground.³⁰⁷

This reason forced the direction of the war to be between North and East. The Federal Government had named the operation Unicord which means solving a problem between brothers and sisters and had underrated the Biafra by promising to use police action to crush the rebellion.³⁰⁸ The town of Ogoja, Nsukka and Bonny fell to the Federal forces in the early

period of the war. The capture of Bonny led to the cutting off of Biafra's Port of Port Harcourt and the sea blockade of Biafra.³⁰⁹ After this achievement, the next target was to capture Enugu, the capital of Eastern Region. Major General Oluleye clearly stated the initial strategy of the war:

The strategy clearly identified as at then two important objectives: The regional capital, Enugu and the university town of Nsukka as the first groups and the economic aspect dealing with the Bonny oil terminal as the other. It was reasonable to assume that the capture of the two key towns, the capture of Bonny Oil Terminal and the sea blockade would force a capitulation.³¹⁰

Consequently, Enugu became the next target since Bonny and Nsukka had fallen to the Federal troops. "The advance onto Enugu by Federal troops was progressing slowly but steadily after the fall of Opi Junction."³¹¹ It was in an attempt to divert the attention of the Federal troops from capturing Enugu that "Ojukwu played a masterly trump card and invaded Midwest State under the command of Brigadier Victor Banjo on the morning of August 9, 1967."³¹² Nwankwo affirms this thus:

The planners calculated that if the West was disturbed, Federal troops would be forced to withdraw from Nsukka and the threat to Enugu would be averted. Secondly, they reasoned that if the battleground was carried near enough to Lagos, the centre might split into pro-Biafra and anti-Biafra factions.³¹³

On the said date, a brigade of 3000 men that were prepared in secret crossed Onitsha bridge and invaded the Midwest, occupying the towns of Warri, Sapelle, Agbor, Uromi, Ubiaja and Benin City, the state capital.³¹⁴ Obasanjo notes that the State was overrun by the Biafra troops without firing a shot or suffering any casualties and attributed this to the cooperation of the Igbo speaking officers who were in majority in the state.³¹⁵ In the same vein, Fredrick Forsyth notes the domination of Midwest army by Western Igbo. He affirms that, "nine out of eleven senior officers of that army were Ika Ibos, first cousins to the Igbo of Biafra."³¹⁶

Apart from the ethnic affiliation, the fact that the Western Igbo suffered the same fate during the pogrom must have contributed to the lack of resistance on the part of Midwest

Army dominated by Igbo speaking people of Midwest State. It must be emphasised that the Midwest Igbo bear the same tribal names with the Eastern Igbo and at the height of the pogrom, the Hausa could not differentiate between Western Igbo and Eastern Igbo. Consequently the Western Igbo easily fell victim to Hausa who made the Igbo their greatest enemy as a result of January coup of 1966 which the Hausa believed was designed by Igbo to eliminate Hausa/Fulani from the politics of Nigeria.

The assertion that the Midwest was easily invaded with the collaboration of Midwestern Igbo officers in the State has been rejected by Iweze. He affirms that "some have argued that the Federal Government used the Midwest State as bait to induce the Biafra to invade the Midwest so as to declare total war on the East."³¹⁷ This made the Biafra border with the Midwest to be left unprotected by the Federal forces. Iweze attributed the easy capture of Midwest by Biafran forces to the poorly blockaded border of Midwest. Ogbemudia, while acknowledging that the Midwest/Eastern border was porous also notes that the Western end of the Midwest border was well protected.³¹⁸ The fact that the Federal Government left the Midwest Eastern border unprotected while the Western border was protected raised other questions. Perhaps, the Federal Government was bothered by Brigadier Ejoor's remark that "he will not allow his state to be used as a launching ground for Federal Military Operation against Biafra."³¹⁹ There was need for the Federal Government to cooperate with Ejoor to avoid risking facing two enemies (East and Midwest) at the same time. This would have been disastrous for the Federal Government. It could also be because of this Ejoor's remark that the Federal Government refused to provide the Fourth Area Command in Benin with sufficient arms that would enable them engage in battle against aggressors. Consequently, they do not have any option than to surrender.³²⁰ The Federal Government thinking of not equipping the forces in Midwest was strategic because equipping

the Midwest forces whose position on the war was not certain might end up to be one arming his enemies.

Ojukwu planned and executed the invasion of the Midwest with the Brigade of three Battalions under the command of Brigadier Victor Banjo. Obasanjo gave the breakdown of the invasion plan: One Battalion under Lt. Col. Mike Ivenso was assigned the Northern sector to move through to Owo, Akure and seize Ibadan, the capital city of Western State. A second Battalion under Lt. Col. Festus Akakpawas assigned the centre moving through Benin, Ore, Ijebu-Ode to seize Lagos. The third Battalion under Lt. Col. Humphrey Iwuchukwu Chukwukawas assigned the South moving through Sapele, Warri, and advancing along the coast to launch a two-prong attack in Lagos.³²¹

Brigadier Victor Banjo was a Yoruba officer detained in Enugu in connection with January 1966 coup. Before the outbreak of the war, Banjo was in detention in Enugu and released with others like Chukwuma Nzeogwu by Ojukwu during the war and fought on the side of Biafra in the war even though he rejected Ojukwu's idea of secession.³²²

The choice of Banjo was to have the support of the Yoruba people whose territory would serve as gateway to Lagos and perhaps to form a Southern union to isolate the North.³²³

Nwankwo affirms this:

Indeed the sudden preference for Banjo as commander of the invading forces was on the ground that, being a Yoruba, he could most easily contact Yoruba leaders for an alliance in a possible North-South conflict.³²⁴

When the Biafra forces took over the Midwest firmly, they broadcasted from Benin that the state has been liberated. In a broadcast to the people of the state, Brigadier Banjo assured the people that the liberation army from Biafra are in co-operation with the Midwestern troops to protect the area from the invasion of Northern troops.³²⁵ After this Broadcast, more Biafran troops came from the East and some detachment were sent to the

border between the Midwest and the West. The Biafra forces reached the Ofusu river/bridge, the border with Western region and here there was a brief battle with the Federal troops. Fredrick Forsyth notes that because the federal troops that engaged Biafra at Ofusu Bridge were from the Federal Guard, Biafra contended that for the Federal Guard to be used, there must be nothing left. This singular reason gave Biafran forces an impetus to press forward. On 20th August, the Biafran troops stormed Ore³²⁶ and they were dislodged and driven back toward Benin by the Federal forces. Iweze described the battle at Ore thus:

The battle of Ore was one of the most crucial engagements of the war because if the Biafran troop has continued their thrust forward with the same momentum towards undefended Lagos few days earlier than they did, the whole cause of the war would have changed and Lagos would have been taken. But the Biafran troops faltered, and the loss of this immense opportunity was very costly for Biafra in the later part of the war.³²⁷

As the Biafra retreated back to Benin, Ojukwu replaced Brigadier Banjo with Major Albert Okonkwo, a medical doctor from Western Igbo as the Military administrator of the state on 17th August, 1967.³²⁸ The appointment of Major Okonkwo gave room for non-Igbo groups like Esan to see the Biafran incursion into Midwest as part of the design of Biafra expansionism. It bordered on poor strategy on the part of Ojukwu³²⁹ Meanwhile, Col. Ogbemudia who later became Military Administrator of Midwest went into hiding but later constituted a local resistance group to liberate the State from the Biafra troops. By August 18, 1967, hundreds of youths were recruited and trained for this purpose. The group adopted various tactics to subdue Biafra soldiers. While the boys were trained to spit salt into the eyes of Biafran troops, the girls were asked to entice the Biafran soldiers and get strategic military information from them.³³⁰ This guerrilla movement had about 180 women and 600 men by August, 1967. Although the group was successful at the beginning, it was later betrayed by some members and this made the group to suffer a lot of casualties from Biafran forces. Consequently, the guerrilla group finally collapsed and Ogbemudia escaped to Lagos to join

the second Division on the 9th September, 1967. The declaration of Midwest State an independent Republic of Benin by Major Albert Okonkwo on September 20, 1967 lasted briefly as the 2nd Division under the command of Murtala Mohammed recaptured Benin. Ogbemudia was appointed military Administrator of Midwest on the 17th September, 1967.³³¹ "With this Military reverses, Ojukwu found his Midwest invasion played on himself and he blamed it on the treachery of his officers."³³²

Most commentators have described Biafran Midwest adventure as Biafran's blunder. Alabi Isama notes that "Biafran entry into the Midwest was to my very mind a military blunder."³³³ Obasanjo in the same vein notes, "Ojukwu had made a very costly mistake by subverting the neutral if not the sympathetic government of Midwest state."³³⁴ The invasion of the Midwest, planned and executed by Ojukwu, nearly took his life. Although Ojukwu may have his reason for the choice of Banjo to command the Biafran forces that invaded Midwest, the choice was a wrong calculation according to his second in command, Philip Effiong. Effiong had earlier advised Ojukwu against the Midwest invasion in general and the use of Banjo in particular. Effiong notes: "I did not think Banjo shared his political concept and philosophy and did not think he would be loyal to him once he got to the Mid-West."³³⁵ Victor Banjo joined Biafra because he was released by Ojukwu and this does not mean he supported the course of Ojukwu. While he was with the Biafra, he had a separated ambition. Ben Gbulie described the use of Banjo as:

A monstrous gamble. It is like paying your own assassin... Ojukwu wanted to use Banjo to get to Lagos. But Banjo also wanted to use Biafra troops to get to his people, to overthrow Gowon and become head of Nigeria... The plan was that Banjo would get to Lagos with our own troops, the Biafran troops, overthrow Gowon, and take over Nigeria. Then they would send Ifeajuna to the East, to his own Biafra, flush out Ojukwu and then he, Ifeajuna would become the Governor of the East. This was their plan. And a man named Ademoyega would be made the Governor of the West.³³⁶

This means that Biafra invasion of Midwest resulted to a double agenda or the pursuit of two causes on the parts of Biafra(Ojukwu and Banjo causes) and the result of this was fractionalization of the Biafran cause and thus invariably affected Biafran's line of defence adversely. Ojukwu later executed four of his senior officers for allegedly conspiring to overthrow him. The officers were Brigadier Victor Banjo, Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Philip Alele and Sam Agbam.³³⁷

The Midwest invasion brought sharp reaction from the federal government who now declared total war on Biafra. The notion of police action, even when it was hypocritical, was abandoned for a stronger action against Biafra. It cannot be denied that the Midwest invasion did slow down the advance to Enugu for a while. Effiong notes: "the advance to Enugu was resumed after slowing down for a while due to Midwest operation."³³⁸ With the takeover of Midwest, total war became the only option for the federal Government if the territorial integrity of Nigeria was to be maintained. The invasion gave the war a more national outlook as opposed to a war between Hausa/Fulani and the Igbo of the East. The invasion of the Midwest and some parts of West made the Federal Government to get the sympathy of the people of these regions as men and women of both regions who had hitherto sat on the fence began to sympathise with the Federal Government.

The Midwest occupation swung the operation of the war from North/South, undertaken by mainly Federal forces of 1 Division to a national one. The occupation of Midwest made the opening of 2 Division necessary when it became obvious that there was need to cage Biafra to uphold the unity of Nigeria. The creation of 2 Division of the Nigerian Army under the command of Col. Murtala Mohammed brought an additional sector into the war strategy on the part of the Federal Government. The additional Western sector was under the responsibility of the 2 Division which has the objective of making sure that Biafran advance was curtailed.³³⁹ With this, the operational sector of the Nigeria Army became three-

North, West and South and the sector had their respective divisions- 1 Division, 2 Division and 3 Division. 1 Division was commanded by Muhamadu Shuwa and was in charge of Northern sector. 2 Division, commanded by Murtala Mohammed was in charge of Western sector and 3 Division commanded by Benjamin Adekunle, was in charge of Southern sector.³⁴⁰ With the three Divisions, the secessionist was caged and this went a long way in sealing Biafran's fate.

The Midwest invasion did reduce or slow down the advance on Enugu. According to Madiebo, the operation "relieved pressure from our own troops in the northern sectors of the war."³⁴¹ However, the invasion which according to Ojukwu, was meant to liberate the South from Northern domination strengthened the South against the Biafrans. Achebe revealed that "there was also growing discontent among the Biafran soldiers who were only there on a military assignment but increasingly found themselves targets of local hostility."³⁴² This means that the "invasion shook Nigerians out of their complacency. Massive recruiting of Yoruba and non-Ibo Mid-Westerners into the Federal armies dates from this time."³⁴³ The invasion extended the war beyond Biafran territory and this was to the disadvantage of the Biafrans. Given Biafran scarce resources and the distances involved (Asaba to Lagos), it can be said that the Biafrans embarked on an operation which they failed to study properly. The implication of this was that the Biafran army became overstretched as they lack the resources to take new commitments occasioned by the extension of the war to new areas. Thus, the Biafran invasion of Midwest was a factor in the defeat of Biafrans in the war.

CHAPTER FOUR

ESAN AND THE NIGERIAN-BIAFRAN WAR, 1967-1970

It has been assumed in some quarters that the breaking away of Biafra from Nigeria might lead to balkanization and instability in this part of the continent. Although historical antecedents like the break-up of central Africa, Mali and Malaysia does not justify this, the political structure of Nigeria made it prone to instability after break away of Biafra.³⁴⁴ Even in the Midwest, it was certain that the Western Igbo group and the non-Igbo groups were divided on some vital issues of national concern. The coming together of the people under one region did not completely eliminate the identities of the groups which formed the region. The Midwest Igbo opposed the Midwest position at the 1966 constitution conference where Midwest supported the preservation of federation with a strong centre. Omoigui notes:

At the September 1966 constitutional conference for the political future of the country, the Midwest was the only region to support the preservation of a federation with a strong centre. This was based at the time of enlightened self-interest, because the leadership feared that the barely three years old oil, cocoa, rubber, timber and port rich region will in all likelihood become a target of hostile intent and domination by its larger, more cohesive, more organized and more powerful neighbors. Midwestern Igbo officers who felt the confederate and even secessionist arrangement proposed by other regions was a better approach opposed this position hammered out by the Urhobo Governor, Lt. Col. Ejoor, Chief Anthony Enahoro (Ishan-Edo), and a group of non-Ibo intellectuals from the University of Ibadan. Such disagreement over policy reflected deep divisions within the political milieu over which Ejoor presided.³⁴⁵

At the constitutional conference, the Northern regional delegation proposed that the country should be made up of autonomous states with the right to own her military and police. This is a complete right to secede from the country. The Western Regional Delegation proposed a

commonwealth of Nigeria to be composed of the existing Regions, with Lagos as a part of the west. The West went further to propose that the country should be a federation of eighteen states with each state having its own military and police and that each region should be at liberty to secede. The Northern and Western delegation agreed on annual rotation of power at the Centre.

There was much similarity between the proposals from both delegations. The Eastern delegation proposed a central authority with executive chairmen whose decision must be approved by the regional Governors. The implication is that the central Head of state would not have executive power. The Eastern delegation went further to propose that the regions' representatives should be elected and paid by their regions. The Midwest was the only region that advocated for true federalism. The survival and unity of the country was paramount to the Midwest.³⁴⁶ Be that as it may, the Midwesterners were not unanimous in their position. The Igbo group objected to the proposal of true federalism. The true Federalism became the position of the non-Igbo group like Esan. Chief Anthony Enahoro was the leader of the Midwest delegation that were concerned with the unity of the country.

Esan and Biafran Occupation of Midwest

The invasion of Midwest at 3am on August 9, 1967, the fourth anniversary of the creation of the Midwest, created hostility between the Midwest Igbo groups and thenon-Igbo groups like Esan. The political leaders of the Midwest had made their position known to Gowon "that they wanted no part of a civil war and that the region would be neutral in the event of any hostility."³⁴⁷ Achebe argued that the leadership must have taken this position not only because of the desire for peace but due to the multi ethnic nature of the region where a sizeable population is Igbo.³⁴⁸ The Biafrans had entertained the fear that the federal

government would force Midwesterners to enlist into the Federal army to fight against them. This would undermine the neutrality of the region in the war.³⁴⁹

However, the Western Igbo and the Non-Igbo groups like Esan had sympathy for the Biafrans for the persecution they had passed in the hands of the Northerners. Another factor that initially attracted them to the plight of Biafrans was that in all the various crises like the 1966 pogrom, some of them almost suffered the same fate with the Igbo. At the height of the killing in the North, every Southerner was a target. Many Esan people came back home. In 1966, the Midwest rehabilitation committee registered 50,000 who had returned home. Some of them had lost their parents, property and means of livelihood. Midwesterners returning from the North were transported to Benin to their respective homes at a cost of £12,000 to the Midwest Government.³⁵⁰ Ajemi Arebha and Isidhome Arebha, both from Ugbogha, came back home with their families as a result of the killing abandoning their properties and jobs.³⁵¹ In Ekpoma, Amieyi Omokhodion and Okaineme Sunday ran back home from Kano and Jos abandoning their property.³⁵² Some Esan were killed. Aibueku Samson said that at the height of the 1966 crisis in the North, all Southerners were regarded as *Iyamiri* and were treated almost the same way as Igbo. He said Salami Ogbame from Igor, Ekpoma was killed in the North in the 1966 pogrom.³⁵³

Benedict Oviawe, a Nigerian Rail worker, ran back to Ebelle from Kafaachan now in Kaduna State. In the same vein, Mr. Felix Omoghigho and Sunday Irabor ran back to Ebelle from Jos and Kaduna respectively leaving their properties.³⁵⁴ The police reported in 1966 that out of about 500 people killed, majority were Igbo.³⁵⁵ This is a reflection that other ethnic groups from the south, had the same tragic experience with the Igbo. Those that returned home narrated the way and manner the Igbo were slaughtered in the North and this made the Esan people to initially sympathize with the Biafran cause.

Moreover, the Biafran propaganda which was meant to get international support also gave Biafra local support. The propaganda brought the misery which Igbo faced in the hand of the Federal Government to the doorstep of the Esan people. Tony Byrne revealed the tragedy the Igbo faced in the hand of the federal forces thus:

The horrific memory of what I had seen and experienced during the past few days in Biafra replaced my fears. Those haunting sights would never leave me. The dead and dying lying everywhere on the streets. The cries of the starving children, the frightening dim of exploding shells and rocket and the hopelessness reflected in the sunken faces of hungry, displaced people. They had moved from one refugee camp to another, trying to avoid the advancing Nigerian Army. Now their country was reduced to a small enclave, leaving them nowhere to run, nowhere to escape. The frightened face of a young boy- Soldiers lying motionless on an army truck, both legs blown off, was vivid in my mind. I had given him the last rite, but beyond that, all I could do was hold his hand as he died. There were other soldiers, too, fleeing from the war-front, throwing off their uniform from their half-starved bodies, mingling with civilians, hoping to lose their identity.³⁵⁶

Communication in war makes it possible for each parties in a conflict to strengthen it cause and weaken that of the opponent. The emancipation proclamation by President Lincoln was a strong propaganda which made it difficult for European governments to support the confederacy in American civil war. This laid their psychological basis for the war.³⁵⁷ The Biafran propaganda created indecision initially on Esan people.

Nonetheless, Esan people are one of the ethnic group in the Midwest which suffered from both sides in the war. "At the height of the crisis in 1966, Ojukwu made an obnoxious proclamation ordering all non-Eastern Region elements out of the East. More than 15,000 Midwesterners were affected by Ojukwu's decision."³⁵⁸ The Esan people were now faced with the situation of running home from both the North and East. As the details of Biafran invasion of Midwest reached Esan, indecision turned to anger at what the people called unprovoked attack. The Esan people had expected Biafran to direct their forces towards their enemy (the Hausa/Fulani). The Esan people before the invasion were sympathetic toward the

Biafran cause. The position of Esan and other non-Igbo group before Midwest invasion was affirmed by Obasanjo:

This was the turning point of the civil war. Ojukwu had made a very costly mistake by subverting the neutral if not sympathetic government of Mid-West State and by invading the west. He compounded the mistake by his air raids on, and attempts through the agent to blow up installations in Lagos. The non-Igbo Mid-Westerners and the Yorubas suddenly became fully aware of the dangers of "Igbo domination", oppression and maladministration that would be their lot if their land should be conquered and occupied. The wars had been ruthlessly brought to the homes of non-Igbo speaking people of the Mid-West and dangerously close to the doors of the Yoruba-speaking people of the West and Lagos. This in a way rallied these different groups solidly behind the Federal Military Government in its effort to crush the rebellion and as a result of that gamble and miscalculation by Ojukwu, many young men from this area reported for recruitment.³⁵⁹

The invasion destroyed the attention from the people the Biafran had achieved with their propaganda. The Esan people saw Biafran in their domain without their consent and so there was fear on the part of the people about which role they would play under Biafra. John Locke posited that "for I have reason to conclude that he who would get me into his power without my consent would use me as he please when he has got me there."³⁶⁰

With the violation of their territorial integrity without their consent, the desire of the youth of the area was strengthened to join the Federal Army to defend the area. Thus, when Anthony Enahoro called on the youth of the Midwest in Lagos to join the Federal Army to liberate the area, the youth happily turned out. In Esan Division, out of the 100 recruited, 80 passed the medical test in Lagos. Anthony Enahoro make sure the newly recruited Midwesterners were not sent to Zaria for training for their safety. They were trained in Lagos. When they passed out from training in 1967, the newly recruited soldiers including all those from Esan division were moved to the war front in the Midwest through the sea via Lagos to Excavos. Captain Augustus Akhomu was the captain of NNS Ogojia, the ship that move them from Lagos to Excavos. Apart from Akhomu, Lt. Col. Eromobo was in the squad.³⁶¹

In Benin, Captain Mike Obiyan from Usugbenu, Irrua was captured by the Biafrans and was made a commander. He led the Biafrans to Igweben through Opoji and Ugbegun boycotting his village, Irrua. Captain Obiyan defected back to the Federal forces on their way to Irrua in September 1967.³⁶² The defection of captain Obiyan demonstrated that perhaps, he may have accepted joining the Biafra out of safety of his life. When Ojukwu ordered all non-Easterners to leave the East in 1966, some Esan youth remained behind in the East. They joined the Biafran Army and fought the war against the federal Government. Some later defected to the federal side. Okuekhamen Sylvester testified that “Akpede Edaki from Ekpon joined the Biafran Army in the East because he was in the Eastern region when the war started.”³⁶³

There were also Esan people that were conscripted by Biafran. Patrick Okwobo and Joseph Uzegbe from Ubiaja were captured at Ubiaja and sent to Enugu for training.³⁶⁴ In the same vein, Humphrey Bamidele, a Yoruba resident at Illushi was captured and the family members could not account for him even after the war.³⁶⁵ In most cases, the Esan people that fought on the side of the Biafran were either conscripted or were in the Eastern region when the war started. Most Esan people joined the Federal Army and there must be some reason for that. In the first place, Esan people were comfortable with the newly created Midwestern Region and they were a major player in the ethnic composition of the region. The Esan people believed that they would be highly dominated under the Biafrans. They were opposed to domination by the Igbo as the Igbo were opposed to domination by the Hausa-Fulani. There were structures in the federation that protect the minorities. Raph Uweche affirms this:

As long, however, as the federal structure existed, the ministry in each region had safety valves which in case of need assured them access to protection by the Central Government which controlled not only the Army and the Police but played a big part in initiating development in the country.³⁶⁶

Even at the National level, Esan were not doing badly. In 1967, the newly established Federal Executive Council comprising civilian leaders from the twelve states had Anthony Enaholo as a member. In the council Yoruba were five, two Hausa, one Tiv, one Ijaw, one Esan, one Ekoi, two Kanuri, One Fulani and one Angas. The Igbo member has not been mentioned. Nine of the members were Christians while six were Muslims.³⁶⁷ Below are the members and their portfolio, tribe and religion.

