



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background to the Study**

By the 1800s, the Ezza people had established themselves as a dominant force in the Northeast Igbo land. They not only fought extensively with their close neighbours to maintain peaceful co-existence within their neighbourhood but went beyond the Abakaliki region, their ancestral home base, to help different communities maintain peaceful inter-group relationships with their own neighbours. The Obeagu Isu community in present day Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, for instance, was at a point of extinction as a result of series of hostilities from their neighbours when they encountered some Ezza warriors and sought their immediate military assistance in about 1849. The result was the Ezza interventionist wars against the troublesome neighbours of Obeagu Isu from 1850. The wars lasted up to 1895 when Amagunze and Amechi Idodo communities, bellicose neighbours of the Iyioni community, were forced by Ezza presence, to abandon their occupied territories in Iyioni for safety elsewhere.

The frequency of Ezza wars and victories made many people to see the Ezza clan as a war-like group, especially in the pre-colonial days. But scholars have noted that the war-like nature of the Ezza was the outcome of the frequent terror visited on the people by some bellicose non-Igbo communities that the Ezza

met on their arrival at the Abakaliki region. By counter-belligerence, the Ezza engaged those communities in wars and eventually exterminated many of them, and in the process dominated other communities in the region. Thus, by militarism the Ezza emerged a super power in the entire northeast of Igbo land, offering protection to weaker communities within the Abakaliki region and beyond it. But militarism was not the only means of relations adopted by the Ezza people. There were several communities outside the Abakaliki area which they acquired by peaceful means. Some of these communities include Ezza settlements in Ishiagu in Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Onugba Nike in the Udi area of Enugu East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Four Corners in Ikom, Cross River State, Idanre in Ondo State, and many others.

Though some of these settlements were acquired after the Ezza encounter with the British patrol force in 1905, it shows the other side of the Ezza Clan. That is, that the people have what it takes to be peaceful when they encounter a peaceful group. This peaceful nature was made manifest when the Ezza decided in recent times, on negotiating peaceful co-existence in their relations with their neighbours. The Ochinkpuru Council, a section of the Ezza Council of Elders, was charged with the new responsibility of sensitizing all Ezza citizens everywhere to accept that there should be no more wars for the Ezza nation. The purpose is to permanently phase out wars from Ezza relations with other communities. The new

diplomatic role was assigned the Ochinkpuru Council following Ezza's defeat by the British troops in 1905, and the people's realization from that defeat that a more powerful military force than the Ezza military might, existed.

Since inception in about the 1930s, the Ochinkpuru Council receives reports of friction from Ezza citizens everywhere, and initiates peace talks with host communities for peaceful resolutions. Success in that diplomatic turn-around was recorded in the Ezza-Agbogazi (Enugu State) boundary dispute, the Ezza-Nkalagu land dispute, the Ezza-Effium land dispute, the Ezza-Ezillo land dispute, and many others. By this peaceful disposition, the Ezza were also able to negotiate for settlements outside their ancestral home land between the 1930s and 1960s.

### **Statement of the problem**

For a very long time, many have held the belief that the Ezza Clan is a war-like group following the many wars the people fought to secure enough land for their extensive farm works, for conducive home, and as a means to peaceful co-existence with other communities. This belief has created misconceptions and controversy about the Ezza people who do not believe that they are as troublesome as people see them. That leaves a question on the true identity of the Ezza people. Have they other characteristics beyond militarism in their pursuits in relation to other people around them? If yes, how, when and where had these other characteristics been put to use in Ezza's pursuits? How effective were these

unpopular characteristics of the Ezza Clan in its relations with other communities within and beyond the Abakaliki region?

Again, is there a constituted institution that champions the course of peaceful relations between the Ezza and her neighbours? At what point in the history of Ezza relations with her neighbours was the institution created, and event or events that informed its creation? These and other related questions about the Ezza relations with other communities are the problems this study is set to tackle.

The problems might have existed long time before 1850 but the study has taken a manageable time frame of 75 years (1850 to 1960) to ensure efficient answers. This decision became necessary because 1850 was close enough to the period of European intervention in the affairs of the Abakaliki people which include the Ezza Clan. The answers proffered by this study will clear the misconception about the Ezza people, and expose the unpopular peaceful nature of the Clan. This would serve as a model of balanced and objective judgement about the Ezza people.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the relationships of the Ezza people with their neighbours between 1850 and 1960. The study made retrospections beyond 1850, for concrete background knowledge about what informed the popular opinion that the Ezza is a war-like nation. The aim is to

ascertain the action and the inactions of Ezza neighbours that resulted to Ezza military reactions.

Additionally, the study considered some new institutions hitherto unknown to the general public which evolved as a matter of necessity to nurture and promote peaceful relations between the Ezza and their neighbours. The purpose is to expose how the erstwhile war mongering Ezza Clan has been able to co-exist in peace in peace with both her weak and strong neighbours without war, even in the face of provocations.

### **Significance of the study**

The significance of this study lies in its relevance to different interest groups. First, the study creates materials for future studies on Ezza people in the Diaspora. The Ezza have settlements in areas very far from their ancestral home land in Onueke. Some of these settlements were occupied by the Ezza many years before the advent of the Europeans in the Abakaliki region while others were secured within the colonial and post-colonial periods. The present study covers the last two periods especially, but made some retrospection beyond the time of securing the Diaspora settlements. That makes the study a comprehensive package, good enough for future studies on Ezza history.

The movement of the Ezza to Obeagu Isu took a military approach. This present study provides step by step details of that movement, their wars to rescue

the community from its enemies, and Ezza's eventual occupation of territories within and outside Obeagu Isu after the enemies had been dislodged. These detailed accounts will be of value to military institutions and strategists to understand the military prowess and strategies of pre-colonial African societies such as the Ezza Clan. Such understanding would be helpful to the redesigning of military defense strategies.

Demographers and policy makers will also find the study an invaluable source material in determining the populations of the Ezza and those of their hosts, especially in the Diaspora. Moreover, the study will serve useful purposes in international and diplomatic studies, peace and conflict matters when the invitation for Ezza military assistance by communities under different levels of threat by bellicose neighbours are taken into account.

### **Methodology and Sources**

This study adopted the qualitative, analytic and narrative methods of historical research. The qualitative approach described in details the events and situations that make up the study. The analytic method made a critical analysis of those events and situations to get a near exact reconstruct of the past under review. In the same vein, the narrative approach of the study adopted the prose style in piecing together the information gathered in the course of the research.

The sources of data for the study were the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were direct oral interviews and archival materials while the secondary sources including text books, journal articles, academic dissertations, and other published and unpublished materials found relevant to the study.

### **Scope of the Study**

This study covered the entire Ezza nation at home and in the Diaspora. Its focus was the relations that existed between the Ezza and their neighbours within the period under review (1850 to 1960) as well as the new diplomatic thinking that has ensured peaceful co-existence between the Ezza and these communities.

The study covered a time frame of 75 years, which is 1850 to 1960. 1850 was the beginning of the Ezza rescue mission in Obeagu Isu. It was also the beginning of the last decade to the 20th Century when the British intervened and halted Ezza's expansionist drive. 1960, the terminal date of the study, was the year the Ezza secured their Onuogba Nike settlement by peaceful means. The agreement that secured that settlement for the Ezza was ratified on February 24, 1960.

All together, there were some retrospective considerations for concrete background knowledge of earlier events that gave birth to the events of the period covered by the study.



## **Conceptual Clarification of Terms**

Some common terms like land, clan, traditional, indigenous and neighbour may imply different meanings in the context of this study. Explaining their true meanings in this study is important. Other unusual terms used in the study such as Egu, Evuma, Arimogu, Owaka and Akpam, are all Ezza concepts whose actual meanings are necessary for the study.

**Land:** This is the section of the Earth upon which life exists and where all social activities are exerted by man. On the other hand, it is a particular environment or a portion of the Earth occupied by a group of persons, and is often used to identify them. For example, the people of “Ezza land”, meaning the environment where the Ezza people have perpetually inhabited.

**Clan:** This is a collection of different village groups that trace their descent to a common ancestor. It does not actually matter whether or not every member of the Clan shares a direct biological link with that ancestor.

**Traditional:** This refers to any system, culture or a way of life that is original and peculiar to a particular group of people. The term was made popular by European imperialists who wanted a differentiation between their own ways of doing things in Africa and the original order of doing things by the Africans in Africa. The Europeans saw their methods as “Modern” and those of the Africans as “Traditional.” In this study, traditional therefore, means any system, culture and

any other ways or methods that are original, peculiar and unique to the Ezza people.

**Indigenous:** This refers to the natives of a particular place or the aborigines who did not come from outside the place. In this study, the term describes the traditional or indigenous systems or methods of the Ezza people.

**Neighbour:** This is a person who lives next to another person or near the person. In the case of communities, it identifies a community that is located next or close to another. In this study, the term is used to identify those communities who the Ezza assisted in wars and who allowed the Ezza to occupy a portion of their community as a price for the assistance received, as well as other communities who the Ezza drove out or assimilated the original inhabitants and occupied in the cause of war.

**Egu:** In the parlance of the Afikpo, Ezza, Izzi, Ikwo, and other Igbo groups, Egu refers to a wilderness or forest where farm works take place. It was, and is still, the most valued asset to the Ezza people.

**Evuma:** This was a biological weapon of war prepared with substances extracted from toads and barks of some poisonous trees. When spread on the road and marched on by a target, the concoction caused a serious damage to the body and eventually killed him within few hours. Ogboji warriors of the Ezza Clan were said to be experts in the use of Evuma.

**Arimogu:** This was a guerrilla war tactic which warriors from the Ogboji community were also renowned in.

**Owaka:** This was a war charm that turned Ezza soldiers invisible in the war front, and emitted poisonous smoke that when inhaled, kept the enemy immobile and left him a cheap prey to the Ezza soldier. Warriors from the Izzo community of Ezza Clan were said to be famous in the use of Owaka.

**Akpam:** This was a war charm generally used by Ezza soldiers for the surveillance of enemy territories before full attack was launched.

covered in this study. They include Obeagu Isu, Ukhobo, Ekwetekwe, Okpoto, Oworima, Agbon, Akpaka, Onicha Nko, Onicha Amagunze, Iyionu, and Amechi Idodo. Chapter Four considered War as a means in Ezza relations with their neighbours.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work adopted the social identity theory to analyze the relationships of nations as a drive for identified interest or interests based on group membership. The theory is all about a person or persons' sense of who they are as a result of the group or community or nation they belong to. It was first propounded by Henri Tajfel in 1979 when he observed that the groups to which people belong were very important sources of pride and self-esteem. Tajfel said that groups create a sense

of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world.<sup>1</sup> The theory emphasizes that we enhance the status of the group to which we belong by discriminating and taking pre-judicial views against an out-group (the group to which we do not belong). Saul McLeod, in explaining the social identity theory, said that we divide the world into “them” and “us” based on a process of social grouping or categorization which is known as in-group (us) and out-group (them).<sup>2</sup>

Social identity theory states that the in-group will always discriminate against the members of the out-group in order to enhance their self-image. Members of an in-group will tend to find the negative aspects of an out-group, thereby enhancing their self-image. This is actually the positions group members take when they try to maintain the influence and prestige of their nations above other nations in inter-group affairs. Henri Tajfel proposed that putting people into groups and categories is always based on a normal cognitive process; that is, the tendency of grouping things together. In doing that, there is the possibility of exaggeration in identifying the differences between groups, and similarities of things in the same group. People are often categorized in the same way. The group to which people belong (the in-group) is always seen as different from the group of other people (the out-group) and the members of the same group as being similar than they are actually. It is this social categorization that breeds prejudicial attitudes; that is, “them” and “us” mentality that results to in-groups and out

groups. For instance, Americans and Nigerians, Europeans and Africans (nations and continents), Moslems and Christians (religion), blacks and whites (race), males and females (gender), poor and rich (social class), etc.

McLeod said that Tajfel held the opinion that three mental processes of evaluating people as “us” (in-group) or “them” (out-group) are obvious.<sup>3</sup>The processes are particularly arranged as social categorization, social identification and social comparison. In social categorization, objects are categorized for easy understanding and identification. In the same vein, people are categorized as black, white, African, student, Moselm and Christian in order to understand the environment. Social categorization helps us to work effectively and efficiently. Also, we know ourselves better by knowing what categories we belong to. We can state what behaviour is appropriate by knowing the norms of our groups. This is only possible if we know who and who members of our groups are. That means an individual could belong to more than one group.

In social identification, people adopt the identity of the group which they belong to, and tend to behave like the members of that group. There is always an emotional attachment to one’s groups; the self-esteem will be bound with one’s membership of his group. The last stage is social comparison which compares one group with other groups. To maintain the self-esteem of a group, the group must favourably compare with other groups. This is the actual cause of prejudice

because once two groups identify themselves as rivals, they are bound to engage in a competition to maintain the prestige and self-esteem of the groups. Competition and hostility between groups is also the result of competing identities rather than competing for resources only.<sup>4</sup>

It is this competition that informs the position of diplomats or actors in the businesses of nations. In Europe, for instance, the categorization, identification and comparison between diverse social statuses of different groups (nations) created a social conflict when each nation desired to establish its influence and prestige above the rest of the nations of the continent, a development that eventually led to the Thirty Years War from 1618 to 1648. In Nigeria, the Civil War of 1967 to 1970 was the result of the mental configuration of some Nigerians as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. In pre-colonial Igbo land, the notion that Eri, founder of the Igbo Kingdom, was deeply religious while leaders of other Kingdoms were war-like, defined the Igbo enclave as the most peaceful. And finally, the recognition of the Ezza Clan by other groups in the entire North-Eastern Igbo land as a Clan of warriors helped to raise the self-image of Ezza people as a group, resulting in the Ezza belief that apart from the heavens above and the earth beneath, the Ezza man feared nobody.<sup>5</sup>

## **Literature Review**

This work reviewed some related literatures for a better understanding of Ezza's relations with her neighbours within the period under consideration. While some of the literatures were concerned directly with the Ezza, others dealt with events of distant and nearby neighbor. But comparatively, each of them contributed to the general interest of the study.

For instance, Ugoh Chukwuma and G.B.G Chapman agreed that farming was central to the Ezza which informed their wide quest for land. That was why a good percentage of the Ezza population migrated to different places<sup>6</sup> and even engaged in wars with other communities. Their works were specifically concerned with the Ezza and their farming skills.

Other scholars saw the drive for farm lands by the Ezza as the reasons for the many wars the people fought in the pre-colonial and colonial days. Njoku Afoke's "Ezza Warfare and Inter-group Relations" detailed the chaotic situation in pre-colonial Ezza land when he wrote that "life in Ezza (land)" was extremely barbarous and crude"<sup>7</sup>. The work is a proof that though the Ezza expanded their territory and dominated other communities, they were far from enjoying peace. The work was relevant to the present study because it contributed to our understanding of the nature of the relationship that existed between the Ezza and their neighbours.

In “Some Aspects of Ezza History Before 1905,” K.O.Nweke posited that there were forces making for unity in Ezza land, than those making for disunity<sup>8</sup>. He maintained that the Ezza were always united in defending their territory such that they never allowed any enemy to take them by surprise. But commenting on the tension experienced in Ezza land and how the people defended their land, Elizabeth Isichei pointed out that all Ezza towns were strongly fortified roundabout with security gadgets such as ramparts and ditches. She said that that Ezza lived in perpetual fear of constant reprisals as usurpers<sup>9</sup> But Philip A. Nwinya contending Isichei’s views, argued that the Ezza were the over lord in the Northeast Igbo to dread any group to the extent of taking precautionary measures to stay safe from any enemy<sup>10</sup> While Isichei tried to expose one aspect of Ezza’s relations with her neighbours, Nwinya seems defensive of the truth about the Ezza situation. On the whole, the positions of Nweke, Isichei and Nwinya were useful to the present study.

The work also found Njoku Afoke and Paul Nworie’s *Ezza History, Culture and Civilization*, very useful in that the book tried to trace the origin, migration and settlement pattern of the Ezza clan,<sup>11</sup> accounts that the present study relied on in its search for data.

In *The Igbo and Their Neighbours*, A .E.Afigbo assessed Ezza’s territorial expansion and posited that:



*Ezekuna (before he died) influenced by his father's blessing, predicted that his descendants would expand until they were stopped by a big river in the west, by another big river to the north, and still by another big river to the east.*<sup>12</sup>

The work was relevant to the present study because it gave a clue to the background of Ezza adroitness for extensive expansion of their territory beyond their ancestral home land. It was by that quest for wider expansion of the Ezza territory that the people contacted the different communities that they are relating with till the present time.

In his "Ecology and Social Structure Among the Northeastern Ibo," G.I. Jones argued that the farming interest of the Ezza was such that the people were in constant need of land which tended to pull them into regular wars with other community.<sup>13</sup> Jones views were relevant to the interest of this study.