Table 2: Federal Executive Council Members and their portfolios in 1967

S/N	Names	Portfolio	Tribe	Religion
1	Major General, Yakubu Gowon	Cabinet Office Defence and External affair	Angas	Christianity
2	Chief Obafemi Awolowo	(Vice Chairman) Finance	Yoruba	Christianity
3	Commodore J. E. A. Wey	Establishments	Yoruba	Christianity
4	Alhaji Aminu Kano	Communication	Hausa	Islam
5	Alhaji Yahaya Gusua	Economic Development Agriculture & Natural Resources	Hausa	Islam
6	Mr. Wenike Briggs	Education	Ijaw	Christianity
7	Dr. Okoi Arikpo	Trade	Ekoi	Christianity
8	Dr. J. E. Adetoro	Health	Yoruba	Christianity
9	Chief Anthony Enahoro	Information and Labour	Ishan	Christianity
10	Alhaji Kam Selem	(Inspector General of Police) Internal Affairs	Kanuri	Islam
11	Dr. T. O. Elias	Justice	Yoruba	Islam
12	Dr. R. B. O. Dikko	Mines and Power	Fulani	Christianity
13	Alhaji Ali Monguno	Industry	Kanuri	Islam
14	Mr. J. S. Tarka	Transport	Tiv	Christianity
15	Mr. L. O. Okunnu	Works and Housing	Yoruba	Islam

(Source: Unity in Diversity, Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos)

At the state level, Shaka Momodu, Dr. Christopher Okojie and Chief Idiase of Irrua were major players in the regional cabinet. The Esan people had played a major role in the

movement that led to the creation of Midwest. Enoseigbe 11, the Onogie of Ewohimi was everywhere with Shaka Momodu and Dr. Christopher Okojie seeking the people's support for the creation of the Midwest.³⁶⁸ Anthony Enahoro cannot be forgotten for moving the motion for Nigeria Independence. Esan could not have abandoned the Midwest and the nation they fought hard to put in place.

The Midwestern Region where Esan found herself was an oil producing state and perhaps this made Esan to be comfortable and was not prepared to make any alteration. In 1967, the Midwest oil accounted for 1/3 of Nigeria's crude oil production. The region became a source of natural gas as a result of oil exploration in the area. For example, the Ughelli gas by 1969 was already generating electricity which was distributed to other parts of the country.³⁶⁹ Oil was a fundamental issue in the civil war. Meredith captures this thus:

Nigeria's oil rich oilfield, located in the East, was beginning to produce valuable revenues. Starting production in 1958, the oilfield by 1967 provided Nigeria with nearly 20 percent of Federal revenue; within a few years, the figure was expected to double. On that basis alone, the East would prosper far more on its own than by remaining in the Federation. To both sides, control of Nigeria's oil fields became a key goal, propelling the country towards civil war.³⁷⁰

Some scholars have argued that oil was a motivating factor that propelled Ojukwu to secede from the Federation. In the same vein, oil was also a motivating factor in the desire of the federal government to bring the East back to Nigeria Federation. Max Siollun expressed this thus:

The discovery of large deposits of lucrative crude oil in Ojukwu's Eastern Region reinforced Federal desire to maintain a united Nigeria, and to strengthen the powers of the central government in order to obtain and maintain control of earnings from crude oil exports, permitting regional autonomy and control of other resources would have led to spectacular wealth disparity and the other regions.³⁷¹

The region that would have equaled Biafra Region in terms of wealth was the Midwestern region where Esan was located. In the creation of twelve states, the Midwest was the only region that was left intact. The newly created twelve states on May 27, 1967 are as follows: North-Western State comprising Sokoto and Niger Provinces, North-Central State comprising Katsina and Zaria. Kano State comprising the Kano Province. North-Eastern State comprising Bornu, Adamawa, Saradauna and Bauchi Provinces. Benue/Plateau State comprising Benue and Plateau Provinces. West-Central State comprising Ilorin and Kabba Provinces. Lagos State comprising the Colony Province and the Federal Territory of Lagos. Western State comprising the present Western Region but excluding the Colony Province. Mid-Western State comprising the present Mid-Western State. East-Central State comprising the present Eastern Region excluding Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces. South-Eastern State comprising Calabar and Ogoja Provinces, and Rivers State comprising Ahoada, Brass, Degema, Ogoni and Port Harcourt Divisions.³⁷²

The non-oil producing parts of the Midwest like Esan were satisfied with the decision of the Federal Government to let the Midwest remain as it was created in 1963 as it would afford the non-oil producing area the opportunity to benefit from the oil wealth of the region. At the height of the crisis, the hope of everyone was their region. They included the Igbo, Hausa and the people of the Midwest. This made everyone to realize the importance of their place of origin. The Esan people in the Northern region ran home as a result of the pogrom in the North and in the East where they were expelled by a state edict.³⁷³ This notwithstanding if the October 1966 edict had not been promulgated, many non-Easterners like Esan would have fled the East for the same reason. But because it was a state decision, it was taken seriously by those that left the Eastern region. Wille warns that:

Of all the expressions to develop in Nigeria during the past month of strife and unrest, the one with the severe implication for national destruction is that which contains the words "return to the place of Origin". The full impact of this concept is more devastating to

peace and the progress than any yet conceived. When peace returns we may expect again that an undue emphasis will be placed on place of origin. It is indeed strange that this policy, implemented today with obsolete weapons, even in some cases with bow and arrows, can be as destructive to a nation as modern atomic weapons. Ghost cities, idle industries, overcrowded villages; unemployed people are the product already in evidence resulting from this weapon of annihilation.³⁷⁴

With the villages crowded with frustrated and displaced returnees from both North and the Eastern region, the atmosphere was ready for the people to resist any party that would bring the war to their domain.

When the war broke out, Esan land and other parts of the Midwestern region was initially not affected by the war. The area was filled up with displaced returnees from the Northern and the Eastern regions with economic and social activities going on: schools, hospitals, and markets were operating; farmers were going to their farms.

Before the Biafran incursion into Midwest, Esan people were already subjected to emotional and psychological torture as a result of different rumours that the Biafran and the Federal force were coming to attack the region. In a crisis situation, rumour is inevitable. Egoji has this to say on rumour in the war:

Some of the informal news items circulated had no origin to any radio station but were sometimes speculations made to appear real. It was not impossible that some recipients could have misunderstood a story and in an attempt to relate it, reproduced it out of context. Very often, instead of a story dissolving into the shadows of its original form; it ends up expanding into a colossus of invented fact.³⁷⁵

The displaced groups from the Northern and Eastern region capitalized on their situation to serve as agents of rumour peddling. There was constant exchange of information among the groups. The information transmitted by Radio Biafra and the Federal radio were either not understood or were quoted out of context. Major Okonkwo while swearing in members of the Administrative council on August 18, 1967 warned;

That the immediate task facing the members of the council was to combat rumours as rumour has the singular effect of removing confidence either in the social or business intercourse and urged to go to their normal division and discourage rumours with a view to restoring confidence in one another.³⁷⁶

The rumour had the end result of making the people psychological casualty before the Biafran incursion into the area. Apart from the emotional torture, the rumour had the end result of alerting the people that their area might be invaded by the fighting parties.

The Biafran invasion of the Midwest "gave non-Eastern Nigerian the impression that the Biafra's objectives were not limited to self-defense, but that it also had ambitions for territorial expansion"³⁷⁷ Frederick Forsyth declares that 'Ojukwu was at pains to placate the non-Igbo majority of the Midwest and to assure them that he bore them no harm."³⁷⁸ The Esan people regarded the Biafra invasion of Midwest as an army of occupation meant to bring about the domination of the state by the Igbo element of the state. Ogbemudia declared that the Biafra forces invaded the Midwest with the collaboration of Western Igbo officers in 4th Area Command in Benin.³⁷⁹ Omoigui affirms that the collaboration between the Western Igbo to invade Midwest started as far back as April 6, 1967. Almost two months before the proclamation of secession, the special branch police report has alerted the Federal Government of certain activities that were to take on significance later. Two officers from the Eastern region, (Lt. Col. Ude and Major Obioha) were in contact with some of their counterparts in the Mid-West to make arrangements for the possible occupation of the Mid-West by troops from the Eastern Area Command. The pretext would be that the Mi-West was not strong enough to defend itself and that Midwest Igbo needed protection. This occupation was to be coordinated with a simultaneous seizure of the Western region, which (according to the report) was why some individuals (presumably Ojukwu, Awolowo and Adebayo) were advocating that Northern troops leave that region.³⁸⁰

The Biafran had plan to use the Esan as springboard for the operation bypassing Benin and taking of Saborgidda-Oria to Ifon and Ifon to Owo and Owo to Ibadan. The plan was to enter Mid-West through the Illushiby River Niger. Omoigui affirms thus:

Ude and Obioha apparently met with Lt. Col. Igboba, Nwawo, Okwechime, and Nwajei, along with Major David Odiwo and a civilian hotelier, Joseph Nwababa. Igboba and Nwajei reportedly reconnoitered the Illushi and Ubiaja areas of the region to determine their suitability as a springboard for operations. This option would have meant bypassing Benin while advancing through Owo to Ibadan.³⁸¹

Perhaps the reason why the plan was abandoned was the difficulty of moving Military equipment across the River Niger to Illushi. There would have also been less resistance since the Biafran were mostly resisted in Benin the state capital where most of the ethnic groups in the Midwest rose and fell.

Two weeks after the war started, the first effect of the war was felt in Midwest. On July 18, 1967. The Asaba textile mill was forced to close down because the Afam power supply to Asaba was cut off. The pipeline linking the Midwest crude oil from Warri to Port Harcourt was also sabotaged.³⁸² The developments increased apprehension in the Midwest.

The infiltration into the Midwest by Biafran troops took the state by surprise as there was no resistance from the Federal Army in the 4th Area Command dominated by Western Igbo officers. The Non-Igbo group like Esan, Benin, Itokir, Urhobo regarded it as deliberate plan by the Western Igbo to dominate the state. They regarded the early statement made by Col. C. D. Nwawo, the commander of the 4th Area Command as "a political statement intended to give the people a false sense of security..."³⁸³ Alexander Madiebo reported that "the troops available for the operation were grossly inadequate for the enormous task before them, but the chances of success were excellent as little or no opposition was expected for some time..."³⁸⁴

The above indicates that the Biafrans had expected cooperation from the 4th Area command dominated by the Western Igbo. Omoigui notes that “weapons were withdrawn for routine check from non-Igbo soldiers in the 4th Area command.”³⁸⁵ The withdrawal of weapons from the non-Igbo soldier like Esan is a reflection that this group would resist or oppose the Biafran incursion into the state. Even Ojukwu had entertained the fear that the non-Igbo groups would resist the Biafrans in Midwest. The report by Madiebo that Benin was taken over “amidst frantic jubilation by the entire local population”³⁸⁶ cannot be correct. In a broadcast to the people of Midwest, Banjo announced:

Fellow citizens of Mid-Western Nigeria, this is Brigadier Adebukunola Banjo, commander of the liberation Army from Biafra speaking to you. Sometimes in the early hours of yesterday morning, some of you might have woken up to the sounds of some minor firing in the capital city of Benin as well as in some other area of Mid-Western Nigeria, and they thought it was in the process of being invaded by Northern troops. I am happy to reassure you that you have not been invaded by hostile troops. As some of you have found out within the last 48 hours, the soldiers amongst you are disciplined troops of the Liberation Army from Biafra which I command acting in close co-operation with troops of Mid-Western Nigeria to ensure that the territory of the Mid-West is adequately protected from invasion by Northern troops. This action is consistent with the desired intention of Biafra to assist in the Liberation of the people of Nigeria from domination by the Fulani-Hausa feudal clique. I would also like to reassure the people of Mid-Western Nigeria that this is neither an invasion nor a violation of the integrity of the Mid-West. This action of the troops under my command, in close cooperation with their Mid-Western counterparts is designed to insulate the people of the Mid-West from the coercive threats of Northern Military presence in neighbouring areas and occasionally in the Mid-West from declaring its true stand in the Nigeria crisis of the last 18 months. It is my hope that by our presence, the people of the Mid-West will be able to seek their rejection of the fiction that peace in Nigeria is only possible under the conditions that the entire people of Nigeria should be dominated by the Fulani-Hausa feudal clique.³⁸⁷

Brigadier Banjo declared the Midwest an independent region and expressed lack of support for the concept of an independent Biafra. Midwest is the fourth region created in Nigeria by Act of Parliament and if the region wanted to break away from Nigeria, it should not be an

obligation on outsider. It is a right of self-determination. John Stuart Mill, while recognizing the right of self-determination suggested that it is human right but, not an obligation on outsiders.³⁸⁸ For the sixth weeks of Major Okonkwo's administration, approval for expenditure came from Enugu.³⁸⁹

Lt. Col. David Ejoor declared that he would not allow the Midwest state to be used as a battle ground which was taken to mean neutrality by the Biafran. In as far as the 4th Area Command was still being financed and paid by the Federal Government, the neutrality of the state cannot be guaranteed. Although Col. Ejoor supported the Federal Government, he also played the role of mediator. Ogbemudia declared that there were some Midwestern Igbo who wanted the Igbo speaking parts of the Midwest to be merged with their Eastern counterpart. Major Albert Okonkwo who was appointed as Military administrator of the Midwest by Ojukwu was one of them. Ogbemudia declared thus;

Major Albert Okonkwo was no doubt, one of those who had worked and hoped for an Igbo 'resorgimento' in the Midwest. This is the group that favoured the merger of the Igbo speaking area of the Midwest with their kith and kin of the East. In fact a number of notable traditional rulers in the Igbo speaking area confessed to me later when I became the Military Governor that they had subscribed to a petition calling for such a merger out of fear and persuasion by some army officers who felt that a merger was the only logical arrangement.³⁹⁰

The non-Igbo group like Esan rejected such a merger. This became an area of disagreement between the Igbo and the non-Igbo groups like Esan in the state. The Esan people wanted the state to remain as it was carved out from the Western region.

Resistance Movement

When the appointment of Major Albert Okonkwo was announced from Enugu, the Esan people regarded it as a realization of the dream of most Midwestern Igbo. This notwithstanding, there were some Midwest Igbo Military and civilian who were against the Midwest invasion but were afraid to make their position known. The announcement was

followed by imposition of dusk to dawn curfew and other measures inimical to the freedom of the people. Ogbemudia affirms thus:

A dusk to dawn curfew was immediately imposed in major cities and town of Benin City, Sapelle and Warri... only those loyal to the Biafran had passes to come out at night. There were fears of abduction, torture, detention and even murder of opponents... freedom of speech was greatly curtailed.³⁹¹

The new Biafra dispensation favoured the Western Igbo, while the non-Igbo groups lived in fear as torture, abduction and death of non-Igbo group increased. The Biafran onslaught on the non-Igbo group like Esan pushed them to form underground local resistant groups.³⁹²

Resistance movement, according to the US Department of Defense "is an organized effort by some portion of the civil population of a country to resist the legally established government or an occupying power and to disrupt civil order and stability."³⁹³ The movement is common among those who cannot further their cause by legal and peaceful means. On the resistance movement Omoigui declares thus:

Many resistance groups may have operated in the Midwest, but one in particular was organized and very effective. This group was the one formed by Chief Michael A. Ojomo in Benin on August 18th... In a short time, recruitment and training started and volunteers came in hundreds. Soon afterwards, an effective system of hits and runs was in operation... By 26th of August, we had assembled a reliable force of about 600 men and 180 women... supportive citizens, who were too old for action donated their Single and double barrel cartridge guns. Recruits performed armed and armless combat, isolating and capturing Biafran sentries. Night raiders spat salt into the eyes of the soldiers, while attractive girls distracted them with sex, obtained intelligence and even stole their weapons. In a manner reminiscent of the Vietcong in Vietnam, corpses of freedom fighters were recovered at great peril for burial, frustrating the Biafran units who had engaged them in firefight. In the Siluko area, so Biafran soldiers (about half of a company) were drawn by a group of Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri swimmers who lost 16 men in the fight. At the behest of the resistance, female cooks put all kind of things in the meals of the Biafran soldiers. Supported by threatening letters written to harass the Biafran command, rumors spread about the risk of poisoning by locals. It is speculated that even the administrator, Major Okonkwo, stayed away from food cooked by his official cooks, particularly if they were non-Igbo.³⁹⁴

Contrary to earlier views that the resistance group was formed by Samuel Ogbemudia, the movement was formed and financed by Chief Michael A. Ojomo from Uromi and he was the chairman. Ogbemudia was very instrumental in the area of tactical training of the group. The Esan men and women voluntarily joined the other non-Igbo groups to resist the Biafran despite the early attempt to win the heart and minds of the non-Igbo groups. The attempt to win the heart became inevitable because of their limited resources both in man power and equipment.³⁹⁵ Fredrick Forsyth reported that:

There were no Military vehicles in the column, no armour, no artillery. The actual weapon consisted of two mortars and very limited ammunition for them, half a dozen light machine guns (no heavies available) some submachine guns, bolt-action rifle, a newly arrived Russian AK-47 assault rifle, plenty of home-made hand-grenades and commercial quarrying explosives.³⁹⁶

Jorre affirms that in Benin, the Biafra "in early days in particular behaved well, bought rather than stole, cajole rather than command and treated the local population humanely."³⁹⁷ Northerners were killed, but some were hidden by the local populace. But despite the fact that some local leaders visited Enugu to discuss the matter with Ojukwu, it became obvious that the Biafran were not wanted.

When the resistance movement began to be noticed, the secessionist began to move away from areas predominantly occupied by non-Igbo groups. The Igbo civil servant began to move away from Benin to places like Agbor and Asaba even though their fellow Igbo were in control.³⁹⁸ The resistance of Esan and other non-Igbo groups in the state resulted to hostile reaction from Biafrans towards Esan and other non-Igbo groups. On September 25, 1967 a plan to kill non-Igbo groups like Esan in the Mid-West was uncovered in Benin. According to the report:

A plot by the rebels to kill all non-Igbo speaking people in the Midwestern state has been uncovered by Military authorities in Benin, following the recapture of important town in the state.

According to the plan, therebel were to kill non Igbo in the state today, September 25 and identity cardshad been issued to Igbo in the state which they could produce when asked to do so by the rebel soldiers.³⁹⁹

The plan to kill the non-Igbo groups was due to resistance and mass disobedience against the Biafran occupation. Other Midwesterners outside the state also joined in rejecting Biafran occupation of the state. The leader of the Midwestern state in Kaduna, Mr. J. A. Ameh denounced and condemned the Biafran regime in the Midwest. The leader maintained that Midwesterners had not mandated Biafran to pull the state out of the federation.⁴⁰⁰

The non-Igbo Midwesterners in Lagos vehemently rejected and denounced the Biafran occupation. More than 20,000 Isoko and Urhobo people resident in Lagos identified with other non-Igbo Midwesterners to pledge their support to the fight to liberate the state from Biafran occupation.⁴⁰¹ The Esan and other non-Igbo groups in the state regarded the Biafran incursion as an act of colonialism that must be resisted. John Locke posited that "he who attempts to get another man into his absolute power does thereby put himself into a state of war with him... to be free from such force is the only security of my preservation."⁴⁰² The Esan and other non-Igbo groups resisted the Biafrans because the incursionwas without their consent and against their right of self-determination.