But the war instincts of the Ezza were seen as necessary by J.C. Anene who described the Ezza mercenary wars as a kind of peace keeping efforts. Anene noted in his book *Southern Nigeria in Transition* that the Ezza were a peace keeping fore in the Northeast Igbo region between 1850 and 1906.<sup>14</sup> This view, though contrary to the popular view that the Ezza were war- like, and so the aggressors in all their wars, was relevant to this study because it strikes a balance between the popular and unpopular views about the Ezza. To some scholars, the Ezza were unarguably aggressive and prone to war at the slightest provocation while to

others, the Ezza were naturally peaceful and palliative, especially on encountering a peaceful group.

To A.O.U. Echiegu, the Ezza are most often cunning in their relations with other groups. Echiegu maintained in his *Yesterday and Tomorrow in Ezza and Izzi's Today*, that land lords who volunteered their land to one Ezza tradesman ended up short changed by the Ezza beneficiary who secretly invited other Ezza migrants to squat with him without the consent of his land lord. Echiegu said that such a secret arrangement led to a rise of Ezza population within few years to the consternation of the indigenes.<sup>15</sup> The work was relevant to the present study because it availed information on how the Ezza secured some of their settlements, especially in the Diaspora.

In *The Nature and Pattern of Pre-colonial West African Wars*, J. Aluede offers a justification for Ezza's endless quest for territorial expansion which he said was common to all West African societies of the period. According to him, West Africans of the pre-colonial days frequently waged wars to expand their territories, control trade routes, collect taxes or tributes from vassal states, and remain the master middlemen in the trade in slaves which made them saw wars as normal in inter-group relations.<sup>16</sup> The relevance of Aluede's postulations lie in their justification of Ezza's expansionist drive, even though the reasons for wars in other est African societies as he enumerated did not apply to the Ezza Clan.

K.C. Nwoko and C. Onwe-Ogah attributed wars in pre-colonial Igbo land to population increase and its consequences. They contended that the agrarian nature of the Igbo made land an important economic asset that people frequently elected for war instead of losing their portions to another group. According to them, that was as a result of the pricelessness of land and its relevance to the contradictions of population explosions in Igbo area<sup>17</sup> This present study found the inputs of Nwoko and Onwe-Ogah relevant, especially their opinions on the reasons for Ezza's expansion beyond their ancestral home land.

G.T. Basden dwelt on the economic importance of land to explain why the Igbo spent all their "spare times" fighting themselves at the least opportunity such that warfare became an indispensable attribute of the people before the dawn of colonialism.<sup>18</sup> Basden's opinion was relevant to this work because it expressed a generalized view about the pre-colonial and colonial state of the entire Igbo land which include the Ezza clan. Moreover, he offered an explanation of the kind of relationships that existed among Igbo communities within the time frame of his study.

As in the cotemporary Ezza society, there were peace times in all Igbo communities through the cessation of hostilities when non-disputant communities inter- vened in the disputes of other communities to restore peace in their regions. This was the view of J.O. Ijoma who investigated the means to peace in pre-

colonial and colonial Igbo land.<sup>19</sup> Ijoma's investigation is quite useful because it corroborates the opinion of Nwofoke Offia who held that there were times when the Ezza intervened to restore peace between two warring communities but often adopted force to enforce the desired peace, especially when her peace appeals were rebuffed.<sup>20</sup>

U.C. Anyanwu assented to the peaceful nature of Ezza people when he wrote that the Ezza were peaceful people who had a lot of respect for human life. In his article

“The Ezza: Unsung Warriors of Igbo Land”, Anyanwu maintained that the Ezza frequently made efforts for peaceful co-existence in their relationship with other communities but would not hesitate to declare war on any neighbour that rebuffed their peaceful approaches. To each of their hostile neighbors, Anyanwu said the Ezza held out an olive branch, signaling peace and the need for peaceful co-existence.<sup>21</sup>

Onwuka N. Njoku's *Ohafia: A Heroic Society* is an epic song about the Ohafia mercenary warriors whom the author said went far and near “fighting wars for other clans in pre-colonial Igbo land.”<sup>22</sup> Though Njoku did not say anything about the prices or rewards paid the Ohafia mercenary warriors as compared to Ezza warriors that were paid in landed properties for their mercenary services to

other communities, the work was relevant to the extent that it served as a good comparison between the Ezza warriors and the Ohafia mercenary warriors.

In “The Ezza and The Ohafia: A Comparative Heroic Igbo Societies”, U.C. Anyanwu examined the causes of wars in pre-colonial Igbo land. He posited that the fertile nature of the northeast Igbo area caused much migration from other places into the region, leading to constant frictions among groups who struggled for enough space.<sup>23</sup> The work was relevant to the present study since it dealt justice to why the Ezza of northeast Igbo land were often found in frequent struggles with their neighbours over land.

In his “Ezza Migrant Labourers of Eastern Nigeria, 1920-1950”, U.C. Anyanwu explained how the Ezza moved from place to place in search of a living, accepting farm jobs and other manual jobs from people.<sup>24</sup> Extolling the physical strength of the Ezza, Anyanwu maintained that:

*Through their wars, the Ezza emerged a super power of the Northeast Igbo land. However, because of their proven martial ardor, the Ezza moved about the whole of Northeastern Igbo land unmolested.*<sup>25</sup>

The work was appropriate to the interest of this study as it showed the details of how the Ezza got in contact with most of their neighbours and how the relationships that resulted from the contact started, and was nurtured.

In his *Farmers and Towns People in a Changing Nigeria*, Simon Ottenberg maintained that the Ezza were premier blacksmiths in Abakaliki, their iron tools were of major importance in farming and also in the wars that they fought; these wars led to innovations in iron weapons.<sup>26</sup> The work seems to be concerned with the factors which aided Ezza's rise to military supremacy in the northeastern Igbo region. The availability of the sources of iron to Ezza indigenous iron workers was an advantage to the people for the fabrication of various farm tools and war weapons. Ezza blacksmiths, Ottenberg said, travelled to different places to ply their trade, thereby establishing relations with those communities. The importance of Ottenberg's work is its stating how the military and farming skills of the Ezza developed.

In *Treading the Rough and Tumble Field*, U.C. Anyanwu described the Ezza as insatiable land grabbers who expanded their original territory at the expense of their weaker neighbours.<sup>27</sup> The work, though not keen on how the Ezza acquired their land and how that encouraged the expansion of the Ezza territory, benefited the present study by giving an insight into the reasons behind the Ezza relations with some communities.

A.E. Afigbo in examining the relevance of charms to the pre-colonial warfare in Igbo land, maintained that the farther the town of a medicine man (Dibia), the higher the belief that his charms were powerful. Thus, the war

medicines of that native doctor were believed to provide good results.<sup>28</sup> Afigbo upholds the opinion that charms were widely involved in Ezza wars. Good cases were the involvement of different charms in the Obeagu-Isu rescue mission.

T.A Okereke and C.A Njoku's argument on the reasons for Ezza's defeat by the British military in 1905, revealed that the lack of organized army in Ezza land was responsible for its inability to withstand the British in the brief encounter. They held the view that out of the many communities of Ezza Clan, only Idembia, Ekka, Umuoghara and Oriuzor communities could mobilize forces against the British patrol forces. They argued that in all the days of Ezza military supremacy in the northeastern region of Igbo land, all the communities of Ezza clan never organized an army against army enemy. It was either one community or more was mandated as was the rule, by the Ezza council of elders at Onueke, to fight and subdue a particular enemy or some warriors unilaterally went to war against another community out of provocation. That was why conquered territories were first occupied by the communities or warriors that were directly involved in each war.<sup>29</sup> The relevance of Okere and Njoku's work is in its exposition of the trend of Ezza wars and the eventual occupation of conquered territories which resulted between the Ezza and those communities.

Commenting on the sources of weapons that contributed to making the Ezza military, Elizabeth Isichei and J.A Latham separately maintained the

centrality of Ezza blacksmiths in the fabrication of both farm tools and war weapons in Ezza land. Isichei said that the main source of weapons for the Ezza military was Nkwerre (in present day Enugu State) where the *Ururu-ala* gun, a short but heavy kind of gun, was manufactured. Aro traders plying the Igbere-Afikpo - Uburu – Akpoha - Ezza trade route, made the gun available to Ezza warriors. She further stated that Ezza blacksmiths complemented the supply by fabricating locally, few guns and other war weapons like spears, axes, and others.<sup>30</sup> On his part, J.H. Latham opined that the Ezza as majorly farmers and warriors, produced their own tools and weapons with hardwares or iron brought in from overseas through Calabar, and made available in Ezza land through trade.<sup>31</sup>

Though Latham failed to mention the traders who brought the hardwares to Ezza land, Philip A.Nwinya added that Awka (in present day Anambra State), was another area from where weapons were made available to the Ezza military.<sup>32</sup> Altogether, these three scholars contributed reasonably to the present work.

Notwithstanding the sources and types of weapons available to the Ezza military in the pre-colonial days, the clan under-rated the might of the British troops which led to its easy defeat by the imperial force in the encounter of 1905. The fortification of their towns with ramparts and ditches, together with their strong self- confidence, failed to field the usual glory to the Ezza clan .A.E .Afigbo noted that:



*The Ezza from the beginning refused to go into any negotiation with the British ... (but) rather reached for their guns and machetes. In this situation, there was no other option left than to “let the guns do the talking and negotiation.”<sup>33</sup>*

In Okike Okorie Osi’s “The Art of a Revolution...”, strategies for victories in wars were outlined. That includes properly trained military personnel, the right kind of logistics, good timing and adequate knowledge of the terrains of both the enemy and local community. Osi contended that war was the final arbiter in confrontational disputes.<sup>34</sup> The work was useful to the present study by providing justifications for Ezza strategies in her interventionist wars for the rescue of Obeagu Isu community.

A.E .Afigbo in reconsidering the 1905 Ezza-British War, maintained that the Ezza lost the battle due to the fact that they were armed with traditionally made weapons-machetes, axes, cudgels, and others, which did not permit a bodily harm on an enemy except on a close range<sup>35</sup>. In Simon Ottenberg’s consideration of why the British was determined to end the Ezza reign in the northeastern region of Igbo land, noted that the Ezza posed a stumbling block to British rule in the entire region.<sup>36</sup> Both Afigbo and Ottenberg were relevant to the present study for they not only dealt with the nature of Ezza war weapons and their shortcomings but upheld the position of the Ezza military in the northeast Igbo land as supreme.

In “The Ezza and Their Neighbours on the Eve of The British Invasion of Igbo Land: An Appraisal,” U.C Anyanwu and J.O Ijeoma qualified the Ezza as a peace-keeping force in the northeastern region of Igbo land. They said that the Ezza were respecters of natural laws and would not attack any weaker neighbour just because of their strength. Rather, the Ezza will go into a mutual agreement with a community that was facing a threat of attack by a stronger and vile neighbour. The Ezza signed that agreement on condition that a part of land in dispute would be given to them for a permanent settlement if victory turned the way of their ally. The authors posited that:

*The invitation of the Ezza by any group to protect them from external aggression was usually followed by the establishment of a bond of brotherhood (Igbandu) between the Ezza and their landlords.<sup>37</sup>*

In most cases, Ezza’s relationship with their neighbour took the above approach to bring the Ezza into closer union with their hosts. Anyanwu and Ijeoma have actually provided the true basis of Ezza’s numerous settlements outside their ancestral home land. Their views were relevant to the present study.

Emmanuel-Mary Mbam agreed that it was a normal practice in the “Abankaleke” region for other communities to intervene and end a land dispute between other communities by occupying the land in dispute. Citing the land dispute between Ishieke and Ekyara communities, Mbam maintained that Chief

Nwiboko Obodo had mediated that Ishieke should accommodate the Izhiangbo on their section of the disputed land while Ekyara should accommodate the Ezza on their own section.<sup>38</sup> That was how contemporary Ezza-Ojienya community was founded in the present Ebonyi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The work is relevant to the present study.

In summary, the reviewed literatures were all helpful to the present study for their worthy ideas. Nevertheless, none of them dealt directly on the communities of this study -Obeagu Isu, Ukhobo, Ekwetekwe, Okpoto, Oworima, Agbon, Akpaka, Ogiri, Onicha Nko, Onicha Amagu Nze, Obeagu and Ezillo. All these communities were the focus of the present study.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study was organized into **Seven Chapters**. **Chapter One** treated the General Introduction of the work, including the Background to the study, Statement of Problem, Purpose of the study, Methodology and Sources, Scope of the Study, Conceptual Clarification of Terms, Theoretical Frame work, Literature Review, and Organization of the study.

**Chapter Two** covered the Geographical location, history of Origin of the Ezza people, and Occupations and Socio-political Institutions of Ezza Clan. **Chapter Three** made Overview of Ezza relations with their neighbours as

covered in this study. The neighbours included Obeagu Isu, Ukhobo, Ekwetekwe, Okpoto, Oworima, Agbon, Akpaka, Ogiri, Onicha Nko, Onicha Amagu Nze, Iyionu, Amechi Idodo, Obeagu and Ezillo communities. **Chapter Four** considered War as a means in Ezza relations with her neighbours.

In **Chapter Five**, a review of the war tacts in Ezza relations with her neighbours, was taken; and in **Chapter Six**, an examination was made of the changes and continuities that took place after the British intervention in Ezza relations with other communities between 1900 and 1960. Last but not the least, **Chapter Seven** ended the study with a Summary and Conclusion.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO EZZA CLAN

#### Geographical Location of Ezza Land

Presently, it is difficult to state the exact geographical location of the Ezza clan, except the account excludes the numerous Ezza settlements scattered within and outside the Abakaliki area of Ebonyi State. This work is based on that fact to recount the geographical history of the Ezza people. This is because Ezza geo-history is almost inseparable from the rest of the Abakaliki area. Ugoh Chukwuma, a historian from Ezza clan, noted that the geography of Abakaliki is not much inseparable from that of Ebonyi State<sup>1</sup>. And U.C. Anyanwu who had studied Ezza history, admitted that even though his work was on Ezza, that:

*The field work and the title embraced the whole of Abakaliki or North-Eastern Igbo land. One of the reasons is that Ezza settlements or colonies dot across the whole of North Eastern Igbo land and even beyond<sup>2</sup>.*

Ezza Clan is politically divided into two Administrative Local Councils of Ezza North and Ezza South. The Clan covers an area of approximately 854 square kilometers, including the Ezza Community in Ishielu Local Government Area. It is bounded on the East by Ikwo clan (in Ebonyi State) and Agbo clan (in Cross River State); on the West by Ezzangbo, Ntezi, Okpoto and Agba; on the South by Akpoha and Amasiri; and on the North by Izzi. To the South-West, Ezza shares



boundaries with Ugwulangwu and Oshiri in Ohaozara Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

Ezza lies between longitude 250 20'' and 300 23'' East of the Greenwich Meridian and latitude 350 15'' and 400 15'' North of the Equator. Its vegetation is the grassland type which it shares with the entire Abakaliki region. There are patches of forests, a feature that shows that Ezza land was originally a densely forested region. But due to perennial stretches of settlements and extensive farming activities, the forests have all disappeared, giving rise to the current derived Savannah features of the area. Ugoh Chukwuma said that the only major river in Ezza land, the Ebonyi-Ezza, might have given rise to the earlier forest feature of the land.

*Ebonyi – Ezza runs from... Nsukka hills down to the Western part of Abakaliki down to Cross River waters to empty its waters at the Atlantic Ocean in the South<sup>3</sup>.*

Originally, Ezza clan was made up of twelve communities<sup>4</sup> – Umuezeoka, Umuezeokoha, Umuoghara (Izzo Group); Oriuzor, Ekka (Imoha Group); Amana (Oldest Ezza Village Group); Amaezekwe, Amegu, Idembia, Ameka, Amuzu and Ezzama (Kpakpaji Group)<sup>5</sup>. Over time, nine additional communities were added through migrations and conquests, excluding those in the diaspora. These are Okoffia, Echara, Ukawu, Nsokara, Amudo, Okpomoro, Amaewula, Ogboji and Inyere communities<sup>6</sup>. While the Izzoh and Imoha village groups are all found

within Ezza North Local Government Area, the Kpakpaji group and a host of other communities are found in Ezza South Local Government Area (all in Ebonyi State). Together, these two Local Government Areas had a population of about 278,824 people, according to the 2006 population census<sup>7</sup>.

### **A History of Ezza Land**

Tracing the origin of the Ezza people is still a journey in probability due to the fact that the people seem to have lost knowledge of how they came to settle where they are found today. Worst, no one remembers the meaning of ‘Ezza’ and why it was adopted as a name for the Ezza clan. What they do is to seek solace in the Bible to claim origin from Ezra, son of Seraiah, a priest and scribe who led the second movement of the Jews to rebuild the temple of God in Jerusalem under King Artaxerxes of Persia (Ezra 7). Theophilus Nweke believes that Ezra was corrupted to Ezza by the different environments and cultures the original descendants of Ezra contacted in their long period of migration out of Israel to their present home<sup>8</sup>. That is one peculiar problem of the pre-history times when events, no matter their significance, were never recorded. The Ezza claims could still be the result of the controversy surrounding the history of origin of the core Abakaliki people – Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo. They are closely knit with some linguistic similarities and other aspects of their cultures. But they disagree on any common ancestry until recently when a controversial consensus was formed around Ekuma

Enyi. Yet the question of where they migrated from remains unanswered. While the Ezza claim Israeli origin; Izzi claim the three migrated from Afikpo (Ehugbo); and Ikwo says they are all from Igalla under Enyi Nwegu as their common ancestor<sup>9</sup>.