Biafran Occupation of Esan Land

The Biafran occupation of Esan did not only alienate the Esan people of the Midwest from the Biafran cause, but also tended to wield the Esan together as a political force with a single direction. The Esan became a strong protagonist of the Federal Government cause. Out of the Midwest total area of 15,344 square miles, Esan occupied 1078 square miles.⁴⁰³ The Biafran troop invaded Midwest on 9th of August, 1967 and it was on that same day the Biafran took over Ubiaja, the headquarters of Esan Division.⁴⁰⁴ Although the Esan people rejected the Biafran invasion of their domain, they did not engage in open confrontation with

the Biafran. When the Biafran arrived in Ubiaja on the August 9, 1967, they occupied St. Benedict Primary School Ubiaja. On arrival, the Biafran troops fired indiscriminately into the air unchallenged. The Biafran forces first went to the police station and collected their guns. This was followed by imposition of curfew and those that violated the curfew were killed. Joseph Okoyomon revealed that one Oyomon man who violated the curfew was killed. Nobody could go out as a result of the curfew. Some Ubiaja youth were captured and sent to Enugu for training. For instance, Patrick Okwobo and Joseph Uzegbe was conscripted and sent to Enugu for training. In Ubiaja, the Biafran captured some policemen and sent them to Enugu for recruitment and most of them died in the war. The Biafran molested women seriously. A high rate of sexual harassment was recorded during their stay in Ubiaja.⁴⁰⁵

Eboh Christ joined the Nigerian army in 1967. He recounted how young girls decided to dress like married women to save them from sexual harassment. The Biafrans mounted a road block at Ukpaja where farmer's farm products were forcefully taken from them. Domestic animals and articles in store were looted by the Biafran fighting forces in Ubiaja. The Biafran forces killed a lot of Hausa people in Ubiaja. Eboh Christ, as the senior Patrol leader, Boys Scout in Ubiaja asked the Biafran to allow them to follow them so that they don't mistake Esan persons for Hausa person and the Biafran refused. Eboh Christ said that Peter Isabo was among those that joined the Biafran army but did not return after the war.⁴⁰⁶

Mr. Enedion John said the Biafran landed at Uromi in August 1967. They were divided into two groups and one group went to the market and confiscated the people's food items and cooking materials like pot, knives, spoons and firewood. Another group led by their commander went to the Onogie palace to seek his response and the Onogie told them he supported them. He gave them food items and prayed for peace to reign. Perhaps, the Onogie told them he supported them for the sake of peace, so that they would not molest his subjects. The Biafran occupied Efadion Primary School and Agba Grammar School. The two schools

were immediately turned to barracks.⁴⁰⁷ Enechion John reveals further that the Biafran forces entered Uromi town in search for the Hausa and Fulani. They killed the Hausa in Uromi and confiscated their cows and other belongings. One group went to Anthony Enahoro's house in search of the father, mother and other relatives but they could not locate them. Enahoro's parents went into hiding immediately the information got to them that the Biafran troops were in Uromi. The Biafrans already had it in mind that since Anthony Enahoro was from Uromi, the people would be pro the Federal cause.⁴⁰⁸

Okoedion Ehi said some Uromi people that were killed by Biafran was out of mistake. Those that could not mention the name of their Onogie or speak Esan language were suspected as spies and killed by Biafran. Ehi revealed that the Uromi people were not prepared to support Biafran being the place of Anthony Enahoro, the federal commissioner of information and labour.⁴⁰⁹ The question is can proof of origin be left to language and knowing one's king? At road blocks during the war, a man is expected to identify himself by speaking his language.⁴¹⁰ There are people that could only speak the language of where they were born. The war resulted to movement of people from where they were born to their places of origin. If the proof of origin is the test of language, it therefore means that the people born outside their place of origin are in serious trouble.

Chief Philips Ekeoba revealed that in Ewohimi, the Biafran mounted a road block at Okaigben and anybody passing was arrested and taken to Ekpon. Chief Ekeoba said he was arrested on his way to farm with Mr. Francis Omanda, Mr. Ekenfoh Osojiahon, Mr Okolo Omondiagbe. Their offence was that they were suspected to be reconnoitering the area ahead of the advance of Federal troops. While Francis Omanda and Ekenfoh were killed immediately, Chief Ekeoba and Mr. Okolo were taken to Ekpon for detention. According to Ekeoba, the Biafrans would have killed all of them, but for the want of intelligence information from them. In Ekpon detention cell, they met 23 other people behind the bar and

the 23 were later killed and buried in a mass grave which the people were commanded to dig. Where they detained them did not have a good door. Consequently when the two Biafra guards were sleeping, they forced the door open and escaped.⁴¹¹

Chief Ekeoba also revealed that Alade and Peter, both sons of the Onogie of Irrua and staff of Midwest Oil Palm Development Company, Ewohimi were killed on September 23, 1967 on suspicious of reconnoitering. One Ewossa carpenter was killed by Biafran troops because he identified himself as being Ewossa which Biafran troops mistook or understood as Hausa. In Ewohimi, Biafran troops killed a lot of mad people because they were seen by them as reconnoitering in preparation for the advancement of the Federal forces. Two Ewohimi sons joined Biafran army as a result of circumstances. Obiazi Odige was a Nigerian soldier in Onisha, the Eastern Region when the war started and decided to join the Biafran army for his safety. One Ighedosa was serving somebody at Onisha when the war started and had no choice but to join the Biafran army.⁴¹²

Monday Osagieahon said that the Biafrans occupied Ewohimi Modern Primary School (now Ewohimi Primary School). They molested young girls and because of this, the carrying of a baby became a qualification for women to pass Biafran's road block or else they would be captured by the Biafran soldiers. In Ewohimi, the Biafran troops searched for the Hausa and when they are found, they were killed. The Ewohimi police quickly locked up the station and ran away. Consequently, the Biafran forces in Ewohimi did not confiscate arms from the police.⁴¹³

Lt. Col. Emmanuel Idieke Abhulimen noted that the Biafran forces captured captain Mike Obiyan, a Nigerian soldier from Usugbenu, Irrua and made him commander. Captain Obiyan led Biafrans to Igweben, Opoji and Ugbegun cutting his village off. Captain Mike Obiyan defected back to Nigerian Army on their way to Ewohimi. Even when Obiyan tried to

prevent Biafrans from invading Irrua, another group of Biafran forces invaded Irrua in August 1967. They were based at the Catholic Primary School, Irrua.⁴¹⁴

Samson Aibueku revealed that when Biafran troops arrived Ekpoma in August, 1967, they went straight to the police station and collected all their guns. Before the arrival of the Biafrans, the Ekpoma people had taken a position that they were descendants of Oduduwa. This means wherever the Yoruba move to, they would go to that direction. In Ekpoma, there was a local announcement that people should not sleep on their bed but on the floor to save them from flying bullets. The Biafran troops sexually harassed the local girls in the area. This development made the girls to be dressing like married women to save them from the harassment. Aibueku further revealed that some Ekpoma people were voluntarily giving Biafra forces food items out of fear. The Biafran troops killed a lot of Hausa people in Ekpoma and anybody harboring Hausa friends was arrested by the Biafrans. The process of identifying Hausa in Ekpoma was by language as some Hausa who were denying that they were not Hausa were asked to speak the local language which they claimed, and if they could not, they were killed.⁴¹⁵

Benedict Akhigbe noted that Biafran troops garrisoned themselves at School of Agriculture (now Ambrose Alli University Secondary School). The Biafrans were particular about those they perceived to be Hausa. The Ekpoma people that were killed were out of mistake. The major problem they had with Biafran troops was sexual harassment of their girls and confiscation of food items and domestic animals.⁴¹⁶ Shaba Bashiru Oaikhená revealed that Biafran forces stayed in Ewu Community Primary School for four days and the Biafran forces had cordial relationship with the local people. In Ewu, it was difficult for Biafran forces to separate the Hausa from the local Ewu people as they appeared like Hausa. Most Ewu people were Muslim and they bear Hausa and Muslim names. Consequently, if name and appearance were the yardsticks of identity, a lot of Ewu people would be killed. The

Biafran knew this and they had no choice but to adopt a different approach of being friendly to all in the area.⁴¹⁷

In Uzeah, Ekoh Godwin revealed that he was in Olili Primary School when Biafrans invaded the school and all the pupils ran back home. The Biafran forces came across some local hunters who were coming from the bush and seized their guns. When Biafrans met some village leaders to find out their position on the crisis, they told Biafran forces that they were in support of Biafra. The verbal acceptance of Biafra was just a lip service as it was the only way of avoiding being killed. With the presence of Biafran, villagers stopped going to farm and the people's domestic animal were killed by the troops. The village girls had to go into hiding to save them from sexual harassment. The people that were killed by Biafran forces in the area were Hausa. Similarly, in Egun, Uzea, the Biafran troops also occupied the primary school and the school was closed. Local gin and Indian Herbs were confiscated from the local sellers and consumed by the troops.⁴¹⁸

In Illushi, the Biafran troop came to the area in August, 1967. It was on the market day and the troops molested a lot of people and collected their items like garri, fish, yam and provisions from Igbo and non-Igbo stores without paying. The native cow owned by John Ekoh and the king of Illushi were slaughtered by the troops. The Igbo also suffered harassment from the hand of the Biafran troops at Illushi since they also confiscated items from their stores. One party of the Biafran troops seized one of John Ekoh's truck and went away with it. Humphrey Bamidele was conscripted by Biafran forces at Ilushi but later defected to the Federal forces. One Mr. Ejemheare Momodu from Ugboha was arrested by Biafran troop because Momodu was his name. The king of the place latter came to identify him and he was released.⁴¹⁹

Stephen Ebozele disclosed that the Biafrans in Ugbegum occupied Umelen Ugbegum Centre Primary School. They killed domestic animals and confiscated food items from the

local populace. The Hausa ran away when the Biafrans arrived the area. One Etsako man who appeared like Hausa was mistakenly killed by the Biafran troops in Ugbegum.⁴²⁰

Lawrence Osaigbovo noted that Biafrans arrived Ogwa in August, 1967. The people of the area out of fear willingly gave them food items like garri, yam and rice. There was no person in Ogwa that joined the Biafran Army but a lot of people from the area enlisted into the Nigerian army during the war. The rate of molestation of the local populace was minimal compared to Igweben and Ewohimi where Biafran troops suspected that the people of Igweben and Ewohimi acted as reconnoiters for the Federal forces against the Biafran troops.⁴²¹

In Ujogba, Lt. Col Atoe Gabriel revealed that the Biafran troop was not based in the area but were visiting from Ebelle. When they went to the Onogie of Ujogba, His Royal Highness William Egbegamen, he told them that he supported them although this was lip service to avoid Biafran harassment. Atoe Gabriel noted that Biafran troops had no difficulty in moving round Esan because some Igbo that stayed in Esan before the war went back home to join Biafran army.⁴²²

In Ebelle, the Biafrans occupied St. Mathew Primary School (now Equare Primary School). Mathew Ihensekler revealed that there was information that Hausa people were hiding in Chief Ogedegbe's house and in an attempt by Biafrans to get the Hausa people, Ogedegbe's brother Aihebho Ogedegbe who tried to escape out of fear was killed by the troops. He was killed by the Biafrans with the hope that he must have been one of the hiding Hausa in the house. Aihebho Ogedegbe died leaving a wife and a son.⁴²³

In Igweben, Chief Idogun Cletus noted that, the Biafran troops came and occupied the teacher training college. The students vacated the school as a result of the invasion. The Biafran troops that invaded the school were the troops that were escaping Federal forces attack from Uromi and Ekpoma. The Federal forces traced the Biafrans to Igweben and as

they were fleeing from the Federal attack, they were shooting anybody that came their way. The Biafran troops killed so many people in Egbiki. The Biafran troops already passed Egbiki but when they asked Ebelle people who were the Egbiki, they were told they were Igweben. They ran back and killed so many people because the Biafran accused the Igweben people of giving the Federal troops information about them.⁴²⁴

In Ekpon, the Biafran troops were very much at home. They occupied Pilgrim Baptist Primary School Ekpon (now Central Primary School). The troops were not hostile to the people. The Ekpon people are Esan but they speak Esan and the Ika language (a kind of Western Igbo Language). Ohuekhamen Sylvester said even the Ekpon people did not demonstrate any traces of hatred towards the Biafran. He revealed further that the Biafran hostile attitude towards some other parts of Esan was because they were involved in exposing the position of the Biafran to the Federal troops. The Biafrans dug trenches in Ekpon which were to be used to ambush the Federal troops.⁴²⁵ The fact that the Biafran troops were very much at home with the Ekpon people revealed the role ethnicity played in the war. Ekpon are Esan but they speak Igbo and this perhaps may be the reason why they were not hostile to the local populace. The Mid-West Igbo were accused of collaborating with the Biafrans to invade Benin. The ethnic affinity was explored by the Midwestern Igbo to the detriment of the non-Igbo groups. The Biafran troops mounted a road block at Agbor-Ekpon road where most Esan people returning home were arrested. Unknown to the Biafrans, some Ekpon people were showing the returnees alternative routes to take to escape Biafran arrest. Akpede Adake joined the Biafran army because he was in the East when the war started. However, most Ekpon people joined the Federal army.⁴²⁶

Igbeta Smart in his submission revealed that even though the Biafran troops had cordial relations with the Ekpon people, some out of fear decided to stay in the farm. Among the Biafran troop that came to Ekpon, some had no gun and uniform.⁴²⁷ This is in line with

Fredrick Forsyth's submission that "there was neither enough man power, nor weaponry for the Midwest operation."⁴²⁸ Igbeta revealed further that the Biafran forces used his father's house as officer quarters displacing them and he could not continue his school as a result of the war. The Biafran troop harassed local palm wine tappers by confiscating their wine and forcing them to tap more for their consumption. They entered the people's houses and seized food items like garri, plantain, yam belonging to the local people. The community people were gladly submitting the food items to them for their safety. The Biafran troops did not kill anybody in Ekpon. Even though the Biafran did not mean to kill any person, there was fear and this made commercial activity to be affected. Consequently, the presence of Biafran created hardship as the people could no longer get their daily needs to buy.⁴²⁹ With the Biafran invasion of Esan, there was no police, no government and traditional institution in place where the civil populace could channel complaints of harassment and torture to. Even when the people did not support Biafran, they did not engage in open confrontation with them. Some of them tried to use local juju power to resist Biafran.

In Irrua, the Odiowele of Osugbemu, Igbenigie called a meeting and said this is the time for Osugbemu to show what they have. After the meeting, honey bees invaded the Biafran troops in Osugbenu and they immediately moved out of the place.⁴³⁰ In Ugboha, the news of the atrocities the Biafran committed in Ubiaja got to them early enough and they prepared for them before they arrived. Immediately the Biafran troop landed in Equare Primary School, they were chased away with honey bees.⁴³¹ In Ubiaja, since the people could no longer tolerate the atrocities of the Biafran forces, they resorted to the use of African local power to resist them. Chief Eboh Ojiamen used snakes to chase Biafrans away. According to Eboh Christ, a large number of snakes invaded the Biafran troops where they camped and the more they try to kill the snakes, the more they increased.⁴³² In Olili, Uzea, a decision was

reached among the elders that Biafran forces should be taught a lesson. Consequently, flying honey bees were invoked on the troops and they moved out of the place immediately.

In Uromi, the home town of Chief Anthony Enahoro, it was a different form of juju attack. Biafran forces atrocities and harassment of the civilian made the Chiefs to gather in Onogie's palace to discuss the way out of the Biafran onslaught. According to Ojiefoh:

The Onojie told his Chiefs and guests that Uromi should be protected and fortified. Ukpomon rose and asked the Onojie to send for Ikpakpa and Ori, both Esan delicacies. A chief went to the market and bought the items from the Eki Olele market and the sorcerer Ukpomon produced a small calabash from her long brown hair, Okuku hair style and pounded a part of its content into the food and asked for a ram which the Onojie produced. She had the Ikpakpa and made some unintelligible incantations in a low voice and the ram ate all the food in her palm. She told the Onojie to send his chiefs to the officers in Government School now Equare Primary School Uromi. The Onojie's gift was received by the troops with shouts of the "Hail Biafra". The Biafran did not shoot any gun at Uromi after the encounter.⁴³³

In some parts of Esan, the people displaced in Benin as a result of the Biafran invasion came back home and narrated their ordeal in the hands of Biafran to the local people. The molestation, harassment and killing of non-Igbo groups including Esan spurred some villages to prepare their local charm in advance for their arrival of Biafran forces. In Idumiwu Ebelle, charms were buried in the two entrances to ward off any enemy from entering the town. Consequently, the Biafran troops never entered the town. In Udo, as Biafran troops entered the town from Ubiaja, the people used mystical powers to direct them to the bush and they never came out from the bush.⁴³⁴ We cannot say that Biafran did well or badly. We cannot assess Biafran behaviour without assessing what must have pushed them to act the way they acted in Esan. Oparah notes that:

Right from the beginning of the war, hunger was identified as a hindrance to the fighting spirit of the forces of Biafra and to the will of the people to continue to support the fight. This is a direct consequence of the economic blockade imposed on the region by the Federal Government.⁴³⁵

The confiscation of food items and weapon was not unconnected with the Federal government blockade. The total blockade by the federal government rendered the economy of the Republic of Biafran very weak to make the needed contribution towards the needs of the Biafran Army in terms of food, clothing and weapon. In the Midwest, some Biafran soldiers went to the battle field without adequate supply. Consequently, the local people's food items and weapons became attractive to them.

Federal Forces Occupation of Esan Land

The second Division meant to liberate the Midwest including Esan Division, was hurriedly formed under the command of Col. Murtala Mohammed.⁴³⁶ "On recapturing Benin-City, the state capital, Col. Murtala Mohammed made a broadcast to the people that the liberation of the Midwest state had been achieved..."⁴³⁷ On September 20, 1967, the Midwest was cleared of Biafran forces just as Major Albert Okonkwo was proclaiming the independent and sovereign Republic of Benin. By the end of that day, the federal forces had completed the liberation of the city.⁴³⁸ With the take-over of Midwest by the federal forces, the non-Igbo groups including the Esan started killing the Igbo. This was in retaliation of what the non-Igbo groups suffered in the hands of the Igbo when the Biafran army invaded the state. In Benin, the non-Igbo groups like Esan, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Etsako Owan and Ijaw were assisting the Federal troops to identify the Igbo. Jorre revealed the mass killing of Igbo people in his work thus:

Similar massacres occurred in Benin and other Mid-Western towns, again perpetrated mainly by non-Igbo civilians though sometimes Federal soldiers would join in when the victims had been pointed out to them. Signs like 'Urhobo man lives here' 'Benin man's shop' or One Nigeria suddenly appeared on peoples door and, inevitably, many old scores were settled before law and order returned.⁴³⁹

On the arrival of the Federal troops to Esan, there was jubilation everywhere. The Esan people perceived it as transition from Igbo government to Government of the Midwest. The

chanting of "One Nigeria" was in everyone's mouth. This also applied to other non-Igbo groups in the state. At every passage of the federal forces, the people gathered by the roadside to welcome them and this in no small measure boosted the moral of the troops. Obasanjo revealed this thus:

Throughout 2 Division's operation in the non-Igbo speaking areas of the Midwest, the formation received a tremendously warm and cheering welcome from civilians who thronged to the roadside at every passage of troops to shout one Nigeria while indicating the symbol of one Nigeria by clenching their fists and pointing with the forefingers. It was a great moral booster and encouragement for Federal troops who had contend with considerable rebel opposition in spite of fighting in predominantly friendly area. Bearing in mind the way the Division was hurriedly put together their overall performance could only be described as laudable.⁴⁴⁰

On September 21, 1967, Ekpoma and Uromi were taken over by the Federal forces after heavy fighting. The Biafran troops left machine guns, rifles and ammunition behind as they pulled out of the area.⁴⁴¹ The heavy fighting between the Federal troops and the Biafran troops in Ekpoma led to the hiding of the local populace. At night, the people no longer went out to urinate and defecate. They started putting containers inside their room to defecate in contravention of their local culture. There was announcements that everybody should sleep on the floor to protect them from flying bullets.⁴⁴² The heavy fighting left many Biafran troops dead and Mr. Samson Aibbueku, one of the Red Cross officers said he was intimidated by the federal troops to mobilize other civilian passersby to bury the corpse of the Biafran soldiers.⁴⁴³

In Uromi, the arrivals of the Federal troops spurred the people into jubilation. Apparently, this was expected as it was the home town of Anthony Enahoro, the federal commissioner of information and labour. There are some people who maintain that until the arrival of the federal troops and the subsequent overwhelming of Biafran troops, they could not envisage the defeat of Biafran forces in the war. To them, whoever controlled Benin, the state capital, was invincible. The position taken by such people can be attributed to strong

propaganda by the Biafran government. For example, the Biafran invasion of the Benin was followed by catchy newspaper headlines like "Biafran takeover Midwest without a single resistance from 4th Area Command". Apart from Biafran propaganda, the media generally played a role that made people to believe that Biafran could not be defeated by the Federal government. For example, on September 2, 1967, the *New Nigerian Newspaper* released the map of Nigeria showing the progress of the war.⁴⁴⁴ However, there are people like Albert Arete who believed that with Biafran invasion of Midwest, the end was near for Biafran to be defeated. They hinged their argument on the superiority of the weapon of the Federal government and the withdrawal of sympathy from the Biafran cause.⁴⁴⁵

Esan was unlike the areas that had given their allegiance to the Biafran which were forced to flee to escape persecution when the federal troops arrived. Immediately after the Federal take-over of Esan, the local people stayed behind and were jubilating. Thus the people were not converted by the Federal government. The position of being a strong protagonist of the federal cause tended to unite the Esan people and other non-Igbo group in the Midwest. This was despite the warning by Major Albert Okonkwo against supporting the Federal Government:

If we search our hearts aright, we know that the Lagos Government does not represent the true aspiration of the people of the region... It is to this end that I have been called upon to assume control of the Government of Midwest. I call upon every person in this territory to keep calm. It is in the interest of everyone to ensure that no one attempt to embarrass the Government in anyway.⁴⁴⁶

The warning perhaps was a mere threat to convert the people to Biafran cause. Major Okonkwo in an interview with Prince Uba in August, 1967 has earlier stressed the reluctance of the people to cooperate with his government. Okonkwo "stated that although people are free, there is the sign of reluctance, irrespective of that, cooperation is necessary..."⁴⁴⁷

Uromi, being the economic hub center of Esan, had high population of Igbo people. Consequently, the arrival of the federal forces made them to go into hiding since their

allegiance to the Biafran could not be doubted. The Massacre of Igbo civilian occurred in Uromi and was perpetrated by the federal forces in collaboration with Esan civilians as they were responsible for identifying the Igbo civilians. As the federal troops attacked the Biafran troops in Uromi, panic set in among them and they ran in all direction, some throwing away their Biafran uniform and gun. Ojiefoh revealed that in Uromi:

The Biafran were retreating, running and throwing their guns away. The fleeing Biafran soldier pulled away their uniform asking farmers in the bushes the way to Agbor. The few vehicles have been commandeered by the officers in their flight to the Niger Bridge.⁴⁴⁸

As Uromi was been liberated in September, Uromi youth quickly showed the federal soldiers Igbo shops and houses. The youth and the federal forces looted the stores and Igbo properties. After this, there was killing of the Igbo in the area. The civilian youth were responsible for identifying the Igbo.

The role played by Uromi people in identifying the Igbo before they were massacred by the federal troops is seen by many as to avoid killing Esan person in place of Igbo. However, Uromi dislike for Igbo predated the war. The Igbo were accused of taking over all aspects of Uromi economy. Even in the Catholic Church, you cannot use Esan language without using Igbo. Consequently, the war became an opportunity for the Uromi to address long time animosity with the Igbo. According to John Okho here, the war became constructive for Uromi as it give them the opportunity to take over their economy that was hitherto in the hands of the Igbo.⁴⁴⁹ Ojiefoh also affirms that:

The Uromi artisans now replaced the Igbo who were their masters. Uromi Sons who were traders, mechanics, drivers etc all returned home and established there various trades in Uromi... Among the Uromi sons that returned at this time are some great merchants and politicians...⁴⁵⁰

Chinua Achebe revealed that "Nigerians of all other ethnic groups will probably achieve consensus on no other matter than their common resentment of the Igbo."⁴⁵¹ Achebe further

said that "the civil war gave Nigeria a perfect and legitimate excuse to cast the Igbo in the role of treasonable felon."⁴⁵² Igbo people are known to have contributed their quota to the advancement of wherever they found themselves in Nigeria. According to Chinua Achebe:

The origin of the national resentment of the Igbo is as old as Nigeria and quite as complicated. But it can be summarized thus: The Igbo culture being receptive to change, individualistic and highly competitive, gave the Igbo man an unquestioned advantage over his compatriots in securing credentials for advancement in Nigeria...⁴⁵³

The commercial success and the economic prosperity of the Igbo gave them the control of the lucrative sector of the host community and some measure of economic strength that are also equal to political and economic power. This often relegates the host community to background and is highly resented by the host community.⁴⁵⁴

Notwithstanding, there are Esan people that protected the Igbo from the federal forces onslaught in the cause of Midwest liberation. For example, chief Idogun Cletus revealed that some Igweben people hid their Igbo friends until they were able to escape. He revealed further that Igweben people demonstrated in front of the Army Recruitment Centre when some Midwestern Igbo were arrested by the federal forces. The demonstration led to the release of the people after they were tortured. This is unthinkable as the Western Igbo groups were believed to have collaborated with Biafran forces to take over Midwest⁴⁵⁵ and this did not go well with the Esan and other non-Igbo groups. This is a reflection that despite the fact that the Biafran invasion of Midwest resulted to quarrel between the Midwestern Igbo groups and the non-Igbo groups like Esan, some Esan people still took them as brothers. This means that some Esan people had already reconciled with the Igbo group in Midwest before the end of the war.

Initially, the federal troops made up mainly of Northerners had thought that the Igweben are Western Igbo. Consequently, they had started maltreating the local populace before they were educated that the people are not Western Igbo.⁴⁵⁶ The federal forces met

strong resistance from the Biafran troops at Igweben which later became the fourth training depot of the Nigerian army. It was through this Depot a lot of Esan joined the federal army during the war. Before the war, there were two training Depots in Nigeria- Zaria and Abeokuta. The third Depot, Lagos Depot, was also created during the war.

In Ewohimi, the federal forces searched for Igbo hiding in different houses and when they were located, they were brought out and shot dead. The villagers were instrumental in helping the army to identify the Igbo and after the killing of the Igbo, the local people and the army looted the stores and other properties of the Igbo people killed.⁴⁵⁷ As in other places, some Igbo people were able to escape the federal onslaught as a result of the goodwill of their Esan friends. While it cannot be denied that some local people took over the landed properties and houses of those killed, it is also true that those that returned back after the war reclaimed their houses and landed properties in Ewohimi.⁴⁵⁸

The Biafran forces while retreating from the federal troops destroyed some important transport infrastructure such as Ewohimi-Onichugbo Bridge which linked Western Igboland with Ewohimi and other parts of Esan.⁴⁵⁹ The destruction of the bridge was to impede the federal forces advance. On September 11, 1967, Anthony Enahoro regretted that the operations of the federal troops were being slowed down by the destruction of bridges by the Biafran forces.⁴⁶⁰ Another bridge blown up by the retreating Biafran forces was the Ilah-Ewatto Bridge linking Esan with Asaba and other part of Western Igboland. Similarly, Utoh-Emu Bridge linking Esan with other parts of Western Igboland was also destroyed by the Biafran forces.⁴⁶¹ The major bridge that was not destroyed by the Biafran is the Ubiaja-Illushi Bridge connecting other parts of Esan with the Illushi port. Since Illushi is a close, the coming of the federal forces from the only entrance and exit route made the Biafran forces to commandeer the boats of Igala people that came to Illushi market to the East. Some of them used foot parts from Illushi to Odogumen-Okpokporo. Consequently, the Ubiaja-Illushi

Bridge was not destroyed because the Biafran troops did not take the Illushi-Ubiaja road when they were retreating.⁴⁶²

Illushi like Uromi was high in population of the Igbo because of the commercial viability of the place. But the news that the federal troops has taken over Benin resulted to mass exodus of Igbo from the area. Consequently, when the federal forces arrived the area, almost all the Igbo including the Biafran troops had fled. The federal troops occupied the same St. Augustine Primary School, John Holt and UAC colonial buildings formerly occupied by Biafran troops.⁴⁶³ The federal troops unlike the Biafran forces had enough supplies and even gave some leftover food items to the local populace. The federal government located the 6thbrigade at Illushi and they operated from Illushi to Onitsha where they had a fierce battle with the Biafran forces.

Although the federal forces had cordial relationship with the people, there were some cases of arrest and molestation of innocent civilian who were suspected to have sympathized with the Biafran cause. The federal forces subjected the village girls to sexual harassment and those who tried to condemn the act were framed as Biafran supporters and tortured. Illushi was liberated from Biafran troops in September, 1967 and law and order began to return to the place. But when schools were reopened in the Midwest, Illushi Primary School remained closed because it was occupied by the federal forces.⁴⁶⁴

In Ubiaja, before the arrival of the federal forces in September, 1967 the Biafran troops in the area were on their way back to the East. But despite the jubilation and chanting of "One Nigeria", the federal forces also imposed dusk to dawn curfew at Ubiaja and whoever violated the curfew was arrested and set free the next morning without maltreatment. The federal troops operated from St. Benedict Primary School and Oyomon Modern School Ubiaja. The federal army stayed in Ubiaja until 1973 before they moved to the barracks.⁴⁶⁵The long stay of the federal forces resulted to young women and children

being sexually abused and other forms of inhuman treatment. The end result was impregnating the young girls without marrying them. Mrs. Rose Momodu revealed that the problem became so serious that the young girls had to start disguising themselves as married women to save them from the sexual assault of the Nigerian army.⁴⁶⁶

The issue of sexual assault even got to the extent of the army taking over the wives of the local people. Elder Joseph Okoyomon noted that a federal soldier took the wife of Mr. Asibor Peter of Idumosodi, Ubiaja. He reported further that the sexual atrocities of the federal army resulted to the pregnancy of some of their girls and the children were abandoned by the soldiers.⁴⁶⁷ Eboh Christ narrated that some Uromi youths came with the federal forces to Ubiaja and after the federal troops broke the stores of the Igbo traders, the youth looted all the goods in the store. He narrated further that Ubiaja youth did not take part in the looting because it is a taboo to take what belongs to another person in Ubiaja. One of the store looted was Hope Rising Supermarket owned by an Igbo man.⁴⁶⁸ The booty was shared between the army and the youth that collaborated with them. The implication of this is that the federal troops like the Biafran forces looted a lot of properties in the Midwest but that the media focuses on the Biafran atrocities, while those of the federal troops were not published.

When the information of the fierce battle between the Biafran forces and the federal troops at Ehor was made public, the Biafran troops at Ujogba, Ogwa and Ebelle started retreating immediately. Consequently, when the federal troops arrived the aforementioned towns, the Biafran troops had already left the towns. The Onojie of Ujogba while receiving the federal troops told them that they had been waiting for them. Ujogba, being a remote place lacked commercial viability. Thus the Igbo in the area before the war were rubber tappers and peasant farmers. Since they did not have landed property, it was very easy for them to flee the area when they heard of the federal troop's advancement. Consequently, the

Igbo left the place before the federal troops arrived the area. Many of them honoured Ojukwu's call to go home.⁴⁶⁹

In Ogwa, Lawrence Osaogbovo revealed that the Biafran troops stayed in Ogwa for three weeks before the federal troops came to liberate the place in September, 1967. Lawrence revealed further that the Biafran commander announced with megaphone in late September that everybody should start moving to Asaba and Ogwashukwu for the Nigerian troops were close. Within 45 minutes of the announcement, the Biafran troops fled the area.⁴⁷⁰

In Ebelle, the Igbo captured in Amahor and Ugun by the federal troops were brought to St. Mathew Primary School (now Equare Primary School) and killed. Mathew Ihensekhien revealed that the villagers were forced to bury them. In Ebelle, the looting of Igbo's properties did not arise because the culture of the area forbids them from taking what belongs to another person. In Ebelle, Ujiogba and Ogwa, the arrival of the federal troops was followed by the usual jubilation and chanting of "One Nigeria" everywhere.⁴⁷¹ To them, the federal troops had not only come to save them from the Biafra onslaught; it also meant the fulfillment of their right of self-determination of being protagonist of the Federal cause. Okoromi Sunday revealed that the Egbiki local people that ran into the bush as a result of the killing of seven people in the area by Biafran forces came back home when the federal troops arrived the area. This was followed by jubilation and massive support for the federal cause in the area.⁴⁷²

In Ekpon, Igbeta Smart said the federal forces were shelling massively as they advanced towards Ekpon despite the fact that Biafran forces had left the area. From Ebelle, they entered the area with massive shooting on October 1, 1967. The federal forces had expected formidable resistance from Ekpon since Biafran forces were attacking some parts of Esan from there and again, the federal forces erroneously took Ekpon to be one of the Western Igbo communities that collaborated with the Biafran forces. The reaction of the

Ekpon people to the Biafran forces and the federal troops was dramatic. To the Biafran forces, when they are questioned, they spoke Ika Igbo language which Fredrick Forsyth described as⁴⁷³ "first cousin to the Igbo of Biafran."⁴⁷⁴ To the federal forces, they responded with Esan language.

Notwithstanding, the commander of the federal forces that liberated Ekpon, Major Josai Agbe, a native of Epon was able to clear the air. The massive shooting by the federal forces as they were advancing had made the local populace to run to the bush but Major Agbe was able to convince them in their local language to come out. Thus, the people came out from their hiding jubilating and shouting "One Nigeria". The people happily demonstrated their support for the federal cause not minding the ethnic affiliation to the Western Igbo.⁴⁷⁵ Mr. Okuekhamen Sylvester revealed that Mr. Sunday Agholor hanged himself when he heard of the massive shooting of the federal troops when they were advancing to Ekpon. According to the informant, the man said he would rather kill himself instead of being killed by the troops. The federal forces sought the cooperation of the local people on how to locate Biafran troops and they complied by showing them the escape routes of the Biafran forces.⁴⁷⁶

However, the federal forces in Esan committed a lot of atrocities against the local people. They beat up innocent people and locked up the people with their military police without cause. Ojiefoh revealed the atrocities of the federal troops in Uromi:

The Uromi market built in 1500 by Agba Onogie (The fourth Onojie of Uromi) was burnt down in 1972 by the irate soldier when they found one of their fellow soldier dead at Ujoror Street. These atrocities made the Uromi community association under the administrative leadership of G. O. Uwadiale, the Ehi of Uromi to invite Chief Anthony Enahoro the Adolor of Uromi, then a member of the Supreme Military Council, federal commissioner for information and special duty to withdraw the soldiers from Uromi.⁴⁷⁷

The reason for the atrocities on the part of the federal forces was that the second Division of the Nigerian army "was known to consist of the large number of unprofessional

soldiers who were hurriedly assembled and therefore lack adequate military training and discipline."⁴⁷⁸ The opening of the fourth Depot at Igweben, the location of the 6th brigade at Illushi, followed by the establishment of garrison at Uromi, led to the congregation of the federal soldiers in Esan land. Consequently, this gave them opportunity to commit various crimes against the people. Moreover, the Nigerian military barracks became the place where the local populace seeks redress. Sunday Okoromi noted that when any person had issue with another, the person would report to the nearest federal forces. Since the Nigerian army were not trained in the act of handling civil cases, they could not dispense justice.

The Biafran occupation of Esan had effects on Esan and their relationship with the Igbo. The Esan people almost suffered the same fate with the Igbo as many of them were killed and some were displaced and returned back home in the various riots and pogrom in the North before the war. At the height of the killing in the North, every Southerners including the Esan was a target. Another factor that attracted Esan to the plight of Biafran was the persecution they had suffered in hands of the Northerners. This reasons had initially united the Igbo and Esan. Although Esan people were displaced by the Eastern Regional State Edict which mandated the non-Easterners to leave the Eastern region, Aluko notes that if the East had not promulgated the Edict, the non-Easterners would have return back to their place of origin.⁴⁷⁹ Even when some Esan people were displaced from the East as a result of the State Edict, they nevertheless sympathized with the Biafrans until the Biafran invasion of their region. This act turned the Esan against the Biafran. The end result was that those that returned back home and those at home became strong protagonist of the Federal Government. Consequently, there was massive voluntary recruitment of Esan into the federal Army to fight against the Biafran. The fact that the Esan people were protagonist of the Federal Government changed Esan pattern of migration from the East to the West after the war.

CHAPTER FIVE

POST CIVILWAR RECONSTRUCTION, 1968-1975

In Midwest, reconstruction started immediately after the liberation of the state from Biafra in September, 1967. This means that reconstruction in Midwest started during the war. Ogbemudia started the reconstruction of the state shortly after he was appointed as military administrator in September 17, 1967. This made it imperative to access the Midwest reconstruction and how it affected Esan first before the national post-civil war reconstruction and how some of the policies affected Esan.

Midwest Reconstruction Programme

The rate of devastation of the Nigerian-Biafran war on Esan was very minimal compared to other parts of Midwest like Western Igboland. Major towns in Esan like Ubiaja, Uromi, Irrua, Ekpoma and Igweben did not experience huge damage like Asaba, Ibusa and Ogwashi-Uku where the federal forces engaged the Biafran troops in fierce battle. Consequently, the Igbo speaking part of Midwest had more displaced persons compared to the non-Igbo speaking groups like Esan. Iweze declared that Western Igbopeople constituted about 60% of the entire war victims in the Midwest.⁴⁸⁰

After a general tour of the state, Ogbemudia appreciated the huge challenges posed to the State by the civil war. The need to maintain law and order was crucial. The issue of tolerance and putting government in place that will command the respect of the various ethnic groups in the state was cardinal to Ogbemudia. There was also the problem of rehabilitation and resettlement of Midwest Igbo which was most devastated by the war. It was in an attempt to address these problems in the State that the State Military Administrator, Col. Ogbemudia convened a meeting of the state Consultative Assembly comprising of representatives of fourteen administrative divisions of the state on November 3, 1967 at Uromi.⁴⁸¹ At the

meeting, representatives came from Aboh, Asaba, Akoko-Edo, Benin East, Benin West, Etsako, IkaIshan, Isoko, East Urhobo, WestUrhobo, Western Ijaw and Warri. At the meeting, the problems facing the state were identified as follows:

- i) Loss of lives of family bread winners.
- ii) Suspicious, bitterness and hatred among various groups.
- iii) The breakdown of social and economic life of the state.
- iv) The destruction of roads, bridges and buildings.
- v) Fear and insecurity of live and property.
- vi) Starvation and distress among the people of the state.⁴⁸²

The challenge of building the state made the State Government to set up a seven man reconstruction and rehabilitation committee under the chairmanship of Mr. S. Y. Eke to tackle these problems in October 1967. The committee was constituted to speed up the process of creating a harmonious relationship between the Midwestern Igbo who were suspected to have cooperated with the Biafran in the invasion and the non-Igbo group like Benin, Esan, Etsako, Urhobo and Ijaw. The committee's fundamental responsibilities were state recovery efforts and were mandated to:

- i. Undertake a comprehensive tour of the state to have a firsthand knowledge of the effects of the rebel atrocities.
- ii. Ascertain the extent to which the exodus of the people of the East Central State might have affected the economy of the Midwest State.
- iii. Recommend, where necessary, and as a matter of Urgency, measures to bring about a return to normalcy in both the economic and social sectors of the state.
- iv. Encourage the formation of group associations among the people, in order to attract financial assistance from banking houses to stimulate commercial activities.
- v. Assume responsibility for property left behind by fleeing persons.
- vi. Make recommendation generally for reconstruction in the light of the experience gained.⁴⁸³

According to Ogbemudia:

The committee also had to contend with the problems of the displaced persons of Midwest origin who had returned from other parts of the federation. All such persons, including civil servants, employees of local government authorities, corporations and universities were instantly absorbed into the State public service on my directives. Within a short time, about one thousand, five hundred persons had been absorbed. A loan scheme was evolved for self-employed returnees. Although only about thirty thousand Naira was provided for in this loan, a total sum of about one million naira had been spent on this item alone by July, 1968.⁴⁸⁴

Iweze argued that the above assertion that civil servant of Midwest origin that returned were absolved without discrimination is not true. He affirms thus:

It should be noted that the above official claim is not true because the punitive measures inherent in the implementation of Decree. No. 40 of 1970 made majority of Western Igbo civil servants not to be reabsorbed. The civil servants of non-Igbo group were readily re-absorbed and they dominated the population of those that retained their jobs in the post war era in the State.⁴⁸⁵

It was because of the above attitude toward the Western Igbo that UchenduEgodi questioned the animosity of the non-Igbo group like Esan towards the Western Igbo. The Edo, Urhobo, Isoko as well as the Itsekiri did not avenge themselves on Biafran for occupying their State but manifested their hatred for their Igbo neighbor⁴⁸⁶ in other ways. The Justice Omo-Ebo tribunal known as the Rebel Atrocities Tribunal of Enquiring set up in 1967 was meant among other things:

to ascertain and determinethe role played by public officers and other civilians in respect of secessionist activities before and during the secessionist troops occupation of the State; to find out in what respect (if any) the part played by a public officer and any member of the public fell short of or departed from the standard conduct of propriety which can reasonably be expected to be shown or adhered to by persons in their positions.⁴⁸⁷

Ogbemudia declared that he made sure that only those who were found guilty are punished. Although the State Government never published the Tribunal report, the fact that non-Igbo group like Esan dominated those that were re-absorbed and those that retained their jobs

demonstrated that the Tribunal perhaps indicted some civil servants in the State whose conduct fell short of the standard required of the position they occupied.

Although the war did not cause serious economic hardship, the people of Esan experienced some level of devastation. For example, the federal forces burnt down Uromi market in 1972 when they discovered that one of their fellow soldiers died along UjoroStreet.⁴⁸⁸ It was also revealed in the course of field work that when the Biafran troops were fleeing from the federal forces attack, the flight resorted to the destruction of the people's property in Esan. This assertion could be correct since the friend of my enemy is my enemy. Perhaps Biafran troops resorted to the destruction and killing when they sensed Esan's loyalty to the federal government. Ogbemudia affirms:

The secessionist occupation of the Midwest had stimulated the people of the state to action, motivating them in several ways to accepting the challenges of the time. You will recall that both the treasury and central Bank in Benin City had been looted and emptied. Similarly, a number of utilities and infrastructures like roads, bridges and buildings were damaged, some beyond repairs. In this way, both the social and economic activities in the state were paralyzed. Still visibly hanging over the atmosphere in the state was a thin air of psychological defeat which the bitterness of the invasion and occupation had brought. The occupation no doubt had left behind it widespread depression which was yet to disappear in spite of the federal gains, and the recapture and return of the state to its status quo.⁴⁸⁹

As noted by Ogbemudia, the war did not only cause destruction of property and infrastructure, it caused division among the people of Midwest. The groups that were loyal to the federal troops became opposed to the group that supported Biafran. Hence at the assumption of office after the liberation of Midwest by the federal forces from the Biafran in September 1967,⁴⁹⁰ Ogbemudia met a state divided by the civil war. Ogbemudia acknowledged this in his meeting with traditional rulers of Midwest on February 7, 1970. Ogbemudia declared thus:

In the midst of this conflict, the Midwest was betrayed by handful of Midwesterners who thought at the time that their salvation lay in supporting the rebellion. The occupation of the state by the secessionist troops lasted for six agonizing weeks. When the state was eventually liberated by the federal troops, many of our people fled their posts and business locations for one reason or the other and were trapped behind the secessionist line. Since the end of the rebellion, many of them have come back home and have told incredible tale of discrimination against them by the very clique they thought love them so much.⁴⁹¹

The above demonstrated that some groups in the state were loyal to the Biafran while others mainly the non-Igbo groups like Esan were loyal to the federal cause. The end result of this is the problem of inter-ethnic relation in the state. John De St. Jorre notes that "the most significant-and fascinating-proof of this was the steady Ibo exodus from non-Ibo areas."⁴⁹² While the non-Ibo blame Enugu for the economic hardships cause by the federal blockade, the Ibo group blame Lagos for it. After the liberation of Midwest, many Midwesterners especially the non-Igbo element like Esan who had suffered from the hands of Biafran soldiers felt that the time had come for them to be rewarded and recognized. They had expected that those who were suspected to have collaborated secretly with the Biafran soldiers in the state should be punished for their actions. In a meeting with traditional rulers of the State on February 1, 1970, Ogbemudia demonstrated his willingness to reconcile the various groups in the state. Ogbemudia declared thus:

After the liberation of the Midwest, we were quick to understand and show no bitterness or recrimination towards those elements in our midst whose activities we suspected aided the rebellion as well as aided the invasion of the State. Rather, we harnessed all our energies towards the quick restoration of mutual understanding and confidence among all our people as well as to the damage done to our economy. For we know that it is through unity we can achieve the desired goal.⁴⁹³

The Midwest State also set up the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation in order to handle the post war problems of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation and to co-ordinate the programme.⁴⁹⁴ The Midwest Rehabilitation Committee

was constituted mainly to re-unite the various ethnic groups who became rival as a result of the war. This will ensure tolerance and accommodation. The programme was also to ensure the reconstruction of facilities destroyed by the war such as road, bridges, public building and schools.⁴⁹⁵

The Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee in the Midwest was assisted by rehabilitation committees set up in villages, town and divisional areas as affirms by Ogbemudia:

Although the Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation has responsibility for the overall co-ordination of all programme for rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction, it is my wish that small committee be set up at village, town, district and divisional levels to take responsibility for the work of rehabilitation, resettlement, reconciliation and reconstruction in their respective local areas... It is my conviction that the intimate local knowledge of these small committees under the leadership of the natural rulers and chiefs will prove very useful in organizing communal efforts to deal with the problems of rehabilitation, reconciliation, resettlement and reconstruction in the local areas. If these local groups are carefully organized and given effective leadership, they are bound to achieve success. I am sure that if we can forge a strong sense of belonging and oneness among the people at the local village, town and district and committee levels, the health effects of this will quickly seep up to the state and national level.⁴⁹⁶

Ogbemudia launched rehabilitation fund on February 7, 1970 to which he made a personal donation of £100. The commissioners donated 15% of their salary while civil servants donated 5% for three months to the rehabilitation fund.⁴⁹⁷ It was not only the commissioners and civil servant who responded to the appeal for fund for reconstruction of the State. The Driver's Union imposed a levy of five kobo per vehicle per day for one year as its contribution to the reconstruction effort of the State. The women were not left out. The National Council of Women Societies in Midwest levied themselves one shilling per member per month for one year as their support to the fund for reconstruction.⁴⁹⁸ This notwithstanding, the Midwestern Government received substantial assistance from the National Rehabilitation

Commission and thus made the effort of the State Government in rehabilitation and reconstruction a huge success. Ogbemudia revealed this in his address to traditional rulers in February, 1970 thus:

I am also aware and I know as a fact of the substantial assistance received in our work of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction from the National Rehabilitation Commission. Without the readily financial and material assistance and encouragement of the National Rehabilitation Commission, the efforts of the Midwest Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee would have been handicapped.⁴⁹⁹

The State Development plan of 1964-1968 did not anticipate the war and so the State had to operate a stringent budget. The State had to launch another development plan to compliment the 1964-68 plan. On April 1, 1968, the State launched a 44 million Naira 1968-1970 Development plan to enable the State tackle the war challenges before her and creating condition for expansion in both public and private sector of the economy.⁵⁰⁰

Reconstruction of Economic Facility

The civil war affected important sectors of the economy such as agriculture, commerce, industry and distribution. The "approximate valuation of physical and financial losses was between £150 and £200 million and the estimated reconstruction component of the Second National Development Plan was between £350 and £400 million for the national economy as a whole."⁵⁰¹ In the "Midwest, all the fourteen administrative divisions were affected by the war."⁵⁰² Quantitatively, therefore, the number of persons and property affected in the Midwest may not be as high as in the other states affected by the war but qualitatively, only the East Central State can honestly be said to be higher than the Midwest.⁵⁰³ It was the Biafran invasion of Midwest that brought the war to Midwestern domain and this affected the economy of the region

Transport Infrastructure

The civil war led to destruction of roads and other transport facilities especially in the Eastern Region. Most of this destroyed transport facilities in the East affected the economy of the Midwest nay Esan. For example, the destruction of Onitsha Bridge made some Esan people especially those by River Niger to resort to river transport to Onitsha via the Illushi port. The high rate of destruction of road in the war made the Second National Development Plan to allocate a high percentage of funds to the reconstruction of roads. The plan made road construction its main area of investment because a country's development process depends heavily on transportation. Thus, 2200 miles of road were reconstructed.⁵⁰⁴

The sum of £242.6 million was set aside for expenditure in the transport sector to achieve the objectives of the plan. Out of this, the sum of £32.9 million was set aside for the rehabilitation of roads damaged as a result of the war.⁵⁰⁵ A few of the most important roads that fell into this category are Lagos-Ibadan-Ilorin-Kano produce evacuation route, (£5.27 million); Kano-Kari (£3.8 million); Kano-Katsina (£1.728 million); Benin-Asaba (1.3 million); and Jos-Alaide-Otukpa (3.9 million). Also featuring are replacements to sub-standard bridges on various trunk routes.⁵⁰⁶ It must be emphasized that the Second National Development Plan contains the policy framework for the reconstruction of war damage areas as well as the construction and development of the rest of the country.⁵⁰⁷

The rehabilitation of roads was mainly in the Eastern region devastated by war and roads in the Western and the Northern parts of the country. The roads were rehabilitated with the aim of putting the economy on track after the war setback. The rehabilitation of roads and bridges all over the country was estimated to have cost £32.945 million.⁵⁰⁸ Even though some of the roads and bridges rehabilitated were not in Midwest and Esan, they nevertheless link Esan with the rest of the country. Onitsha Bridge destroyed during the war was important

to the Esan's economy and the bridge was reconstructed by Dumez Construction Company, the company built it at the estimated cost of £1.5 million.⁵⁰⁹ The bridge links the Midwest with the Eastern region and is very important to Esan's economy. Esan people access Onitsha market through the bridge. Even though there are some parts of Esan like Illushi and Ifeku that were alternatively accessing Onitsha by river transport when the bridge was damaged during the war. The absence of the bridge affected Esan's economy. It must be emphasized that most parts of the Esan are located on Plateau and such people dread river movement.

Under the plan, the roads and bridge that were awarded in the First National Development Plan 1962-1968 were interrupted because all available resources was mobilized to prosecute the war. The roads and bridges in this category were Eko bridge extension, which would require £2.241 million for completion; Apapa road and Ijora with estimated £7.453 for completing the project; Calabar-Ikom-OgojaKatsina-Ala road with estimated cost of £4.419 million for completion; Warri-Benin-Irrua-Auchi-Ososo-Okene-Lokoja-Kaduna road with estimated cost of £7.2 million for completion of the project. The Warri Benin-Auchi road was to open Warri port to Northern parts of the country and boost the economy of the Midwest.⁵¹⁰ The Warri-Benin-Irruaroad which links Esan would have been completed within the time frame of the first National Development Plan if not the interruption of the war. In the Second National Development Plan, 1970-1974, one-third of the total public sector expenditure was earmarked for transportation. Of this 77.4 percent went to road and rail transport, and the planned expenditure in the transport sector was ₦1.031 million. Besides, road transport gulped the greater percentage of public allocation in land transport as 88.3 percent of total government expenditure went to the sub-sector. By the early 1970s, the bulk of traffic in Nigeria amounting to about three-quarters of freight ton-miles was carried by the motor road transport system. The impressive performance it recorded in the Nigerian economy justified the continued attention it received from the government. The general

strategy adopted in tackling the numerous problems of reconstruction of roads and bridges in the area is the idea of getting transport operators, both private and public, back on the road with the aim of reviving the economic life of the sub-sector.⁵¹¹

In Esan land, the civil war interrupted most development projects in the area especially roads. Consequently, after the war, the area experienced problems of bad road and inadequate roads. Movement between rural and urban areas was hazardous. The State Government put up plan to address the problem. Iweze affirms thus:

To solve the problem of transportation, the state government set up a city Bus service in Benin-City in 1968 and later established the Delta Bus Service in April, 1971. This was followed by the emergence of township bus services in Agbor, Asaba and Sapele which were later extended to all the Divisional headquarters and the neighbouring towns like Ubiaja, Ugo, Auchi, Warri, Gborodo and Ogwashi-Uku. In the subsequent years, the State Government established the Midwest Line (later renamed Bendel line) which plied various routes in other parts of the country.⁵¹²

The transport company improved the lives of the people of the state including Esan people by providing jobs for them. Aifesehi while examining the role play by transport in development posited that it gives access to goods and services, opportunities for individual mobility and better quality of life, an inevitable sector to the social and economic development of our communities.⁵¹³ Apart from road construction, the State Government embarked on the reconstruction of bridges destroyed in the war. The reconstructed bridges are Orhiomawan Bridge, Ovia Bridge and Ewatto Bridge at the total sum of £0.355 million.⁵¹⁴ The fact cannot be denied that the company constructing the roads and bridges gainfully employed Midwesterners including Esan people and the roads and bridges gave the people better quality of life. The Ewatto Bridge links Esan with Western Igboland and Eastern Igboland through the Onitsha Bridge.

In Esan land, there was no significant rehabilitation of roads during the reconstruction exercise by the federal and state governments. The Benin-Irrua-Auchi road was a project continued from the First National Development Plan. Local roads were neglected and the reason for this was that Esan did not experience devastation like the Western Igbo where the level of devastation was very high during the war.⁵¹⁵ Be that as it may, the opening of Benin-Irrua road and Benin-Asaba road stimulated commerce and linked Esan land with major urban centers in Nigeria. Catherine Linard argued that lack of a reliable transport system forces the people to spend a significant amount of time in travelling to meet basic needs and increases the transport cost to access the services. She further contends that lack of road isolate the people thereby causing poverty as accessibility and connectivity provide business and economic opportunity for the people.⁵¹⁶

Agriculture

In the Midwest reconstruction process, the State Government gave agriculture a priority and this is because agriculture which is the mainstay of the state economy was disrupted by the civil war. Agricultural produce were either destroyed by bombs or stolen by fighting troops and looted by other war destitute. During the war, farming became risky as a result of military presence in the area and the end result of this was famine and food shortage.⁵¹⁷ Ogbemudia affirms the shortage of agricultural produce in the State:

The experience of meat shortage during the brief secessionist occupation showed clearly that the state could not produce sufficient animal protein and food crops for her people. The conclusion was obvious that not much had been done to accord agriculture its pride of place.⁵¹⁸

To address the above problem of shortage of food in the state, government had to embark on expansion and modernization of agriculture as a result of ensuring the success of the rehabilitation and reconstruction after the war.

The first thing Government did was to take the lead and give practical example for farmers in the state to follow. The government in addition to research and extension services was involved in direct agricultural production for both local consumption and export.⁵¹⁹

In order to maximize production, the state embarked on a bold policy to eliminate the militating factors such as ignorance of scientific agriculture, lack of capital, problem of land tenure and fragmented holdings, storage, marketing and distribution. The Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources has adopted several measures whereby the farmers can be encouraged to adopt the modern methods of farming. One of the measures is by way of encouraging farmers to form themselves into co-operative societies in order to attract government loans. Other farmers are supplied with improved and high yielding crops, fertilizers, spraying chemical and insecticides at subsidized prices.⁵²⁰

The extension service staff of the Ministry of Agriculture in the state was given adequate training with a view to help in the dissemination of modern scientific methods of farming to local farmers. To this end, the government set up practical farms in Esan Division; Awiele farm in Etsako Division; Ogba farm in Benin; Effuru farm and farm institute, Agbadu near Warri.⁵²¹ The state government rehabilitated mechanized farms in the various parts of the State. "Ogbemudia stressed the state's priority programme in terms of getting people back to farm as veritable means of obtaining employment and he created the people's awareness to ensure increase in food output.⁵²²

Government modified the farm settlement scheme to ensure the success of the agricultural revolution in the state. The modified scheme led to the closure of Okpe farm settlement in Akoko-Edo Division so that the state now has four fast developing farm settlements at Ekpoma with average of 5,677 acres; Mbiri with 4,70 acres; Utagbu Uno, 1366 acres and Iguoriakhi with 1,375 acres. Ekpoma farm settlement is the largest of this farm settlement. With the farm settlement scheme, young school leavers are being encouraged to make farming their career. Government made the farm settlement attractive to the young school leavers by equipping the farm settlement with modern social amenities such as electricity, pipe-borne water, market, swimming pool and play ground with indoor and outdoor games.⁵²³

Ogbemudia's government launched the farmer's crusade projects at Ubiaja in February 1968 as a new and dynamic approach to agricultural development. The crusade project was meant to reverse the trend of urban migration by raising the standard of living in rural areas.⁵²⁴ Ogbemudia affirms that:

The introduction of the farmer's crusade project will provide gainful employment for the rural dwellers, check the growth of rural-urban migration, provide gainful employment in agriculture for displaced persons and increase food and crop production. By participation in the programme, the crusader will derive the following advantages from the project:

- a) An opportunity to overcome unemployment by honourable means.
- b) Cash income from his crops with which to obtain the necessities of life. And attain a better standard of living.
- c) Security against hunger and want for himself and his family.
- d) Availability of farming capital (often a limiting factor in agricultural production) guaranteed by the government and recoverable, after harvesting the crops, in small convenient installments.
- e) Ready market for his crops at more attractive prices than are possible by individual sale in the open market.
- f) A feeling of satisfaction and self-sufficiency in assisting to improve the wealth and economy of the state.⁵²⁵

The crusade project received the sum of ₦2.12 million from Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the federal commissioner of finance after touring the state from 11th to 14th of August, 1969.⁵²⁶ Meanwhile, the crusade projects consisted of the following schemes:

- i) Rice at Illushi in Esan Division.
- ii) Maize at Udo in Esan Division
- iii) Maize and Cotton at Warrake in Owan Division, and Ekperi and Aviele in Etsako Division.
- iv) Maize, Rubber and Atachi in Asaba Division.
- v) Upland rice and oil palm in Iguoriakhi in Benin West Division.⁵²⁷

By 1970, the crusade project has recorded huge success with the scheme employing three thousand crusaders cultivating 3,000 acres of rice, 6,750 acres of cotton and 2,000 acres of maize.⁵²⁸ "The sum of ₦480, 000 was disbursed by the state government to support the

scheme between 1968 and 1970. On the whole, a total sum of ₦670, 000 was spent on the scheme."⁵²⁹

The Midwest State Government resuscitated and upgraded the various state government farms such as Warake farm, 13000 acres;Agbede mechanized farm, 10,000 acres and Agenegbode farms 105,000 acres.⁵³⁰ The acute shortage of meat during the Biafran occupation made the government to give cattle rearing a priority in her agricultural scheme. Consequently, the state government established a cattle ranch at Igara Division in 1968⁵³¹ with the sum of ₦91,232.00. The state government also established cattle ranch at Ubiaja in 1971.⁵³² According to Ogbemudia:

After the liberation of the Midwest, we decided on an all-out effort to restore all veterinary services. Veterinary clinic were established at Sapele, Uromi and Asaba and control posts at Agenebode and Obiaruku. Control post at Asaba and Ibillo were enlarged to meet demand. The remarkable increase in demand for veterinary services was shown in the increased revenue for treatment of livestock for which fees were charged. Over 200 cattle, 500 sheep, 3000 goats, 400 dogs, 30 cats and 120,000 fowls were treated in the state between 1969 and 1970, whilst about 250 dogs and 100,000 fowls were also treated by the veterinary Division, and a total of 86,987 cattle, 895 sheep, 1528 pigs were inspected at the various slaughterhouses in the state over the same period.⁵³³

Ogbemudia created a lot of innovation in agriculture which he used to unlock vast unemployment opportunity in the Midwest including Esan land. With this a lot of Esan displaced people starting from 1966 coup followed by the pogrom in the North and those that returned home from the East and other parts of the country as a result of the war were rehabilitated. Busani Bafana argued that providing necessary infrastructure in rural area can stem urban migration and boost employment.⁵³⁴ Ayide described agriculture as a sector that has "multiplier effect on nation's socio-economic and industrial fabric because of the multifunctional nature of the sector."⁵³⁵ Imoagene described farming "as not only a major

occupation in Midwest, it was also virtually the only occupation outlet open to rural population."⁵³⁶

War has always been followed by severe food crisis and unemployment. Ogbemudia was able to capitalize on the rich soil fertility of Midwest including Esan to address not only the problem of food shortage but also create employment for those whose means of livelihood had been devastated by the civil war.

Education

The Midwestern State reconstruction effort left a remarkable legacy in the area of education. The Midwest was carved out of the Western Region where educational development had been most remarkable especially with the introduction of free education in 1955.⁵³⁷ Consequently, the Midwestern State was among the highest in school enrollment since 1955. Education was truncated in Esan land because the Biafran and the federal troops occupied the schools in the various Esan communities when they were in Esan. This resulted to the closure of many schools in the area. Students of the Teacher Training College, Igweben, were chased away by Biafran forces, who occupied the school before the arrival of the federal forces who subsequently occupied the school.⁵³⁸ The federal government made the school the fourth training depot in Nigeria during the war. In Ubiaja, the Biafran forces first occupied St. Benedict Primary School before the federal forces took over the school. In Illushi, the Biafrans occupied St. Augustine primary school (now Niger Bank primary school) before the federal forces came to eject them from the school and occupied the school.⁵³⁹ In Ekpoma, the Biafran forces first occupied the School of Agric, Ekpoma (now AAU secondary school) before the federal troops came to take over the school.⁵⁴⁰ All the schools occupied by the fighting forces were forced to close down. This went along way to disrupted education in Esan.

"The pre-war high school enrolment in the state is a manifestation of the keen interest parents had in the education of their children."⁵⁴¹

The Midwestern Government was prepared to sustain this momentum. Consequently, on the 3rd of October 1967, the state governor, Ogbemudia held a meeting at Immaculate Conception College, Benin City with principals of secondary schools, teacher training colleges, trade and technical schools and senior officials of the Ministry of Education.⁵⁴² The meeting identified the problem facing education in the state thus:

There were problems of acute shortage of staff, wide destruction of school buildings and resettlement of displaced pupils, especially those who could not return to their schools which were either destroyed or were situated in areas still in secessionist hands. In the urban centers, shortage of accommodation for displaced students was a serious problem. Also, the exodus of a large number of Igbo proprietors of schools created vacuum that had to be filled.⁵⁴³

In Esan, although there were no damaged infrastructures in schools, the war made some people poor resulting to their inability to cater for the educational needs of their children. For example, persons of Esan origin displaced in other parts of the country came back home as a result of mass killing of Southerners in the North in 1966. There was also mass exodus of Esan back home as a result of Ojukwu's pronouncement that all non-Easterners should leave the Eastern region at the height of the crisis in 1966. In the same vein, when the Biafran forces invaded Midwest on August 1967, some Midwest citizen fled their home only to come back as displaced persons.⁵⁴⁴

Among the displaced people were Esan people. The displacement affected their ability to cater for the education needs of their children. There were orphans whose parent were killed due to the war. As affirmed by Ogbemudia. "There were orphans who had nobody to look after their educational needs."⁵⁴⁵ The state government under Col. Ogbemudia as a result gave priority attention to this orphans in the award of scholarship. "Apart from the

awards of scholarship based on academic merit, the government made post-primary scholarship awards to indigents and war affected students."⁵⁴⁶

The scholarship awards was made by the Midwestern Government with special consideration to the manpower needs of the state. By the end of 1968/69 financial year, the following benefited from the Midwest government loans and scholarship:

Table 3 Showing Scholarship Awards and Number of Beneficiaries, 1968/69 financial year

S/N	Scholarship/Grants	Number of Beneficiary
1	Post- Graduate	12
2	Post-Secondary(loans)	535
3	National Certificate of Education	89
4	Post-Primary	394
5	Higher School Certificate	112
6	Technical Education	41

Source: Midwestern Nigeria Handbook, (Benin: Information Department, 1970), 18.

To encourage female employment in the teaching profession, the state government introduced special scholarship for the training of female graduate teachers.⁵⁴⁷ In addition, any female or male student who scored an aggregate of between 5 and 15 in the West African School Certificate Examination was automatically entitled to scholarship to a higher institution.⁵⁴⁸

Furthermore, a revolving loan was also introduced. It offered manystudent the opportunity to benefit from higher education. Eligible candidate must have completed the H.S.C or UniversityPreliminary Courses and are in their second year at a University, pursuing science studies. Under the scheme, students who graduate with the first class honours or second class upper in their final examinations are exempted from refunding the loans. A medical student is eligible for exemption from refund of the loan, provided he has a distinction in any of his subjects.⁵⁴⁹

The special loan scheme supplied the needs of many Midwestern students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka who were expelled from the Eastern region before the war. The displaced Midwestern students also included Esan students and they made the demand for scholarship to be higher than what the government could entertain. Thus, the revolving loan scheme became inevitable to cope with the problem of displaced student.

In the three former regions, it was not difficult to handle the problem of displaced students from the East and other parts of the country because there were higher institution for placement of the displaced students. In the Western region, there were the University of Ibadan and University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) established in 1948 and 1962. In the Eastern region, there was University of Nigeria, Nsukka established in 1960. In the North, there was Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, which was established in 1962.⁵⁵⁰ With these universities, the displaced students' problem did not pose a big challenge to the West and North. Ogbemudia affirmed this thus:

At the tertiary and post-secondary school level, generally particularly at the university and polytechnic levels, the Midwest State was not as lucky as most other states who had such institution to cope with their problems of inadequate placement for their displaced students.⁵⁵¹

The non-Igbo Midwesterners suffered great educational deprivation as a result of the war and this may have made them bitter and hardened towards Biafra. The Midwest students of non-Igbo origin were forced out of Nsukka prematurely. The long turn out of post primary school leavers made the demand for higher education high in the State. The absence of a university in the State and the fact that the quota policy of admission outside the Eastern State or the war area did not cater adequately for the educational needs of the Midwest, made the University of Nigeria, Nsukka their destination.⁵⁵² Ogbemudia made scholarship available for the displaced student to seek admission to any higher institution in Nigeria or abroad. The following is the rate of the scholarship:

The value of the loan scholarship award for undergraduate studies is the exact value of the institutional fees (including boarding in residential colleges) examination fees and teaching practice fees.