One incontrovertible fact is that the three clans are all Igbo groups found within the same geographical location in the North-Eastern part of Igbo land. So far there is no account of direct North-Eastern wave of migration of any Igbo group from either the Nri-Awka or Awka – Nsukka core centres of Igbo dispersion. Available records carry accounts of dispersals from Nri to Awka to Nsukka; Nri to Awka to Isuama/Orlu to Okigwe axis. The dispersals of the Igbo groups tended to be mostly southwards because of the dire need of fertile land for agriculture. If that was the case, the Igbo groups today known as the Abakaliki people must have been part of the early Igbo groups that moved southward from the Awka core through Isuama/Orlu to the Okigwe area where further dispersal was said to have taken place. From there, a secondary dispersal moved into the Umuahia-Arochukwu and Ohafia area until it got into the North-eastern Igbo area of Abakaliki. According to A.E. Afigbo,

*One can more positively distinguish a later and more massive dispersal which traditions do refer to, and which was mainly South-Eastern – wards from the Ibo centre into what is now Eastern Isuama area. From this subsidiary dispersion area there was one movement South-South East..., and another movement East into Umuahia and hence to the Ohaffia – Arochukwu ridge, with an off-*

*shoot that struck North to become isolated in the heart of the Eastern plains and to develop into the North – Eastern Ibo<sup>10</sup>.*

Afigbo maintained that it was from the ‘off-shoot’ dispersion that places like Edda, Item and related peoples of today<sup>11</sup> were founded. In the historiography of Akpoha (a Southern neighbour of the Ezza), it is believed that these early migrants who founded Ehugbo, Amasiri, Akpoha, and Abakaliki in the North-east of Igbo land, were originally called the Egu group (Egu meaning ‘wilderness’ or ‘Ozara’ in local dialect). They were said to be the first settlers of the present Ehugbo (Afikpo) territory since about 350 B.C. Many fractions of the Egu group later left to different locations as a result of a disastrous war popularly remembered in Afikpo as ‘Agha Ogbugbu Umuruma’ (war that massacred children). The talented and powerful Egu people were said to have been betrayed in that war by Aja Ogbeyi, a saboteur planted by Egwu Urochi, an acclaimed son of Igbo Ukwu, who had tried severally in past years to subdue the Egu to no avail<sup>12</sup>. Some of the leaders that left included Echa Ali who founded the Ohanwegu village group in Amaogu Akpoha, and Eni Ukpom who founded the Ndukwe village group also in Amaogu Akpoha. Other leaders of the emigrating groups moved on, and some settled at Onueke and later spread all over the areas today known as the Abakaliki area. The remaining of the Egu people in Ehugbo continued at the original site of the group and is known as the Ugwu Egu people of

Ehugbo (Afikpo) because of the hilly nature of their settlement. But in Abakaliki historiography, the name of the leader of the group that founded the “Abakaliki Area” has remained a source of controversy. Some claim Anekawhaliki was the great grand father of the Abakaliki people who led the movement from the beginning until he was struck by “Igbogbo” (small -pox), a mysterious disease then, which later killed him. His corpse was thrown into an evil forest at Onueke which is known till date as “Ebonyi furu Egu” (forest of the lost Ebonyi).<sup>13</sup> Oral sources hold that mismanagement of the misfortune of Anakewhaliki has remained the source of concealed mysterious events in Ezza land where “coconuts grow on plantain trees, outbreak of epidemics, large scale mysterious deaths, etc” always observed by the people at distant intervals until the spirit of Anakewhaliki is elaborately propitiated. The attempt to hide that fact out of history was on the ground that death by small-pox (Igbogbo) was looked upon as eternal shame. This has given rise to the claims of different descents by the people of Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo. While Ezza maintain that Ezekuna was their ancestor, Izzi hold Ekuma Enyi as their own forebear; and Ikwo believe their ancestor was Enyi Nwegu<sup>15</sup>. But in A.O. Echiegu’s contention, Ekuma Enyi was an ancestor to Izzi and Ikwo only. Ezekuna was their brother-in-law because he married their sister, Anyigor<sup>16</sup>.

Echiegu has added another dimension to the controversy. Who was the father of Ezekuna, the acclaimed ancestor of the Ezza and where did he originate

from? Ezza historiography recognizes Anekewhaliki or Anekewa as the great grand ancestor of Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo because he was the father of Enyi who begat Una and Ekuma. If that postulation is acceptable, the order should read: Una Enyi and Ekuma Enyi, sons of Enyi Anekawhaliki. (Knowledge of Anekawhaliki's father is assumed lost). Anayo P. Nwinya is of the opinion that

*The Ezza people's migration ... is traced to Anikawhaliki, father of Enyi... the great grand father of Ezeke Una (Ezeke Una), the legendary war lord of the Ezza people and the greatest general of all times, who brought Ezza to lime light<sup>17</sup>.*

Nwinya holds further that Ezeke changed the settlement pattern of the Ezza people 'automatically' from his father's clustered type to a scattered pattern to enable him secure the vast areas of land that his father acquired while Ezeke was away. Ezeke was said to have gained knowledge of the scattered settlement pattern in the cause of his wide travels to different places to fend for himself as an orphan.

*Having been brought up as an orphan under the tutelage of his uncle (Ekuma Enyi), (Ezeke) learnt so many things in his life such that he can bear hardship. As he was living with his uncle, he was tortured to a point that he escaped from home to fend for himself outside the country home. While away from home, he got in touch with the Akpa group of warriors. Also, he visited so many towns like Edda, Afikpo, Ohafia, Onitsha (Onicha Mmiri), Awka (Oka), Iddah, Tiv, etc<sup>18</sup>.*

Nwinya maintained that Ezeke Una returned home to find that Ekuma Enyi, his uncle, had died several years ago, and decided to dislodge his cousins – Nnode and Noyo, from Enyi Anikawhaliki (his grand father) home, being the most

senior of the grand children who should, by the rule of primogeniture, inherit his grand father's home. As a result, Nnode and Noyo conspired to eliminate Ezeke whom the two saw as a threat. Unfortunately, Nnode lost his life in the conflict that followed<sup>19</sup>. But Ikechukwu O. Onuoha and Kelechi J. Ani disagreed with Nwinya, arguing that there was never any Ezeke Una but simply Ezekuna, as the ancestor of the Ezza people. They refused the idea that Ezekuna left his father's compound at Onueke to wander about far and near towns before he returned to fight his cousins over his primogenitural rights<sup>20</sup>. Nonetheless, Onuoha, in an interview, seem to have contradicted his earlier opinion when he said that the clans of Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo had reached a consensus adopting Ekuma Enyi as their common ancestor<sup>21</sup>. He did not give reasons for the consensus, and what becomes of the wide claims of Ezza people that Ezekuna was their ancestor. Instead, Onuoha maintained that Nwinya's claims on Ezza origins were rather spurious, and needed further investigation<sup>22</sup>. Notwithstanding, fact remains that consensus does not often mean the correctness of facts but simply implies a kind of compromise where closer ties are required for some socio-political gains.