Undergraduate scholarship overseas were entitled to institutional fees, examination fees and tuition fees plus a maintenance allowance of £600 a year paid to them in equal monthly installments. Post graduate scholars in Nigeria receive a flat rate of £450 a year for boarding and institutional fees. Post graduate scholars overseas are entitled to a maintenance allowance of £720 per annum in U.K and other European countries, £1,285 per annum in U.S.A... £1200 per annum in Canada paid to them in equal monthly installments. In addition, they are entitled to examination fees, tuition fees and other approved institutional fees which are paid direct to the college authorities.⁵⁵³

The problems of the displaced students and the high demand for higher education was the motivating factor that led to the establishment of the University of Benin in 1970 by Ogbemudia.⁵⁵⁴ As part of the reconstruction efforts of the state government, this remained the biggest achievement in the educational sector. The University initially started as Institute of Technology, Benin City in 1970 and started in the 1970-71⁵⁵⁵ academic year with 180 students. The institution was upgraded and named University of Benin in 1972 and graduated its first set of graduates in 1974. The fact cannot be denied that among the graduating students were Esan.⁵⁵⁶ The university had satellite campuses throughout the state with the main campus in Benin. The Midwestern Government also established College of Education in Abraka in 1969. The institution trained professional teachers who were very instrumental to the reorganization of education in the State. However, the college of Education was later made the faculty of Education of the University of Benin. Ogbemudia stated his motive of education development in the state:

I was concerned with a systematic development and general re-organization of education in the State to satisfy the educational aspirations of our people, as well as to meet the needs of numerous displaced persons of all ages and categories.⁵⁵⁷

As part of the reconstruction and rehabilitation, the state government introduced restricted scholarship for the educational disadvantage areas, such as Isoko, Owan, Akoko-Edo, and Western Ijaw.⁵⁵⁸ Esan was not categorized as one of the educationally deprived areas despite the fact that the university, the satellite campus and other higher institution established to address the problems of the demand of higher education and displaced students were not located in Esan. However, the fact cannot be denied that the reorganization of Education brought higher education closer to the people of Esan.

Before the civil war, education was basically in the hands of missionaries. Before the government undertook direct control of the schools in the state on April 1, 1973,⁵⁵⁹ "all schools, excepting Edo College, Benin city, and Government College, Ughelli were owned and managed by private proprietors and voluntary agencies, notably religious organization."⁵⁶⁰

By an Edict No 4 of 1973, a state education board and fifteen divisional education boards including Benin City were created. The government negotiated the compensation with the private proprietors while some proprietors notably the missionaries asked for no compensation...

Available statistics in 1965 indicated that only about 10 percent of primary school leavers entered secondary school in the state. Until they were abolished, the secondary modern school accounted for about 30 percent of primary school products. Records also showed that the remaining 60 percent of the total primary school output in the state did not have access to further education... By 1974, the number of secondary school in the state had risen from 64 in 1965 to 150. Similarly, the enrolment rose from 16,272 in 1965 to 55,289 in 1965.⁵⁶¹

Although the Christian mission schools maintained good discipline, they were not able to meet the educational aspiration of the State in term of access and curricula. With the State takeover of schools, there was rise in enrolment all over the State including Esan Division. After the takeover of schools, it was not difficult for the government to expand educational facilities in Esan Division because the civil war did not result to the devastation of schools like in Western Igbo where schools were devastated. Even when there is no available data to show the increase of school enrolment in Esan Division after the takeover of schools from missionary, the fact cannot be denied that the takeover led to expansion of education in the area. The government takeover of schools was not unconnected with the role churches played in the war. The federal government had accused the churches of using relief supply as cover to supply the Biafran arms and the federal government regarded this as a frustration of its war effort.⁵⁶²

Health

Health and medical services constitute one of the major areas of priority in national development. Before the civil war, health services in the state were very poor. When Ogbemudia came to power, the state government had nine general hospitals with bed capacity of 607. Apart from the problem of shortage of hospitals, there was also the problem of shortage of drugs and inefficient management of the existing few hospitals.⁵⁶³ This became a challenge to the government. As parts of the reconstruction efforts, the state government set up an emergency Task Force to construct three hospitals with a total capacity of 240 beds on February 20, 1970. The three emergency hospitals were located in Akwukwu Igbo, Ibusa and Ilue-Ologbo. Out of the three, two were located in Western Igbo and one in Isoko Division,⁵⁶⁴ leaving Esan Division out of the emergency health facility. Perhaps, Esan was left out because the civil war did not seriously affect the area.

In the 1970/71 financial year, the state government earmarked the sum of £1.8million for health facility and services and this represented 14% of the total recurrent expenditure. £1.8million was also budgeted for the building of new hospitals, improvement of old ones and purchase of medical equipments. The state government made medical treatment free to all children up to the age of 18 years.⁵⁶⁵ In the same financial year, Uromi General Hospital was among the eighteen hospitals expanded by the state government. In 1971, the state government built twelve new maternity hospitals at the cost of £30,000 at Akwukwu, Umunede, Ubiaruku, Ibilo, Gbokoda, Koko, Oweh, Igwobazuwa, Effuru, Igbanke, Ubiaja and Igweben.⁵⁶⁶ Out of the twelve new hospitals, two were located in Esan Division. The Midwestern government also established the Midwest Medical Centre which later became University of Benin Teaching Hospital. In the words of Iweze:

By the Edict No 12 April 1971, the state government established the Midwest Medical Centre which later formed the nucleus of University of Benin Teaching hospital based on the Midwest Medical Centre (Amendment) Edict, 1972... The UBTH received financial and technical assistance from the federal government. The reforms in the state's Health Ministry culminated to the enactment of Edict No 20 of 1971 which provided for the establishment of the Midwest State Management Board.⁵⁶⁷

As more people availed themselves of the services of government hospital, the problem of perennial insufficiency of drugs became pronounced. In the 1970/71 financial year, government earmarked £365,000 for drugs. In addition, the state government established a drug manufacturing factory in Benin at the cost £50,000 to ensure the steady supply of drugs and to make it affordable.⁵⁶⁸ With the establishment and expansion of existing hospitals, the Midwest Medical Centre and the drug factory helped to address the health challenge of the people especially after the war when the people faced a lot of hardship. Even though the medical facility were inadequate, they nevertheless created jobs for a lot of displaced Midwesterners including the Esan people.

Esan and Gowon's Reconstruction

In Gowon's broadcast to the nation after the formal surrender of Biafra at Dodan Barracks in Lagos on January 15, 1970, he emphasized the enormous task of building the country destroyed by the war.⁵⁶⁹ The socio-economic and political thrust of Gowon's administration was declared on October 1, 1970 in a national broadcast to the nation. Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation, known as 3Rs, was among the programmes. The fact that the civil war had left devastation and destruction especially the Igbo war-affected areas made the 3Rs imperative.⁵⁷⁰ Gowon had anticipated the enormous task of post-civil war reconstruction and established the National Rehabilitation Commission by Decree No. 40 of 1968 which was headed by Mr. Timothy Omo-Bare.⁵⁷¹ The commission focused basically in the Eastern States made up East-Central State, Rivers State and South-Eastern State. The

commission was saddled with the responsibility of collecting and distributing drugs and humanitarian gift from international and non-governmental agencies.⁵⁷²

In the National Rehabilitation Commission's post war reconstruction programme, the Esan was not included because the area was among the federal government controlled territory.⁵⁷³ Thus, Esan did not benefit directly from the humanitarian gift from the commission. However, we are going to explore the implication of some of the post war policies like currency exchange, abandoned property and Indigenization Degreeon Esan.

The Currency Exchange

Six months after the civil war began, Chief ObafemiAwolowo announced that the new Nigeria notes would go into circulation in January 1968.⁵⁷⁴ In line with the announcement, the federal government changed her currency in January 1968. The Biafran government responded on 30 December, 1968 with Biafra's own currency. Biafra banned the use of Nigerian pound as legal tender within her territory.⁵⁷⁵ Anigbogu remarked that "the change of currency by Nigeria in January 1968... resulted in a major financial disaster for Biafra."⁵⁷⁶ He further declared that it was clear to everyone in Biafra by October, 1967 that the Nigerian government was going to change her currency. But the Biafran government failed to develop a plan early enough to counter the federal government plan.⁵⁷⁷ Madiebo attributed the currency change by Nigerian government as the reason why Biafra lost the war and also questioned the lack of taking early measure to counter the federal government currency change even when every Biafran envisaged the plan by the federal government to change Nigerian currency right from October 1967. Madiebo affirms thus:

The Biafra financial disaster, if not a total collapse as a result of the change in currency by Nigeria in January, 1968, was the most important single reason why we lost the war. At the end of the financial chaos, which followed in Biafra, we had lost over 50 million pounds which could have made a world difference in our favour if properly utilized for the execution of the war. This should

not have happened if prior arrangements were made to counter the move. After all, as far back as October, 1967, the common man in Biafra was already talking about possible change of currency by Nigeria. As a result of that fantastic financial loss, Biafra found it difficult to support her army at war.⁵⁷⁸

Apart from affecting the position of Biafra winning the war, the federal government change of currency also worsened the suffering of Biafran civilian population who were engaged in cross border trade with their neighbors. For example, there were some Biafran suppliers who were getting their supplies from Illushi market which is situated by the Bank of River Niger in Esan Division. The change of Nigerian currency affected this trade. Traders within Nigerian territory refused to accept Biafran currency while traders within Biafran territory refused to accept Nigerian currency. The implication of this is that the currency exchange impacted beyond the Biafran territory since it affected trade in some parts of Esan.⁵⁷⁹

As part of the reconciliation policy after the war, the federal government directed that all citizens should deposit all old Nigerian and Biafran currency with the central bank of Nigeria. Those affected by the directive were basically the former Igbo secessionist group. The Igbo complied with the expectation of receiving the equivalent of what they deposited.

Iweze notes:

The people complied with the federal government's directives and deposited their money with great expectation of receiving equivalent of the same amount deposited. In anticipation of the pending exchange, the Biafrans deposited £16 million Biafran fund and £25million in old Nigerian notes with Nigerian Central Bank through local banks. In May, 1970, however, the government changed the terms of the plan. Under the new plan, each amount deposited with the Central Bank of Nigeria for exchange was exchange at a flat rate of £20 regardless of the amount deposited.⁵⁸⁰

"The financial disaster began with the currency exchange which climaxed with the change of bank account in 1970."⁵⁸¹ This policy of nullifying any bank account operated during the war was under the guidance of ObafemiAwolowo, the federal commissioner for

finance.⁵⁸² Achebe reiterated that the action of the federal government "had the immediate result of pauperizing the middle class and earning a profit of £4 million for the federal government treasury."⁵⁸³

After the war, Philip Effiong made practical proposal to General Gowon in a written document on re-integration, unity, re-absorption of Biafra, compensation and restoration. Gowon made a personal comment on the document and sent it back to Philip Effiong. On the problem of currency, Effiong proposed on the document:

One of the surest problems is likely to be the question of currency. The people have suffered many losses, including the dispossession of their property both movable and immovable as a result of the 1966 crisis and the war. They were also severely hit by the Nigerian currency switch of 1967-68. All their present assets seem to be only in the form of Biafran currency. If, as is rumoured, the federal government should fail to redeem this in its entirety, it will be tantamount to a further dispossession of the masses of the people. Apart from the fact that this cannot be calculated to endear them to the federal government, if they are so dispossessed, relief by way of gifts of foods etc cannot make good this loss. To redeem the "Biafra" currency in its entirety by an arrangement which does not savour of mass dispossession will ensure that the people will be enabled to help themselves a bit, by what they can. This will be a more effective and satisfying form of relief. If the federal government should find some difficulty in doing this, recourse could be had to relief money being offered part of which could be used to redeem the currency, a gesture which will tremendously reassure the people."⁵⁸⁴

On the proposal of currency raised by Philip Effiong, Gowon responded by saying that;

- i) The ministry of finance and central bank already have some experience on this...
- ii) It is impossible to exchange £ per £ for a so called Biafran currency.
- iii) Very soon, the federal military government will carry out the necessary exercise for the currency exchange.

The response of Gowon showed that there was a victors and vanquished in contradiction of the federal government position that there is no victor, no vanquish. Victory or defeat in war

is a function of how power is projected from a position of strength even after battle field. The implication of this is that there was a conscious arrangement in place to punish the Igbo after the war. Thus winning the battle and the war and making sure that Biafran did not win the peace was high in the agenda of the federal military government. Fighting a war is governed by political rather than military consideration hence, Carl Clausewitz argued that "war is not merely a political act but also a political instrument."⁵⁸⁵ In fighting war, there is always a goal. Gowon addressed World press on the 5th January, 1968 that:

The federal military government always keeps before it the major political goal of the current military operations. This is to create and safeguard the conditions for the lasting peace, stability and inter communal harmony so that the nation can continue its economic and social development at an acceptable pace.⁵⁸⁶

The above suggested that the action of the federal government was at variance with the political goal which the government professed at the war. The legacy of the one sided peace effort after the war is the re-emergence of irredentist movement such as the movement for the actualization of the sovereign state of Biafra. According to Nwabughuogu, even though irredentist movement do not necessarily lead to complete breakdown of the political system, they can disrupt the process of nation building.⁵⁸⁷ Not only do they obstruct mobility of persons, goods and services, but also create a sense of insecurity of life and property. Many of them cause loss of lives and property. Besides, the enormous resources put into quelling the riots or rebuilding destroyed property deprive the nation-state of money which could have been used to build infrastructure that could have brought good life to the citizens. Many youths, the future nation-builders, loss their lives in the disturbance.⁵⁸⁸ Apart from the above, the phenomenon has the problem of affecting the unity of Nigeria. A situation where the process of making peace is a conspiracy against a particular segment of the country cannot produce the desired result. Hence Chinua Achebe argued that "we cannot extol the

virtue of unity without first satisfying ourselves that the end to which the unity is directed is unimpeachable."⁵⁸⁹

On the part of Esan, the exchange of £20 regardless of the amount deposited by the Biafra which pauperized the Igbo became constructive for the Esan people. As the Igbo lacked the financial strength to re-start their business, it was easy for Esan people to take over some of the businesses in Esan that were hitherto in the hands of Igbo before the war. Small scale business like bakeries were taken over by Esan Ojiefoh affirms this thus:

The Uromi artisans now replaced the Igbos who was there masters. Uromi sons who were traders, mechanics, drivers etc all returned home and established their various trades in Uromi. These people introduced mechanical technology like converting Volkswagen engines into plants, prominent among these were Mr. Monday Odafen the yellow mechanic as he is popularly called.⁵⁹⁰

Businesses in urban parts of Esan were taken over by the people of Esan. In area like Illushi, John Ekoh commanded businesses in the area. In Ubiaja mono bread was everywhere. The artisan in Esan were dominated by Igbo before the war and Esan learnt such artisan crafts like motor mechanic, auto electrician, and welder from them. The legacy of what they learnt from the Igbo was consolidated during the war as some of their Igbo masters did not come back and even those that came back saw that their positions were taken over by Esan artisans trained by them. Ojiefoh affirms this thus:

The legacy that the Uromi indigenous sons got from the Igbos was well consolidated during the war. The artisan faced with the competitions of our sons that had migrated from various cities in Nigeria soon learnt new skills from them. It was possible to boil a car radiator, they told them and it will last for another two years. These and other experimental discoveries made many young men to abandon the only trade they were interested in then, which was to become a driver... Among these artisans and early merchants that decided to learn a trade were great pillars of Uromi town today. His Most Rev. Mathew Okpebholo (JP) started as welder and he is today the managing director of Ray Royal Construction Ltd Uromi with his Headquarters at Ejiana House of Equare, Uromi.⁵⁹¹

One important consequence of this was that Uromi-the economic headquarters of Esan land-experienced unprecedented commercial activities as many Esan moved out of their villages to take part in the booming commercial activities in Uromi. Consequently, the civil war created several job opportunities as many Esan men and women who were before now unknown as traders and contractors because of the sharp competition from the Igbo now became known traders and contractors.

Abandoned Property

The Igbo, in the hurried return to their region at the behest of Ojukwu, left behind their properties in other parts of the country. Nevertheless, the problem of abandoned property started after the January 1966 coup which brought displacement of the people throughout the country. The federal government made sure that all the abandoned properties left behind was taken care of and preserved for them by directing the state government to handle the problems associated with abandoned properties in their state. In obedience to the federal government directives, committees were set up by every state to carry out the assignment. The committees set up in various states handled the sale of movable properties and supervised the renting of houses and commercial property. The committees comprised the state government officials and citizen of the state. After Biafra surrender, Philip Effiong declared before Gowon, that:

With regard to property, there is a feeling that if the people could be enabled to return to their property in places like Port-Harcourt, Enugu, Aba or other parts of the federation, It will serve to assure them as to the genuineness of the oneness. But people cannot hope to do this if they encounter armed soldiers on the roads who are as likely as not to take away their vehicles. An undertaking that people, especially as most of their native homes have been damaged, can return to their property in the town of the federation, will go a long way to heal the wounds.⁵⁹²

As for looting of property and indiscipline on the parts of the army after the war, Gowon directed the field commander to deal with any acts of indiscipline ruthlessly.⁵⁹³

Be that as it may, the subsequent events in some parts of the country demonstrated lack of sincerity in the implementation of the post-civil war reconstruction and reconciliation. The inability of most Igbo landlords to re-claim their properties in Port-Harcourt made the peace effort of the government questionable. This is why Ukase notes that:

From the pronouncement of General Gowon during and immediately after the war, it would appear that his administration was genuinely committed to the promotion of peace and unity, justice, equity and fairness, reintegration and reconciliation with the Nigerian federation. Unfortunately, subsequent events during the life of the administration and other successive governments tend to expose the yawning gap between these pronouncements and the practicality of their implementation. On paper, the government was actually on course; on the part of national reconciliation and reintegration, while in practical terms, the implementation of the so-called post-war reconciliation programme christened the 3rs was a mere smokescreen, a myth and an illusion.⁵⁹⁴

This is why even when the war was fought to keep Nigeria one, we are far from the national unity of our dream. The inability of the Igbo to regain most of their properties in some parts of the country is a threat to the unity of the country.

In the Midwest, "the return of abandoned properties to their owners became the most pressing demands."⁵⁹⁵ The Midwestern state government passed an Edict to protect the property of the Igbo that fled the state as a result of the war.⁵⁹⁶ The state government took inventory of all properties abandoned in the state in all important towns in the state. The Igbo people returned to Benin and major town in the state at the end of the war and, following the Federal and State Government pronouncement that their properties would be returned to them. The abandoned property committees returned about 200 parcel of landed properties to Igbo landlords in Benin.⁵⁹⁷ Ogbemudia notes:

The committee's work was a great success. Working with incredible speed, the committee repaired a reasonable number of damaged and abandoned houses in various towns in the state. In Benin City, for instance, sixty-four out of the two hundred and

thirteen identified houses belonging to the fleeing Igbo were repaired by July, 1968. During the same period, a total sum of ₦10, 440 (ten thousand four hundred and forty Naira) rent had been collected and paid into the bank in Warri on behalf of persons who had fled. The readiness, with which people freely rented these properties in spite of the bitterness of the secessionist occupation, was a source of joy and hope for the future integration of the state. It was delightful to note the sincerity with which Mid Westerners held those properties in trust for their rightful owners. This was to me a manifestation of the genuine desire and ability of Mid Westerners in particular, and Nigerians in general to live together in peace. I took advantage of this desire to get things done. Things moved and we all worked as a team.⁵⁹⁸

Some Igbo's vehicles were recovered by the committee and given to them. The situation in the Midwest and Esan district was a reversal of the situation in Lagos and Port-Harcourt where most Igbo property was seized. After the civil war, the Igbo who were in majority in Port-Harcourt came back to start a new life but were denied their property. Rivers people claimed their property and called it "Abandoned property." The act was carried out in collaboration with the federal military government.⁵⁹⁹ Iweze maintained that most Midwestern Igbo properties were seized in Lagos and Port-Harcourt:

In Lagos, most Western Igbo properties were seized. Chief George Udeme, who worked with Nigerian Post and Telecommunication in Lagos, was erecting a house before the war broke out. When he returned after the war, he found it difficult to recognize his uncompleted building because the house had been completed and claimed by a Yoruba man. He failed to reclaim the building despite the Lagos state Government's pronouncement that all abandoned property in the state should be given back to their rightful owners. Engineer Anthony Okolo, a town planner and estate surveyor from Asaba, lost his houses in Port Harcourt during the civil war.⁶⁰⁰

The Midwestern Igbo suffered the same fate with their Eastern Igbo counterpart because they bear the same name with the Eastern Igbo. Even the 1966 pogrom in the North also affected the Midwestern Igbo as it was not easy to differentiate them from their name. The Esan that ran back home as a result of the war went back to claim their properties. Charles Ihaza notes that his uncle, AbumereIhaza owns a house in old GRA, Port Harcourt and that he reclaim the house after the war.⁶⁰¹

There is no available data to show Esan persons who claimed their properties in Lagos, Port-Harcourt and other parts of the country and oral sources did not show where Esan property was seized in the name of abandoned property after the war. The reason why Esan people were not affected by the abandoned property saga was mainly because they supported federal government cause. It was speculated by some people that after the creation of Rivers State, some Rivers people had agreed with Gowon that should the war end in favour of the federal government, the state would take over all the Igbo property in Rivers state. Onwumere affirms thus:

Historians would say that Ken SaroWiwa was allegedly among the Rivers State indigenes who led other like minds from the state to Gowon. The outcome of their meeting was an accord with the Gowon-led government that should the war end in favour of the Nigeria; the state would take over all that Ndigbo left behind in Rivers State.⁶⁰²

If the above assertion is correct, it means that those who were denied their property in Port-Harcourt were the Igbo who were in majority in the secessionist group. It also means the seizure of Igbo property was in fulfillment of the accord the Rivers people entered with Gowon.

In the Midwest, it cannot be denied that the Western Igbo supported the Biafran cause. Like earlier maintained, they suffered the same fate in the 1966 pogrom in the North and they were almost treated the same way with Eastern Igbo by the Northerners. Obasanjo affirms that even the civilian populations of Midwest Igbo were hostile toward the federal troops when they arrive Agbor and Umunede. Obasanjo thus:

7 Brigade moved up along the detour and continued to lead the advance from Agbor to Umenede. Here, fighting moved through Igbo-speaking areas and hostility was encountered not only from rebel soldiers but also from the civilian population... The advance on both axis remained steady although progress was not so rapid compared with the rate of advance to Benin in the non-Igbo speaking area of operation. 6 Brigade encountered stiff resistance

at Ogwasi-Ukwu and at Ibusa, the home of some senior Army officers on the rebel side.⁶⁰³

The seizure of property after the war was a kind of war indemnity on those that supported the Biafran cause. In other words, it was meant to punish those that were loyal to Biafra during the war. Consequently, some Midwestern Igbo property was seized in Port-Harcourt and Lagos because of their loyalty to the Biafran cause. The non-Igbo ethnic groups in the Midwest distrusted the Biafrans and this heightened the fear of Igbo domination. Even before the war, Esan was among the group in Midwest that supported the preservation of strong centre in the September 1966 constitutional conference.