Njoku Afoke and Paul Michael Nworie, added to the controversy over the origins of the Ezza people. According to them,

*Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo were brothers, grand children of Ekuma Enyi. Ezekuna is the father of Ezza, and Noyo, the father of Ikwo whereas Olodo is the father of Izzi. The three brothers have one father, namely, Ekuma Enyi<sup>23</sup>.*

That is a corroboration of the consensus view of Ikechukwu Onuoha. But Afoke and Nworie's grouse is against the claim in some quarters that the Ezza had any origin in Afikpo, a claim they contended cannot be accepted because it fails to establish the cultural relation between the Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo. They said that

*We have established... that Ezekuna is closely related to Izzi and Ikwo but the Afikpo version says little or nothing about Ezza's obvious cultural affinity with Ikwo and Izzi, which is evidently decipherable upon meeting these three brothers in their children<sup>24</sup>.*

Again, Afoke and Nworie disagreed that Ezekuna was part of the massive movement of people from the Okigwe escapement into Afikpo from where Ezekuna was said to have continued his journey until he settled at Onueke. According to them, such theories as this, ignores the obvious fact that Ezza, Izzi and Ikwo have been together as one family begotten by one ancestor from time immemorial. A major lacuna in the consensus theory is the absence of any substantial link to prove the origin of Ekuma Enyi or Ezekuna. Jumping into the genealogical account of the descendants of Ezekuna without an idea of how he came to be the Ezza ancestor obviates the relevance of logical sequence of events needed in historical accounting. Meanwhile, Afoke went against his earlier disagreement that Ezekuna was part of the massive movement of people from the



Okigwe escapement into Afikpo when he wrote in the *Discourse Journal*, an indigenous publication on Ezza history and social events, that

*Oral traditions passed from generation to generation by the Ezza agree... that the legendary founder of the Ezza was Ezekuna... (Who) was said to have migrated from Afikpo. It is not clear whether they came to Afikpo in the company of migrants who may have started their journey from the Okigwe escapement or (even Item)<sup>26</sup>.*

Afoke, however, did a mental somersault when he added that many writers from Afikpo hold that Ezekuna and Ekuma Enyi were sons of the founder of Afikpo without facts to prove these sweeping allegations. He agreed that there are some cultural similarities between Ezza and the people of Afikpo but added that such similarities equally exist between the Ezza and other Igbo clans with whom the Ezza share no common origin. The ever persistent strong allusions in Abakaliki traditions to Omaka Eja Ali, a ruling stool and a common name in Ehugbo (Afikpo) traditions presupposes stronger ancient connection between the two groups, a clear proof of the kind needed by Afoke to establish the claims of some writers from Afikpo. Until date, no historian or anthropologist, colonial or African, has been able to provide any evidence that the Ezza came into their present settlement at Onueke through another direction other than Afikpo which was formed from the original movement of Igbo migrants from the Nri-Awka-

Isuama/Orlu-Okigwe axis into the Ohafia-Arochukwu region.<sup>28</sup> It was from that movement that many southern neighbours of the Ezza were also formed.

## **Occupations and Socio-Political Institutions of Ezza land**

### **Occupations of Ezza People:**

Generally, two occupations-farming and trading, were predominant in the pre-colonial days of Ezza history. Farming was the major occupation, and it was to remain effective in that occupation that the people went to war against any neighbour that posed a threat to their aspiration for land. They were never mindful of the cost of their wars in terms of man-power and materials. Rather, they preferred rebuilding their losses from the gains that come from conquered territories through extensive farming. Nwaofeke Offia said that Ezza simply means

*Ozuru Mba Onu. No one wins them in wars. Anywhere there is war, we will be hired to help; and if we go, there will be peace. Ezza is from Israel; wherever we go, we possess. Ezza has twelve communities like the twelve tribes of Israel<sup>29</sup>.*

That was the compelling belief that ensured victories for Ezza people in all their wars for land. They maintained the scattered settlement pattern from the days of Ezekuna, their acclaimed ancestor, for maximum occupation and security over their lands. Their labour force was partly made up of groups that worked rotationally for their families. They also offered their farming expertise for daily

hire to other people within and outside Ezza land. By that approach, they were able to penetrate other lands where they acquired large expanse of land for permanent settlements in the diaspora. Ezza people are good growers of yams, rice, cassava, maize, vegetables, et cetera. Ugoh Chukwuma noted that one enabling factor to the rich yields of Ezza farms were

*The swamps which follow the lines of the (Ebonyi) river... At both sides of the river are tributaries which help in increasing the volume of water going into the ocean. The over flow of these rivers... deposits a lot of materials that help the fertility of the farmlands in the river banks. It increases the agricultural yields of Ezza farmers...<sup>30</sup>*

Like other African pre-colonial societies, the Ezza maintained differentiated gender roles in their farming operations for their men and women. While the men planted yams and rice as well as handled other tedious aspects of their farm works, the women were allowed to plant such crops as maize, cassava, vegetables, Nkashieru (Aro Cocoyam), Unaeru and Okoeru, and such other crops which saved the people from hunger during period of famine<sup>31</sup>. The women were equally allowed the grace of weeding the farms and to carry home (into the barns, for yams) the harvests of their husbands.

Apart from farming, there were Ezza traders who engaged in local and distance trade within Ezza land and other communities like Izzi, Ikwo, Akuna-Akuna, Uburu, Ogoja, Obubra, Umon (Ammon), Arochukwu and others. They traded in the various farm products from Ezza which they exchanged for other

goods brought by traders from other regions. There were markets in all Ezza communities where local trade was carried out. But of these, the Eke Imoha market in Onueke was the most central and popular, not only among local traders but to long distance traders from far away communities. Afoke and Nworie were of the opinion that

*Before the advent of the British in Nigeria, Eke Imoha market had acquired fame as the commercial nerve centre of north-eastern Igbo land. The market attracted traders from different localities...traders' goods, especially yams, were moved by head portage to Ikwo and through canoe (they) were carried across the Cross River to Obubra, Umon and Ogoja, and vice versa<sup>32</sup>.*

Oral accounts said that Aro traders who flooded Ezza markets in the pre-colonial days increased the global image of Ezza clan and enhanced the economy of the land. It was from the Aro that many Ezza traders learnt the art of distant trade which saw them venturing into far markets such as Obubra, Uburu, Awho Izzo, Umon and other distant markets<sup>33</sup>. Afoke and Nworie corroborated that fact this way:

*The influence of Aro traders on the economic life of the Ezza is undeniable. It was with their coming that a handful of Ezza traders... adventured to other markets... Aro traders and settlers became the main intermediaries through which exotic goods like Unu Ocha (white salt), Okawoa (potash), elephant salt, tobacco, ordinary cloth and Isoji (Real India), reached Ezza markets. The coming of the ... Aro also led to the availability of certain goods to other local markets... in Ezza<sup>34</sup>.*

Besides the two major occupations of farming and trading, Ezza people were involved in other industries such as black smiting, hunting, basket and mat weaving, palm wine brewing, wood carving, pottery, divination, and so forth. These industries exposed Ezza crafts to the world around Ezza clan, and brought much economic benefits to the people. For instance, the hunting industry exposed Ezza diplomacy to far away communities, and by it Ezza people acquired much of their settlements in the diaspora. Oral accounts had it that Ezzaagu, Nkwubo and Akogba Nike (in Enugu State), and Effium (in Ebony State) were first contracted by Ezza hunters before the communities signed their alliance treaties with the Ezza<sup>35</sup>. While it is known that Ezzagu was discovered by Iwhere Nta Alioka from Ezza Nkomoro, Nkwubo and Akogba Nike by Uwhoo Ezoke from Umuhuali, and Effium by Oke Akam, Omaka Nwangbo Oketa, Mgbadu Obashi and Akochi Nwode (team hunters from Umuezeokoha), it is not clear whether Nkomoro was equally discovered by hunters before the large influx of Ezza migrants. However, the account of how Ezza people came to occupy Nkomoro had the same pattern in other hunter-discovered communities. Available oral accounts maintained that the first Ezza man to settle in Nkomoro was Edene Okogba of the Unwu Alioka lineage of the Unwu Igboke community in Oriuzor of Ezza South Local Government Area, Ebony State<sup>36</sup>.

### **Socio-Political Institutions of Ezza Land:**

**Ezekuna:** Oral interviews with some elders of Ezza clan revealed an undying socio-political order predating the coming of the Europeans which forced many African societies to forget how they were governed in the pre-colonial days. In the case of Ezza clan, the elders are so protective of all administrative orders instituted by Ezekuna, their highly esteemed ancestor, to the extent that the Ezza still see traditional rulers institution (in the 21st century) as a replica of the colonial warrant chief system because it has the approval and backing of the western system of government now in vogue all over Nigeria. In the pre-colonial days, there was no form of contact with Europe by any part of Ezza land. Thus, there was no form of external influence either from Europe or elsewhere on Ezza socio-political institutions. Consequently, the elders said that Ezekuna was the beginning and end of Ezza administrative system. He presided over every major assembly of his people at a place in his compound called Okpoku Ezekuna. Today the area is a thick forest in Ezekuna's compound which is traditionally protected and revered as Ezza ancestral home.

Ezekuna was the head of Ezza pre-colonial judicial system. He formulated what became law and how it was enforced. He regulated Ezza's external relations, especially those that involved Ezza in wars of liberation with other communities. Bartholomew Ugbo had the opinion that

*As a disciplined man, a disciplinarian himself, Ezekuna had warned his children never to charge a fee from any community that requested their assistance in time of war with an enemy. Instead, he established that his children should always negotiate for a portion of the disputed land for a permanent Ezza settlement. Such negotiation, if acceptable to the Ezza, should be sealed with an Ogbu tree planted on the section given to Ezza people, to mark the beginning of Ezza life in that community<sup>37</sup>.*

Ugbo noted that Ezekuna was a man of fairness and justice who was never interested in colonizing the people he liberated from external aggression. He was said to have decreed to his children and their posterity to observe that order and to live peacefully with their host communities<sup>38</sup>. The words of Ezekuna and his system of rulership are today the basis of Ezza traditions and socio-political systems. Contemporarily, Ezza traditions remain resistant to Western influence. The system of government established by Ezekuna remains resilient, and there is yet no possibility that it will be abandoned in the near future. The now worked wooden seat presumably used by Ezekuna whenever he presided over his people's assemblies, is still preserved in the modern meeting centre (Okpoku) of the Ezza nation at the middle of Ezekuna's compound. That stool is today reserved for the oldest man (Ogaraya) in Ezza clan.

**Ogaraya Ezza:** This is the oldest man in the entire Ezza world who enjoys the honour of sitting on the presumed ancient stool of Ezekuna during Ezza assemblies at Okpoku Ezekuna. Though of no significant political relevance, the

Ogaraya Ezza sits and watches the turn of events during Ezza assemblies, the same way a caring parent watches his children discuss issues of importance to the family. He intervenes to remind the people of how things were done in days past whenever he notices a drift from the old ways of Ezza people. The Ogaraya Ezza institution expresses in practical terms, the resilience of the past of the people and its influence on their present. The man is therefore, honoured as the custodian of Ezza culture and traditions. For a man to outlive his contemporaries to emerge the oldest person in all Ezza land is believed to be the result of clear conscience and uprightness. Thus, such a man is revered as a father of all and his counsel is sought by all, including members of the Ozo council, the most powerful and prestigious political institution in Ezza land. That has been the order since the death of Ezekuna.

**Ozo Council:** The Ozo Council is the highest political class in Ezza clan. It was said to have been instituted by Ezekuna but its actual origin could not be remembered other than that it replicates the Ozo title in Awka town of Anambra State. Nobody could remember whether it was instituted by Awka holders of the title for Ezza people on request or whether Ezekuna created a model of it into Ezza culture. What nobody doubted was that the title predates the colonial era in Ezza land. Taking the Ozo title is an expensive and rigorous enterprise. That makes it the highest and last title any man can acquire in Ezza land. Not many men have



taken it because they may not afford to get to its expensive conclusive rituals - keeping their yam barns open for the community to feed from for the four days of the ceremony, providing four strong cows, goats, fowls and other items for food. Nwaofeke Offia said that only the very rich in Ezza land can venture into taking the Ozo title<sup>40</sup>. Afoke and Nworie consented. In their opinion, the Ozza-Ozza or Ozo is

*The highest title in Ezza society... The title compares in excellence with its equivalence, the Ozor title in Awka in Anambra State... It is such a prestigious title that it places one on the pinnacle of society's rich people<sup>41</sup>.*

In Igbo land, Afoke and Nworie further noted, an Ozo title holder was honoured as a king wherever he went though he had to keep to certain rules of life. They said that the title catapulted a holder to belong to the king's cabinet in Ezza land<sup>42</sup>. No wonder, the high cost of taking the title was a deliberate check against its infiltration by men of low means, and a way of preserving its prestige in Ezza land. The few men who could conveniently afford it were therefore, allowed to constitute themselves into the highest socio-political class that determined what constituted law, customs and taboos in Ezza land. Iduma Nwite said that the Ozo title holders in Ezza land determined what was right and what was wrong. They decided what Ezza tradition was and how it was practised<sup>43</sup>.

Further investigation revealed that the Ozo title in Igbo land was originally known as Odoloma Eri in the Eri Kingdom of old before age and population explosion forced an increase that saw the admission of more people into the group. Its role was mainly advisory to the King which qualified every Ozo title holder to belong to the king's cabinet. It was the death of Eri, the acclaimed ancestor of the Igbo race, and the eventual migration of some of his children to different parts of Igbo land that led to the proliferation of the Ozo title taking with different modifications in different communities.<sup>44</sup> In the view of Fidels Idigo:

*The Odoloma Eri metamorphosed into Ozo title society. Members of this society are men of many qualities. They are priests, they are doctors, and they are members of the highest ruling body in a centralized system of government known as the king's cabinet... (In Igbo land), they are at the helm of affairs in the council of elders called Ndichie<sup>45</sup>.*

**Ochinkpuru Council:** The next important political institution in Ezza land is the Ochinkpuru council. While the Ozo council functions majorly as the Executive arm of government in Ezza clan, the Ochinkpuru council acts as the judicial arm. Together, they are called Nde 'Nze na Ozo' because of their inter-mixing of roles in important public issues of the clan. But nobody could remember anything about how the Ochinkpuru council began in Ezza land beyond that the Ozo council has always been above the Ochinkpuru council. Many elders were of the opinion that it must have been instituted by Ezekuna himself as a sub-ordinate class to assist

him in the day to day affairs of Ezza land of his days, especially in the area of maintaining law and order.

In contemporary times, apart from its administrative functions in collaboration with the Ozo council, the Ochinkpuru receives and mediates in complaints of conflicts from Ezza nationals in any of the Ezza settlements in the diaspora. On receipt of such complaints, the complainants are invited to Okpoku Ezekuna where they are thoroughly interviewed on their complaints to ensure that the Ezza nation intervenes on clean ground and not be pulled into any frivolous conflict. Barth Ugbo said that the tradition originated from Ezekuna who, as a fair and just man, warned his children never to engage in unjust wars against any group of people. That way, for instance, the world was saved possible blood-letting between the Ezza and Nkalagu people over an unfounded claim of some Ezza nationals who had resided for so long in Nkalagu town. Nkalagu people were said to have revolted against the Ezza nationals who unilaterally created a distinct settlement for themselves in Nkalagu. The complainants ran to Okpoku Ezekuna for Ezza assistance. But the Ochinkpuru Council intervened and after due investigation, it was established that Nkalagu had never called for Ezza military assistance and that the Ogbu Ezekuna signifying Ezza's covenant with the people of Nkalagu was no where to be found in Nkalagu. Thus, the call for war against Nkalagu community was allowed to die out naturally<sup>46</sup>. Ugbo added that

*going to war against the Nkalagu would have been unfair and unjust which was against the instruction Ezekuna handed down to his children, and which has been going from generation to generation... if (the Ogbu Ezkuna was found to have been planted in Nkalagu at any time) the entire Ezza world would have declared war against Nkalagu because Ogbu Ezekuna must not die<sup>47</sup>.*

Meanwhile, the Ezza nation has jettisoned war as a means of expansion and conflict resolution. Reason is that the modern world has become too civilized and all lands legally inhabited by groups of different people. What they do in the present time is to mediate in any conflict situation and use dialogue through the Ochinkpuru Council, to resolve whatever differences that crop up between them and any other community. Ugbo said that they have found dialogue diplomacy to be better than war diplomacy in inter-group relations.<sup>48</sup> Apart from the case of Nkalagu, the Ochinkpuru Council achieved peace and harmony for Ezza nationals and their hosts in Agbogazi in Enugu State where the Ezza settlement is now clearly demarcated; and in Ezillo in Ebonyi State, where the Ezza settlement has been recognized as an autonomous community by the state government.

**Village Assemblies:** From the earliest times, the village has been the breeding ground for Ezza national governments. The villages consisted of lineage groups and kinship units where the oldest men constituted the leadership class that represented each village at Ezza national assemblies. Each village had a council of elders, and like in other Igbo societies, the oldest man of the lineage group headed

the council. In that order, he represented his group at the Ezza national council of elders which was comprised of the Nde Nze na Ozo (Ozo and Ochinkpuru) council.

At the village level, the village assemblies settled disputes through suggestions from attendants at the village square (Ngamgbo) in the fashion of ancient Igbo democracy. Attendants freely contributed their opinions on issues under discussion. Resolutions were often reached when the elders retired to a corner (igba idzu) to consult among themselves for a resolution.

*The general norm for resolving disputes is by group suggestions and resolutions called Ogba idzu... Ultimately cases were resolved in a very democratic way in that every member present in such discussions has the right to air his opinion at the play ground (Ngamgbo).<sup>49</sup>*

In some cases, an Okpara (first son) of a family represented his family in the village council of elders (Ndi Ichie). Such an Okpara need not to be of the same age of the elderly members of the council but tradition allowed him the privilege of sitting at meetings with the elders by virtue of his being the first male child to open the womb in his family. Again, apart from representing their villages at Ezza general assemblies, members of the council of elders of the different villages were both the political and spiritual heads of their families. They could pronounce sanctions against a deviant in the family, and they also led family delegations to the gods or direct atonements for offences against some deities.