The condition of the Igbo in the Midwest as regards the abandoned property can only be compared to the situation in Kano and other parts of the North where Igbo's property was handed to them after the war. In the debate of reintegration and reconstruction, the abandoned property issue is of special relevance. Property recovery made a considerable economic impact in the attempt to begin a new life after the war. The situation in Kano and parts of the North is comparable to the experience in Midwest. Sabon-gari in Kano was dominated by Igbo before the war.

The way the committee set up by the government of Midwestern state handled the abandoned property issue showed the determination of the people to heal the wounds inflicted by the war. Government and the people held properties in trust for the rightful owners. "The Igbo and non-Igbo groups-Edo, Ishan, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ijaw-point to handling of the abandoned property as one of the veritable elements in the successful reconciliation that occur in the state."⁶⁰⁴

In Esan, the Igbo came back after the war to reclaim their property. The Igbo people had a lot of landed property at Uromi and Illushi. Godwin Agbadamu said Fidelis Igbonezu came back to reclaim his house that later became Illushi Police Station.⁶⁰⁵ In Uromi, Chief J.

A. Uba reclaimed his two storey building and the rent collected was handed over to him. Others that reclaimed their house in Uromi included; Patrick Aubo, Mr. Pius Eyinand Mr. SylvanusNwerem.⁶⁰⁶

In Ubiaja, one Mr. Hope who owns Hope Rising Bakery came back after the war to reclaim his house.⁶⁰⁷ There were some Igbo that came back to sell their houses and landed property for a new start. Harneit-Siever notes that many Igbo, the new start began with selling of their property.⁶⁰⁸ In Illushi, Mr. Emujede Philip bought his house from one Igbo man who needed money to start a new life. Similarly, Mathew Ihensekhiem revealed that Chief Emmanuel came back to Ebelle to sell his house to Chief John Omije, the Eson of Ebelle kingdom.⁶⁰⁹ In Uromi, Mr. EzeObelle came back after the war to sell his house to Mr. Peter Oriakhilin.⁶¹⁰ The Esan complied with the Federal Government directives to preserve the properties left behind by people as result of the war. The implication of this was that Esan became one of the places where the Igbo began to acquire landed property after the war without fear.

Indigenisation Decree of 1972

After the war, the federal military government under Gowon promulgated the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree in 1972. The Decree popularly known as indigenization Decree was meant to put Nigerian economy in the hands of Nigerians. It was an attempt to indigenize the ownership of private enterprises in the country. The Decree defined the enterprises that foreign capital was not allowed to operate in the Nigerian economy.⁶¹¹ Fifty-five types of enterprises operating in the Nigeria were classified into two groups. Commercial enterprises such as retail business and many other service operations were classified as Scheduled One Enterprise and required 100% indigenous ownership, to the complete exclusion of foreign capital except those of African countries that allowed Nigerian

residents to do similar businesses. An exception was granted where equity capital was not less than ₦400, 000. For instance, departmental superstores, by virtue of their size and the volume of capital involved, were exempted. Schedule Two Enterprises, which were required to have 40% indigenous equity ownership, comprised mainly joint ventures. Most of the enterprises which were allotted to this group are intermediate or small-scale manufacturing firms.⁶¹²

The indigenization Decree identified areas in Nigerian economy that Nigerians were capable of owning and running easily. Despite this, the Decree also identified the areas in the economy that cannot be handled without foreign capital. The indigenization was a desire to build a strong economy that would come under the control of Nigerians. Nigerians frowned at the ability of foreign investor to transfer a very high percentage of their profit back to their country. Nigerian questioned that the profit would have been used to expand the economy if the ownership of the enterprises was in the hand of the local investor.

By the time the Decree went into effect in 1974, a few Igbo had recovered from the war. The Decree created an opportunity for a few Nigerian to enrich themselves at the expense of majority of the citizen of Nigeria.⁶¹³ Mohammed affirms this thus:

There has always been a consensus amongst most officials over at least the official aims of the policy of indigenization, which reduce to the achievement of national "economic independence". However, economic independence is a rather vague aspiration, and the belief that it has been the only significant motivating force behind Nigeria's indigenization is somewhat naïve. A close look at the Decree and their implementation suggests that "economic independence" can be a means for achieving further, and rather different ends. Moreover in any case even the official interpretation of the concept appears to be consistent with the promotion of the private interests of businessmen and state officials. In order to promote the interests of these groups such catch-phrases as "economic independence", "economic freedom", and "self-determination" were used to generate a broad base support for the policy.⁶¹⁴

Apart from the fact that the Decree was meant to enrich few Nigerian, it was also a means for taking the economy of the country out of the hands of the Igbo who before the war had a grip of the country's economy. This is why Iweze question the timing of the decree. The Igbo who were devastated by the war had no finance to participate in the buying of shares in the indigenized companies. Thus, the post-war economic policy excluded the Igbo entrepreneurs from the process of indigenization.⁶¹⁵ It is not that the policy was not a well intention one. In African it is not only Nigeria that tried to indigenize her economy. Kenya indigenization "started with the acquisition of the fertile farmland which had been possessed by white settlers"⁶¹⁶ in 1965. In Tanzania, Nyerere claimed that only Tanzanians can develop Tanzania in the interest of Tanzanians.⁶¹⁷

In Nigeria, the timing of indigenization Decree made it not to be for the interest of the whole country. The goal is to put a particular ethnic group in disadvantage position in sharing the national cake. Achebe declared that:

The Indigenization Decree which followed soon afterwards completed the routing of Igbo from the commanding height of Nigerian economy, to everyone's apparent satisfaction.⁶¹⁸

The indigenization policy was sold to the public as part of the plan to liberate the country's economy from the west and empower local business interest. Achebe revealed the conspiracy in the process:

The move was sold to the public as some of "Pro-African liberation strategy" to empower Nigerian businesses and shareholders. The chicanery of the entire scheme of course was quite evident. Having stripped a third of the Nigerian population of the means to acquire capital, the leaders of the government of Nigeria knew that the former Biafran by and large, would not have the financial muscles to participate in this plot. The end result, they hoped would be a permanent shifting of the balance of economic power away from the East to other constituencies. Consequently very few Igbos participated, and many of the jobs and positions in most of the sectors of the economy previously occupied by Easterners went to those from other parts of the country.⁶¹⁹

The timing calls to question the reconciliation efforts of the federal government meant to unite the country after the civil war. In the situation which the Igbo found themselves after the war, any government policy that will make their economic situation deteriorate further is a serious threat to the reconciliation effort of Gowon. The end result is lopsided development due to bias public policies. Thus, permanently leaving the Eastern region backward. This means planting poverty intentionally in the people of the region. Nwabughuogu declared "that poverty breeds corruption, Nepotism, ethnicism and insecurity of life and property all of which are inimical to nation building."⁶²⁰ The decree was attempted to totally prevent the Igbo from having say in the country's economy. Ukase affirms this thus:

And to further prevent the Igbos from having any say in the nation's economy, the federal government enacted the indigenization Decree at the height of total destruction of the purchasing power of the Igbo. The intentional timing of the enactment of this decree calls to question the truthfulness in the reconciliation process.⁶²¹

The decree demonstrated from the timing that some parts of the country used the decree to pursue its interest to the detriment of other parts of the country (Igbo). This became inimical to the process of reconciliation which federal government hope to achieve after the war. Ibeanu affirms that "conflict expresses a direct or indirect between two or more actors in which they attempt to undermine the interests of one another..."⁶²²

In Midwest, the timing of Indigenization Decree can also be said to exclude Midwestern Igbo whose area were devastated by the war from the opportunities created by the policy. In fighting to reclaim the Midwest from the Biafran forces, the federal troops were more ferocious in Western Igboland than the non-Igbo areas like the Esan which they already had their cooperation and loyalty and because of this, the war did not seriously adversely affected the people of Esan. Iweze affirms that:

It was a well-intentioned policy but the timing of the promulgation of the decree and subsequent implementation was inauspicious for the Western and Eastern Igbo whose areas were devastated by the civil war and who had no finance to buy shares in the indigenization companies and corporations.⁶²³

The reason why the Western Igbo was devastated by the war was because some people from the area supported the Biafran and this is unlike the Esan people who were initially neutral and later were loyal to the federal government. Consequently, when the indigenization Decree went into effect, the Esan people had capital to compete with those who had not suffered from the ravages of the war. Peter Oderle notes that:

The Biafra only came and stays briefly without devastation before the federal forces came to liberate Esan from the hand of the Biafra. Esan did not experience devastation like the Western Igbo. The Esan expressed their loyalty to the federal troops by saying One Nigeria when the federal forces were passing.⁶²⁴

The federal government considered all those that supported Biafra cause as people misled into rebellion and promised amnesty for them. Gowon declared that "I solemnly repeat our guarantees of a general amnesty."⁶²⁵ The amnesty was not for those that were loyal to the federal government like Esan people. Esan people were major player in Gowon government. Anthony Enahoro was the commissioner for information and labour and major Oboh was the pay master in the Nigerian Army under Gowon. So Esan were there to compete for shares declared by the indigenization decree. For example, Christopher Abebe became the first indigenous chairman of United African Company in 1972.⁶²⁶

Another measure taken by the federal government that was not traumatic for the Esan people was review of salaries and wages of civil servants in 1971. This was followed by the Udoji award of 1975. This measure was meant to improve the living standard of Nigerians. The commission set by Gowon to review the salaries and wages had Chief Simeon Adebo as chairman.⁶²⁷ The commission reviewed the salaries and wages of public service including

staff of local governments and universities as well as teachers in government public schools.⁶²⁸

The Esan people being on the federal government side during the war did not suffer impediments occasioned by the above policy. They benefited from the salaries and wages increment and the Udoji award which took place during the oil boom. Some Midwesterners of Igbo extraction suffered the same fate with Eastern Igbo because they were suspected to have aided the Biafran soldiers to invade Midwest. As a result of the above, it can be argued that the post-civil war reconstruction and reconciliation led to the dominance of non-Igbo groups like Esan in the economic and political affairs of Midwest. Thus the federal government reconstruction policies impacted positively on the Esan people unlike the Eastern and Midwest Igbo.

The Effects of the War on the Esan People

The Nigerian-Biafran war which lasted from May 1967 to January 1970 had positive and negative effects on the socio-economic and political lives of Esan. Some of these effects are examined below:

The Socio-economic Effects

The first consequence of the civil war is displacement of Esan people. In the first place, the 1966 coup and the crisis that followed it led to the displacement of Esan people and the loss of their means of livelihood. The displacement brought them back home thereby making the villages crowded. By the end of 1966, Midwest Rehabilitation Committee had registered 50,000 displaced Midwesterners among whom were Esan. Similarly, Ojukwu's proclamation ordering all non-Easterners out of the Eastern Region resulted to the displacement of 15,000 Midwesterners among whom were also Esan.⁶²⁹ When the Biafran forces invaded Benin on August 9, 1967, a lot of Esan people were displaced in Benin and many of them found their way home.

When a person is displaced, the social status of the person is adversely affected. In most society, the displaced persons are hardly among the decision making members. The displaced persons put pressure on the resources of family members and this can prevent such family members from living life to the fullest. Festus Ukpokolo disclosed that Cyril Ukpokolo and ObohUkpokolo came back from Kano to Ugboha and were hosted by their uncle, Mr. OrukpeUkpokolo.⁶³⁰ Similarly, AgbadamuGodwin revealed that Celestine OfohOkpataku came from the North as a result of the war and was hosted by his brother, AdayiOkpataku at Illushi.⁶³¹ Vincent Ihaza and Anthony Ihaza ran back from Onitsha and were hosted by their brother, Paul Ihaza at Illushi.⁶³² In the same vein, ArebhaAjemi and Pius Ajemi came to Ugboha displaced from Kano and were hosted by AmafohArebha.⁶³³ Chief Ekeoba of Ewohimi revealed that a lot of Okaigben persons came home from the North with their wives and children as a result of the war. He said further that the displaced persons made it difficult for their relatives at home that hosted them to meet their target. He said what he meant by meeting target is that a farmer can plant 800 yams with the hope of selling 500. But with the unfortunate coming home of these relatives, the farmers were forced by circumstances to use all their harvest for the upkeep of their displaced brothers and sisters.⁶³⁴ The end result was that the farmer might be denied the needs he would have used the proceeds from the sale of the yams for.

One effect of the war is that it subjected the people to mental torture. The Esan people suffered from psychological trauma, especially those parents who watched their children displaced and returned home losing their jobs and those whose relatives were killed in the war. Similarly, the rumour that Biafran were coming to invade the Midwest set some people off balance.⁶³⁵ In Ekpon, Okuekhamen Sylvester reveals that after the liberation of Ekpon by the federal forces on October 1, 1967, the rumour that the Biafran forces were going to re-enforce and come back with full force made most Ekpon people to go to the bush

and settled there for some time.⁶³⁶ Similarly, Moses Eguemi reveals that the rumour that the Biafran people were coming back after the liberation of Illushi made people to stop coming to the market after their first encounter with the Biafran forces.⁶³⁷ It must be emphasized that the Biafran forces looted the people's market goods as they were retreating from the federal forces. Some Ifeku and Igala boats that were seized were used by the Biafran forces to convey these looted goods to the East. This made the people to be afraid to come to the market.

Ojiakor notes that "one major consequences of the civil war relates to the colossal loss of human lives unprecedented in the history of Nigeria."⁶³⁸ Ojiakor further presents the statistics of the loss of life:

Empirical evidence indicated that over five million lives lost on both sides, with the Eastern Region particularly the Igbo accounting for ninety percent of whatever figure that was presented. However, it is estimated that about two million, seven hundred (2.7million) Igbo indigenes died as a result of the war. Secondly, apart from an unprecedented loss of human lives recorded during the war, a greater percentage of the citizenry particularly the Igbo were wounded, and some others permanently deformed throughout their lives.⁶³⁹

Out of the five million lives lost were Esan people. Sunday Okoromi revealed that the Biafran troops killed seven people in Egbiki alone.⁶⁴⁰ In Ekpon, 23 persons arrested from other parts of Esan were killed by Biafran troops in September 23, 1967. They were suspected of acting as reconnoiters to the federal troops. In Ebelle, Ewohimi and Igweben, the Biafran forces killed a lot of mad people since most people acting as reconnoiters disguise themselves as mad people. Apart from emotional torture, the death of the people constituted a set back to their loved ones. Some of those killed were their family's breadwinners. For example, Abiede Asiabo was killed in Ogwashukwu leaving behind his wife and children and other relatives that depended on him.⁶⁴¹

The insecurity and fear that pervaded the period of the war affected the commerce and the economy of Esan. As a result of the fear of being conscripted, the youth were unable to continue with farming, hunting and trading activities. The burning down of Uromi market⁶⁴² seriously affected trade in Esan as Uromi was the commercial hub centre of Esan. The opening of Igweben training Depot diverted the attention of the youth of Esan from useful economic venture to prosecution of the war. Youth who were needed in the productive sectors enlisted into the army. The war reduced the volume of trade drastically in Esan. For example, the Igala people stopped coming to Illushi market after the Biafran troops looted their market items and commandeered their boat to carry the items to the East in September, 1967.⁶⁴³ In Ekpoma, the fierce battle between the federal forces and the Biafran troops also reduced the volume of trade in the area as the people became afraid to go to the market and farm. Domestic animals in the rural communities were stolen by the Biafran forces, the federal troops and the other war destitute in the area. Iweze affirms that:

The produce of farmers and their livestock in the rural communities were either destroyed or stolen by the federal troops and other war destitute. This led to famine and acute food shortage because farming became risky due to military movements in the area during the war.⁶⁴⁴

Ogbemudia revealed that the Midwest State experienced meat shortage during Biafran occupation of state.⁶⁴⁵ Essential food product such as salt and egg were also reported to be scarce in the state. Meat shortage and other essential commodity was due to the fact that the trade between the North and the State was truncated with the Biafran invasion of the State. The information that the Biafran troops were killing Hausa in the Midwest made Hausa traders to stop coming to the state. Esan, being a gate way to the North, was affected by the abrupt termination of this trade. The use of salt for explosives made it scarce in the Midwest including Esan when Biafran occupied the area. The lack of these food items adversely affected the nutrition of the people. The end result of this was health challenges which is a

precursor to poverty. Similarly, the lifting of product like gari, palm oil, orange and paupau to the North from Esan was truncated by the war. Mike Odey argued that the "civil war escalated the economic backwardness of the nation and deteriorated the vulnerability and poverty level of individuals..."⁶⁴⁶

The war led to change in the pattern of Esan migration. Before the civil war, the Northern Region was the destination of most job seekers from Esan. After the war, the West became the destination of most job seekers from Esan. With the catastrophic experience of displaced Esan persons from the North as a result of the war, the area was no longer attractive to average Esan's job seekers. Mathew Ihensekhien said that the killing of two of their family members, Philip Aluya and Anthony Aluya in Kaduna during the 1966 riot influence the Ebele people migration toward the West.⁶⁴⁷ Igbeta notes that those that returned home from the North told horrible stories that dissuaded the Ekpon people from going back to the North.⁶⁴⁸

Another consequence of the war in Esan was the capture of young girls for sex. Young girls were potential targets of all form of abuse such as rape, sexual assault and other forms of inhuman treatment. The problem of sexual assault during the war made Esan young girls to disguise themselves as married women but this only reduced the problem as even married women were sexually assaulted. Samson Aibueku revealed that in Ujemen, a newly married woman was sexually assaulted by Biafran forces in August 1967.⁶⁴⁹ Ojiefoh revealed that the federal forces "beat up people without cause, seized people's wives and locked up innocent citizens..."⁶⁵⁰ In Uromi, there were high cases of sexual assault of young girls. Some were even impregnated without recourse to marriage. The case of sexual atrocities was prevalent in places like Uromi and Igweben because of the location of a garrison and Training Depot respectively. Chief Idogun Cletus notes that a lot of girls were impregnated in Igweben leading to babies abandoned by the Federal soldiers.⁶⁵¹ The social implication of

sexual activities on young girls is captured by Etekpe who argued that early pregnancy deprived the young girls of the right to education and dignity. Etekpe further reiterates that the fatherless children eventually raised from the above pregnancy became hoodlums. He is of the opinion that there is strong correlation between broken families and youth restiveness.⁶⁵² The war led to breakup of marriages. This is either as a result of death of the husband or capture of a married woman. For example, Elder Joseph Okoyomon revealed that a federal soldier took the wife of Mr. Isibor Peter of Idumosodi in Ubiaja. Okoyomon also revealed further that a lot of Ubiaja girls were impregnated by the federal troops.⁶⁵³ The marriage institution is sacred in Esan land but the war led to the desecration of the institution. This is why PuisOkigbo said that the civil war led to the degradation of moral values in our society.⁶⁵⁴

Notwithstanding, there were some Esan women that voluntarily married the soldiers. This enhanced the relationship between Esan and other ethnic groups in the country. Some of the soldiers became senior military officers which help to elevate the status of their wives' relatives. For example, Lt. Col Daramola married Theresa Masada from Ebkoiyi and Lt. Col Adeniran married Patricia Okoriah from Uromi.⁶⁵⁵

The war impacted on some aspects of Esan culture. Chief Philip Ekeoba notes that urinating and defecating inside the living house was at variance with Esan culture. But, with the Biafra and the federal forces in the area and the fear of either being captured or being killed, the people decided to be putting small containers inside for the purpose of defecating and urinating in it at night.⁶⁵⁶ Those killed in the war were buried without proper traditional rites. For example, 23 persons arrested by the Biafran forces from other parts of Esan were killed and buried in a mass grave in Ekpon in September, 1967. Some of them died leaving behind wives and children⁶⁵⁷ According to Okogie:

The Esans of old had a deep respect bordering on superstition and dread for dead bodies, not just because they fear the dead body was that of a person who had then joined the world of spirit but because a dead body was a source of danger to the living... Before the body was ready for burial, it was washed.⁶⁵⁸

The people of Esan cherish their culture. Mathew Ihensekhien notes that "the people of Esan are well rooted in culture and traditions. One of such invaluable custom revolves round the ideal of traditional burial rites and ceremonies."⁶⁵⁹ It is generally believed amongst the Esan that the dead when properly buried join the ancestors. Ihensekhien notes that the dead that is not properly buried will not be accepted by the ancestors.⁶⁶⁰

During the war, most feasts and festivals were not celebrated. In Esan, the celebration of feasts and festivals is indispensable parts of her heritage. Anthony Afariogun notes that "the celebration of some feasts in Esan is an expression of faith in the deities and gods of the land."⁶⁶¹ Some feasts and festivals in Esan are religious obligations which are taken seriously. Afariogun further notes that a day of festival is a day of "communal prayers and invocation."⁶⁶² Festivals are also the day of ancestral worship and when it not celebrated, ancestral anger could be incurred.

The disruption of educational activities was a major consequence of the war in Esan. The Biafran and federal forces occupied schools and this led to the closure of the schools. The Teacher Training College Igweben was invaded by the Biafran forces and later by the federal forces and this led to the closing down of the school. The Army occupied the school from 1967-1973 when the federal forces returned to barracks. In other parts of Esan like Uromi, Ekpoma, Ubiaja, Ebelle, Ewohimi, Ekpon, Illushi, and Uzea, schools were turned to army camps by Biafran and the Nigerian soldiers. For example, St. Augustine Primary School, the only primary school at Illushi, was occupied by the Biafran troops and later the federal forces. Similarly, they occupied St. Benedict Primary School, Ubiaja. Ogbemudia captured the situation when he said that the secessionist invasion of the Midwest made many schools

to go on forced holiday.⁶⁶³ Even when the Midwest government opened schools in the state after liberation from Biafran forces, the schools that were occupied by the federal forces such as Agba grammar school Uromi and St. Augustine Primary School Illushi, to mention a few, were still closed. Before some of these schools were opened, the pupils and students had outgrown school age as the hostility in the period did not allow proper learning to take place.

Immediately after the war, all private and missionary schools were taken over by the Midwestern government in 1971 without paying compensation. Many people see it as a measure of punishing the missionaries for their role in the war.⁶⁶⁴ It must be emphasized that the federal government accused the missionaries of supporting Biafra during the war. With the takeover of schools by government, scholarship was introduced to assist students from poor backgrounds and a lot of Esan people benefited from the kind gesture of the government. The Midwestern State Government made educational development cardinal in her scheme after the war. Special scholarship for the training of female graduate teacher was introduced by the state government in July 1970 to address the problem of shortage of female teacher in the state.⁶⁶⁵

The civil war portrays the Esan people in good light. The Igbo who fled Esan as a result of the war came back to repossess their landed property after the war. For example, Chief J. A. Uba met his two storey-building intact at Uromi and the rent collected was handed over to him. Other Igbo that reclaim their properties after the war in Uromi include Mr. Pius EyinArinze, SylvanusNwerem, and Boniface Ihenfobi.⁶⁶⁶ In Illushi, Mr. Fidelis Igbonezu came back to reclaim his house which was later rented by the Nigerian Police after the war.⁶⁶⁷ In Igweben, Idogun Cletus revealed that the Igbo people came back after the war to repossess their houses.⁶⁶⁸ Similarly, Elder Joseph Okoyomon noted that Igbo who fled Ubiaja as a result of the civil war later came back after the war to repossess their properties.⁶⁶⁹

The civil war removed the economy of Esan from the hand of Igbo and afforded the Esan the opportunity to take over their economy. John Okohere notes that the Uromi people were not happy with the Igbo before the war because they had occupied all aspects of Uromi's economy. Okohere said further that the civil war was a blessing for the Uromi people since it gave them the opportunity to have a grip of their economy.⁶⁷⁰ Ojiefoh notes that "the legacy the Uromi indigenous sons got from the Igbos was well consolidated during the civil war."⁶⁷¹ Ojiefoh affirms further that:

The Uromi artisans now replaced the Igbos who were their masters. Uromi sons who were traders, mechanics, drivers etc all returned home and established their various trades in Uromi.⁶⁷²

Majority of our interviewees subscribes to the fact that the war was constructive for Esan people because it gave them the opportunity to return home to engage in their occupation.

The change of Nigerian currency during the war and the indigenization Decree immediately after the war did not only impoverished the Igbo but also routed them "from the commanding height of Nigerian economy."⁶⁷³ The Igbo that fled Esan came back very poor without capital to start up their business. Since the change of currency and the indigenization did not affect Esan people adversely, they took over Igbo's position.

The war created animosity between individual and groups. There were instances where people are reported to either the Biafran or the federal forces as being saboteurs to them. These individuals or groups are either killed or arrested. For example, Pa Imoesili Agbator was arrested during the war by the federal forces at Ukpoke, Uhie, Ekpoma because he was reported by some individuals that he was supporting the Biafran troops.⁶⁷⁴ The incident of reporting each other created a long time enmity between families.

Political Effects of the War

The war had political implication for the Esan people. In the Midwest, majority of people from the Western Igbo lost their position in the state because of the role they played when Biafra invaded the State. Col. Ogbemudia set up the Rebel Atrocities Tribunal of Enquiry in October 1967 to look into, among other things, the part played by public servants in the Biafran invasion of Midwest.⁶⁷⁵ Although the reports of the tribunal were never published. Iweze reveals that top Western Igbo civil servants who were "considered the guiltiest" were summarily dismissed from service, but those classified as "the less guilty" were reabsorbed but demoted.⁶⁷⁶ The vacancies created as a result of the dismissal of the Western Igbo groups were filled mostly by the non-Igbo groups like Esan.

Another political impact of the war was that the Midwest Region remained as one piece with the splitting of the four region into twelve states. Consequently, the Esan Division remained as it is when there were four regions. Notwithstanding, "Owegbe as a political force had virtually divided the state into factions, the Igbo speaking and non-Igbo speaking area."⁶⁷⁷ The civil war affected recruitment in the army. Omoigui argued that the army was viewed by many as an unattractive profession meant for school dropouts before the war. Omoigui affirms further that it was during the war that a high population of non-Igbo groups like Esan joined the Nigerian army.⁶⁷⁸ For example, 80 persons from Esan Division passed out from Lagos Training Depot in September, 1967.⁶⁷⁹ The war experience led to serious campaigns for equitable representation in the Midwest. The Western Igbo dominance of the Military in the state during the war led to the clamour for a policy of equitable representation in the military in both the state and local government.⁶⁸⁰

In obedience to Ojukwu's call that the Igbo should return to their regions, a lot of Igbo in Esan, especially Illushi and Uromi sold their houses at a giveaway price to interested

buyers. For example, Mr. EzeObele sold his house to Mr. Peter EkaunOriakhilin at Uromi.⁶⁸¹ Mr. Philip Emujede bought a house from one of the Igbo that were returned back to his region. In Ebelle, Chief Emmanuel sold his house to Chief John Omije.⁶⁸² The implication of this is the rise of new landlords who later became influential in decision making.

Some people in Esan used the civil war to settle their old political scores. Mr. Joseph Odigie of Action Group wrote a petition to Murtala Mohammed that the Onogie of Ewohimi who was a strong member of National Council of Nigerian Citizen was supporting the Biafra forces during the war. The Onogie of Ewohimi, Enosegbe II, was arrested by Mohammed and taken to Asaba. On getting to Asaba, the Onogie was able to present 36 previous petitions written against him by Odigie even before the war. The federal forces under the command of Murtala Mohammed concluded that the problem between the Onogie and Odigie predated the war and set the Onogie free.⁶⁸³ Besides, the Biafran invasion of Midwest created inter-ethnic bitterness between the non-Igbo groups like Esan and the Western Igbo groups.⁶⁸⁴ The non-Igbo groups saw the Biafran invasion of Midwest as opportunity for the Igbo groups to dominate the political affairs of the state and this the Esan resented. The most effective movement that resisted Biafran in Benin was formed and financed by Chief Michael A. Ojomo⁶⁸⁵ from Uromi. The unfortunate incident of Biafran invasion of Midwest created long time ethnic bitterness between Esan and her immediate neighbor. This is why Iweze affirms that:

The post-civil years witnessed increasing bitter ethnic frictions and prejudice in the Midwest, especially the Igbo and non-Igbo ethnic groups...⁶⁸⁶

However, the Biafran invasion foster greater unity among Esan people. The party politics divide of AG and NCNC notwithstanding, the Esan people were unanimous in rejecting the Biafran incursion into their area. Since the Esan people do not want a repeat of the civil war, the effect of the war will remain unforgettable. The Esan people have learnt their lessons.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Summary

The study is Esan land and the Nigeria-Biafra war, 1967-1975. The objective of the work is the documentation of the history of the civil war within the preview of the experience of the Esan people of the Midwest Region of Southern Nigeria. When the war broke out, Esan land was not militarized until the Biafran incursion into Midwest. The Esan people who had initially sympathized with the Biafran became a protagonist of the federal cause in the war due to the Biafran invasion of their domain.

Esan people are presently located in five local government areas in Edo state of Nigeria. Among Esan tradition of origin, the Benin tradition which is the most prominent had it that Esan are one of the groups that fled from Benin in the 15th century when Oba Ewure, angered by the death of his two sons, enacted some obnoxious laws and the hardship associated with the laws made the Esan people to leave Benin. According to the tradition, the word Esan is a Benin word "Esafua" which means those that fled. However, Esan scholars like Okoduwa and Okojie contradicted the concept that Esan people originated from Benin. They argued that Esan long existed before the reign of Ewure in the 15th century and that it will be irrational to say that the migrant that left Benin as a result of Ewure tyrannical rule did not meet aborigines. There is another tradition of origin which claimed that some Esan came from the ground or sky and were later conquered by the Oba of Benin who gave him the title Onogie.⁶⁸⁷ There is also another tradition of origin which claimed that Esan originated from Ife. Furthermore, there is a tradition of origin which claimed that Esan were among the Hebrews that fled as a result of King Herod's persecution.⁶⁸⁸

The Esan people believed in other gods. However, they believed in the supreme God without whom the request on lesser god cannot be granted. The people are also Christian and Muslim. While they were Christianized by European explorers and missionaries, the coming of Islam to Esan can be traced to the activities of the Nupe who raided some parts of Esan like Ewu, Irrua and Ukhum.

Socio-politically, in Esan Chiefdom, the traditional government is headed by *Onogie* whose ascension to the throne is by primogeniture. The village is headed by the most senior man (*Odiawe*) and he presides over the village council. The smallest socio-political unit is the family and is headed by the most senior man in the family.

The economic activities in Esan before the war revolved round agriculture. It cannot be denied that the fertile nature of Esan's soil is responsible for this. In Esan, "in spite of the existence of other economic activities such as cloth weaving, basket weaving, blacksmithing and hunting, Esan was basically an agricultural society."⁶⁸⁹ Crops like yam, cassava, rice, cocoyam, various vegetables were cultivated. The coming of the British colonial government diverted the attention of Esan people from food crops to cash crops. But they continued to produce food crops. The lower parts of Esan like Illushi, Ifeku and Amalu in Ugho had considerable marine advantage. Thus, some Esan people are also into fishing.

The Esan early contact with the white and being in the Western Region before the creation of Midwest are among the educationally advanced parts of Nigeria. The early colonial contact also propelled urbanization in Esan land. As early as 1950, Ubiaja was already a District headquarters. Since the development of transport was a cardinal objective of the colonial government, Esan was among those areas where the colonial government constructed early roads in Nigeria. The colonial government also rendered medical services and water supply services to Esan. The major water project in Esan before the war was the

Ivie water project by Western Regional Government and the Ugboha bole hole water project by the Midwest government.

Esan became one of the four Division under the Benin province. The people are among the groups in Nigeria that had early political consciousness. Anthony Enahoro moved the motion for Nigerian Independence. Enahoro and other Esan people like Dr. Okogie, Shaka Momodu played an important role in Nigeria politics before the civil war.

Although, there are remote causes of the war like colonial legacies and series of political events from 1960-1966, the study focus on the immediate causes of the war. The January 1966 coup and the July 1966 coup, with the massive killing of Igbo which followed the coup, were responsible for the declaration of the Republic of Biafra in May 1967.⁶⁹⁰ The new oil resources at the time was also a factor that made the war inevitable.

The Biafra incursion into the Midwest and the re-conquest of the area by the federal forces militarized Esan and other parts of the State and this affected Esan people. The Esan people which initially had sympathy for the Biafran cause swung from this position and became a strong protagonist of the federal government as a result of Biafran incursion into their area. The Biafran incursion into the Midwest created hostility between the Midwest Igbo groups and the non-Igbo groups like Esan as a result of the suspected role played by the Western Igbo in aiding the Biafran to invade the State. The Esan people had expected the Biafra to direct their force towards their enemy (the Hausa/Fulani). Thus, there was fear on the part of Esan about which role they would play under Biafra since Biafra invaded their area.

Esan were among the non-Igbo groups that resisted the Biafran in the Midwest. The political divide in Esan notwithstanding, the Biafran occupation tended to wield the Esan together as a political force with a single direction against the Biafran. The Biafran forces

killed and molested Esan people and this made Esan people to resort to using Juju to resist the Biafran forces.

The arrival of the federal troops was perceived by the Esan as liberation from the Biafra onslaught hence, there was jubilation and chanting of "One Nigeria" everywhere in Esan. The federal forces killed a lot of Igbo in Esan and the local populace collaborated with the federal forces to loot the properties of the Igbo who were killed. However, there were some Esan people who protected the Igbo from the federal onslaught by hiding them until they were able to escape. But some local populace resorted to reporting such Esan persons to the federal forces who arrested them. The federal forces also molested Esan people. They beat up innocent people and locked them up without cause. Sexual harassment of Esan young girls was high in their atrocity against Esan people.

When the war ended in January 15, 1970, "the Biafran leadership affirmed its unflinching loyalty to the federal Military government of Nigeria..."⁶⁹¹ Gowon's pronouncement shortly after the end of war is a reflection that the federal Military Government was committed to the promotion of Nigerian unity. But subsequent events demonstrated lack of sincerity on the parts of Gowon's government. Gowon's post-war policies like currency exchange, indigenization Decree and the abandoned property issues that were meant to punish the Igbo by removing them from the commanding position of the nation's economy became constructive for the Esan people. The lack of financial strength on the parts of Igbo to re-start their business paved the way for the Esan people to take over some of the businesses in Esan that were hitherto in the hands of the Igbo before the war.

In the Midwest, there was a State government Edict in place which protected the properties of the Igbo that fled the State as a result of the war. Thus, the Igbo that returned after the war to the State had no difficulty in reclaiming their properties. The Esan that ran

back home as a result of the war had no difficulty in reclaiming their properties too. Perhaps, the reason why the Esan were not affected by the abandoned property saga was because they supported the federal government cause. The seizure of property after the war was a kind of war indemnity on those that supported the Biafran cause.

The areas devastated by the war were the areas that were pro-Biafran cause and since the Esan were initially neutral and later loyal to the federal government, they were not seriously devastated by the war. Consequently, when the indigenization Decree went into effect in 1974,⁶⁹² the Esan people had capital to compete with those who had not suffered from the devastation of the war. Similarly, the review of salaries and wages of civil servants in 1971 and the Udoji award of 1975 were not traumatic for Esan people.

The study found out that the Midwestern government under Ogbemudia embarked on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of State since the state was not among the states to be reconstructed by the National Rehabilitation Commissions. The state was not included because the Midwest was part of the federal government control territory.⁶⁹³ In Midwest reconstruction, the state government focused on Western Igbo because it was parts of the state most devastated by the war. Among the bridges destroyed by Biafran in Esan like Ilah-Ewatta Bridge, Ewohimi-Onitshaigbo Bridge and Utoh-Emu Bridges, only Ilah-Ewatto Bridge was reconstructed by Ogbemudia's government as part of the State government reconstruction effort.⁶⁹⁴

However, Esan people benefited from other social policies introduced by the Midwestern Government in the course of the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the State after the war. The state government embarked on massive modernization and expansion of agriculture. The government set up a practical farm at Irrua and established four farm settlements including the Ekpoma farm settlement. The farm crusade projects which

consisted of rice cultivation at Illushi and maize at Udo in Esan Division were some of the policies introduced by government to address unemployment after the war.

In the area of education, although schools were not damaged, education was truncated as a result of the Army occupation of schools. The war also made displaced persons poor resulting to their inability to send their children to school. There was also the problem of displaced students from the University of Nsukka. To address this problem, the state government embarked on the award of scholarship in 1968 which Esan people benefited from. The biggest achievement of the state government under Ogbemudia in education as parts of the reconstruction effort was the establishment of Institute of Technology now University of Benin in 1970.⁶⁹⁵ The State Government as part of the reconstruction effort, built and expanded existing health facilities in the State including Esan Division.

The civil war subjected the Esan people to mental torture especially those parents who watched their children displaced and return home without their properties and those whose loved ones were killed. The war affected Esan's commerce and economy as the insecurity that pervaded the area during the war did not allow the people to go about their normal businesses. Esan young girls were potential targets of all forms of abuse especially sexual assault. Their male counterparts also suffered inhuman treatment in both the hands of the Biafran and federal forces. However, the war enhanced the relationship between Esan and other ethnic groups in Nigeria as some Esan girls voluntary married some of the soldiers.

The war also disrupted educational activities. Schools occupied by the fighting forces were closed down and some parents withdrew their children out of fear even when the state government officially announced that schools should reopen. The war portrayed the Esan people in good light as all the Igbo who fled the area due to the war came back and repossessed their landed property. Another effect of the war was that the war afforded the

Esan people the opportunity to take over their economy that was hitherto in the land of the Igbo. Okokhere said that "the civil war was a blessing for Uromi people since it gave them opportunity to have a grip of their economy."⁶⁹⁶

Some people in Esan used the civil war to settle old scores. The war had political implication for the Esan people. Col. Ogbemudia set up the Rebel Atrocities Tribunal of Enquiry in October 1967 to look at the role played by the Western Igbo in the Midwest invasion and most top civil servants of Igbo extraction lost their position in the State.⁶⁹⁷ The vacancies created as a result of the dismissals were filled mostly by non-Igbo groups like the Esan.

With the Midwest remaining as one piece with the splitting of the other three regions into eleven, Esan Division remained as it is when the country was made up of four regions. The war also enhanced Esan's military consciousness. The profession became attractive to the Esan people which is a reversal from the situation before the war when army was seen as profession for school dropouts.

Conclusion

The desire by some ethnic group to control the centre remained cardinal as to why the civil war was fought. "The ghosts that pushed Nigeria to the civil war in 1967... are still with us... The political leadership is appearing unwilling to recognize the genuine problems of millions of Nigerian of diverse ethnic nationalities who are poor and deprived."⁶⁹⁸ Despite the 'no victor no vanquish' professed by Gowon, the war was fought and won by the federal side. However, the one Nigeria which the Esan people fought for has become the property of the oligarchy. Although, they have been offered few appointments, they have not had a full sense of belonging. The Esan people have continued to suffer neglect and their contribution to nation building are not recognized. In Esan, there are hardly employment agencies by the

federal government. The people suffer to get water. Among all the federal government water projects in the second national development plan, none was situated in Esan.

Recommendations

On the bases of the finding of the study which also serves as its contribution to knowledge, include among other things the following: Esan people suffered from both side of the war. In the North, they suffered the same fate with the Igbo as they were treated the same way with the Igbo. In the Eastern Region, they were ejected out of the Region by the State Edit. However, the Esan were initially attracted to the Biafran cause due to the persecution they both suffered in the hands of the Northerners. It was the Biafran incursion into their domain that swung the Esan from the position of sympathy for Biafran to strong protagonist of the federal government. The lesson from the research is for the overall development of the Esan people and the country in general. The study will provide a guide for policy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, those in academia will find the research useful as well as provoke further research on the area. Finally, it will add to the existing literature on the Nigerian-Biafran War.

Some pertinent issues that were raised that plunged the nation into the war such as corruption and total decline in the welfare of the citizen which still constitute a setback to the people living life to the fullest should be addressed. The domination of the country by a particular part of the country is a threat to nation building. Those who are denied resort to agitation and irredentist movement like Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), The Odua People's Congress (OPC), and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). The improvement in the people's material condition through policies that can reduce poverty can go a long way to make the people have a sense of belonging.

Similarly, proper participatory democracy can go a long way to address the problem of power sharing and domination by a particular group.

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S/N	Name(s)	Place of Interview	Title (if any)	Age	Occupation	Mode of Interview	Date of Interview
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2.	Akhigbe, Benedict	Ekpoma	Chief	70	Retiree	Direct	20-5-2018
3.	Akubor, E. Osewe	Ife	Dr.	45	Lecturer	Indirect	15-10-2018
4.	Arete, Albert	Ugboha	Mr.	65	Business man	Direct	18-5-2018
5.	Aregbeyeguale Ojiefoh P.	Uromi	Barr.	75	Lawyer	Direct	20-2-2019
6.	Atoe, Gabriel	Ujogba	Lt. Col	72	Retired Nigerian Army	Direct	17-1-2019
7.	Eboh, Christopher	Ubiaja	Chief	73	Retired Nigerian Army	Direct	14-1-2019
8.	Egwemi, Moses	Illushi	Chief	80	Business Man	Direct	7-2-2019
9.	Ekoh, Godwin	Uzea	Mr.	70	Retired Nigerian Army	Direct	16-1-2019
10.	Idiako, Emmanuel A.	Irrua	Lt. Col.	80	Retired Nigerian Army	Direct	15-1-2019
11.	Okojie, Emmanuel	Ugboha	Chief	80	Farmer	Direct	21-5-2019
13.	Enedion, John	Uromi	Mr.	69	Retired Teacher	Direct	15-1-2019

14.	Udile,Godwin	Illushi	Chief	70	Business man	Direct	21-5-2019
15.	Idogun, Cletus	Igweben	Chief	71	Retired Principal	Direct	18-1-2019
16.	Igbeta, Smart	Ekpon	Dr.	69	Lecturer	Direct	81-1-2019
17.	Ihaza, Charles	Abuja	Mr.	45	Accountant	Indirect	16-3-2019
18.	Ihimire, Godwin	Ekpoma	Chief	55	Civil servant	Direct	7-1-2019
19.	Imawa, Jonathan	Illushi	Mr.	47	Business Man	Direct	25-5-2019
20.	Akpokoyan, John	Lagos	Chief	70	Business Man	Indirect	4-11-2019
21.	Okhokhere, E.John	Uromi	Sir.	83	Retired Principal	Direct	22-1-2019
22.	Okoyomon, Joseph	Ubiaja	Elder	72	Farmer	Direct	15-1-2019
23.	Osaigbovo, Lawrence	Ogwa	Mr.	65	Retired Police	Direct	17-1-2019
24.	Aigbomian, M. Ehimen	Ekpoma	Mr.	65	Civil Servant	Direct	14-2-2019
25.	Mathew,Ihensekhien	Igweben	Sir.	63	Civil Servant	Direct	17-1-2019
26.	Momodu, Rose	Ubiaja	Mrs.	70	Farmer	Direct	8-2-2019
27.	Osojieahon, Monday	Ewohimi	Mr.	68	Farmer	Direct	13-1-2019
28.	Okhekamen,Sylvester	Ekpon	Mr.	68	Farmer	Direct	15-1-2019
29.	Oderele, Peter	Ubiaja	Mr.	75	Farmer	Direct	31-12-2016
30.	Ekioba Philip	Ewohimi	Chief	84	Retiree	Direct	5-12-2019
31.	Aibueku Samson	Ekpoma	Mr.	82	Politician	Direct	25-1-2019
32.	Shaba B. O.	Ewu	Chief	70	Farmer	Direct	15-6-2019
33.	Ebozele Stephen	Ugbegum	Mr.	72	Farmer	Direct	18-1-2019
34.	Okoromu Sunday	Igweben	Mr.	75	Farmer	Direct	20-1-2019

35.	UshomoOkojie	Ugboha	Chief	90	Retiree	Direct	7-1-2019
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