**Traditional Rulers:** Government certified traditional rulers of all ranks have no place in Ezza traditional government. They are not recognized in the Ezza world as representatives of either the gods or the people. They are seen as agents of the government who have no bearing on the traditions of Ezza people. Thus, none of them is consulted on matters of traditional value in Ezza land. Ugbo observed that they are seen as an extension of the colonial warrant chief system imposed on Igbo land by the British<sup>50</sup>. Thus, if an elected traditional ruler in Ezza land attends any traditional gathering of Ezza people, he sits quietly at his corner and no special recognition is accorded him.

**Age Grades:** In the pre-colonial era of Igbo land, the Age grade institution was an important component of the administrative structures of every community. It was said to have been institutionalized in Igbo land by Eri who used it in three tiers-the oldest age set (75 years and above), the Ojama (65 years to 74 years), and the third age sets made up of younger men, for all round administrative purposes in his kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Since then, the culture has permeated the socio-political fabric of Igbo societies, including Ezza land, for same administrative reasons. The ancestors of the Ezza people were said to have organized the age grade system in such a way that every male adult was actively involved in the task of building a virile Ezza community. Each age grade lasted as long as the members remained alive. According to Afoke and Nworie, while names of some

age grades like Abaragu Mba evolved during war times in Ezza land, there were others such as Ogbo Ugoma, Ogbo Uwaoma and Ogbo Okogba, that evolved within peace times. There were still others like Enyi Jike, Enyi Igwe and Ama Enyi age grades that evolved between peace and war times<sup>52</sup>. The frequent wars of the people led to the restructuring of the age grades in Ezza land. From the oldest age set to the youngest, new roles in the war strategies of Ezza nation were assigned. For instance, the oldest age grade, Ogbo Ibina, which previously had no specific political roles except advisory, were given the added responsibility of offering scarifies to the gods to keep the warriors safe in battles and ensure total victories for Ezza land. The Ogbo Ugoma was second in age rank to the Ogbo Ibina but had the added role of searching out disciples for the Ezza army among the people.

Younger age grades were arranged according to their war skills. The Ogbo Enyi Igwe which had the highest fighting skills formed the bulk of Ezza army while the Ogbo Abaragu Mba made up of youths between 20 and 30 years, were next because they were always courageous in battles and returned home with the heads of the enemies. The third rank in Ezza artillery was the Ogbo Okogba, comprised of strong boys who performed most of the hard cores of the army.

Below that age grade was the Ogbo Iruali made up of boys between 20 years and above, who were conscripted into the army from the younger Ogbo

Akpapi age grade and were assigned the espionage roles for the Ezza army after their circumcision. Lastly, the Ogbo Uwaoma, formed from the Ogbo Iruali, was made up of boys about 20 to 30 years old, and were kept incharge of protecting the farm crops from straying domestic animals. Theophilus Nweke, a youth leader in Ezza Oji-Enya, said that the Ezza army remains intact till date even though the clan no longer envisages wars with anybody.<sup>53</sup> The army he was referring to was the age grade institution re-structured in Ezza land to prosecute the several wars of expansion of the clan.

**The women:** Women had neither political positions nor roles in Ezza land in the pre-colonial days. They remained calm before the men, and spoke only when they were asked to speak. They daily served the interests of their husbands by taking care of the homes as well as working together with their children on their husbands' farms as the core of the family labour force. Nwafoke Offia noted that except in 1954 when the women were asked to pay tax by the British colonial officers, Ezza women were never seen or heard in the political circles of the clan.

He added:

*But in 1954, the women were mobilized against the British colonial officers who were thoroughly beaten up and humiliated at Eke Imoha by the women under the command of Usulor Enyi Mgbadu<sup>54</sup>.*

Nwafoke Offia maintained that the only role the women played in Ezza pre-colonial public life was organizing them-selves to divorce stubborn and



incorrigible wives. Afoke and Nworie added that the women were not permitted to climb trees or kill animals or engage in dangerous exercises like going to wars or hunting<sup>55</sup>.

## Endnotes

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5. Ikechukwu O. Onuoha and Kelechi J.Ani, “The Ezza Origin, Migration and Conflict-Based Relations” in *Studies in Igbo History*, (Dan O. Chukwu, et al, eds.), Eungu: Nolix Educational Publications Nigeria Ltd; 2016.p.131.
6. Onuoha and Ani, p.131
7. Official Gazette (FGP 71/52007/2,500 (OL24): Legal Notice of the Publication of the Details of the Breakdown of the National and State Provisional Totals, 2006 Census by the National Bureau of Statistics
8. Theophilus Nweke, C.48, a youth leader in Ezza Oji-Enyu, remained emphatic that Ezza meant Ezza but was corrupted due to contacts with different environments as a result of the long period of movement and contacts with different peoples and culture.
9. John Nwakpuru, c.75; Retired Headmaster from Akuna Akuna, Amagu Ikwo, said that the three major clans of Abakaliki-Ezza, Izzi; and Ikwo, came from Igalla under the leadership of Enyi Nwegu as their common ancestor. But Jacob Nweke, C.62; a retired civil servant, farmer and traditional head of Ishiagu Enyigba, Izzi, maintained that the three descendants were sons of Ezekuna who migrated from Afikpo to Onueke. Still, Theophilus Nweke, c.48, a youth leader in Ezza Oji-Enya, and some elders of that community, maintained that Ezza was of Israeli origin.
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14. Bartholomew Ugbo, c. 69, an Ezza elder and Chairman, Ochinkpuru Council, the second highest social-political institution in Ezza land, in an interview with Researcher in his house at Udenyi Umuezeoka, on Friday, 21/09/2017.
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53. Theophilus Nweke, c.48, youth leader, was interviewed at the scene of Ezza Oji-Enya Welfare Union Meeting in Ezza Oji-Enya, Ebonyi Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, 29/07/2017.
54. Nwaofeke Offia, c.97.
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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **OVERVIEW OF EZZA NEIGHBOURS**

This chapter considers some of the communities that the Ezza related with, mostly through wars, between 1850 and 1895, and between 1915 and 1930. These communities are significant in Ezza war history, not actually more significant than communities like Effium, but for the peculiar approaches applied in executing the wars. The first period of 1850 to 1895 covers Ezza's relations with Obeagu Isu, Ukhobo, Ekwetekwe, Okpoto, Oworima, Ogiri, Agbon, Akpaka, Onicha Nko, Onicha Amagu Nze and Iyionu communities. The second period of 1915 to 1930 considers only two communities out of the many for the reason stated above. The two communities are Obeagu and Ezillo, all in the present day Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

#### **Ezza Neighbours, 1850-1895**

##### **Obeagu Isu**

**Obeagu Isu** is in present day Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. In the pre-colonial period, the community was squashed between some bellicose neighbours that were determined to wipe it off the face of the earth. That very desperate situation informed the tone of Ede Nwogo, a leader in Obeagu Isu, on his chance meeting with Njoku Chita, the reputed Ezza warrior, on his way to Afia Ukhobo (Ukhobo market) one Afor fateful day in late 1849. Ede Nwogo had

approached Njoku Chita to seek Ezza's assistance for the Obeagu Isu community against its hostile neighbours. Philip Nwinya opined that:

*Tired of running, and fearing possible examination, (Obeagu Isu) unable to withstand their enemies sought the (intervention of (the) Ezza (whom they) they hired to fight their wars ...or live in their midst as a protective measure ...to their stronger neighbours.<sup>1</sup>*

It was by that invitation to intervene for the rescue of the threatened Obeagu Isu community that the Ezza came into contact with the community. The people volunteered a section of their land if they had victory in the battle. The area they allowed the Ezza stretched from Azu Nweke( behind the present Nweke Ubia market)extending to a village square close to Ede Nwogo's compound where the covenant ram was buried alive,

### **Ukhobo**

Before its extinction by the Ezza warriors, Ukhobo was in present day Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State where the Ezza Ezza-egu community now extends to. The community was the leader of the coalition against Obeagu Isu community in the mid 1840s, before the latter sought and got the assistance of the Ezza military. Ukhobo used to be a strong force within its region.

Ezza's attack on the community was tactically delayed till the dry season of 1850 for maximal result. Ukhobo was surrounded by other smaller communities that joined forces together with it to render the Obeagu Isu community extinct.

When eventually the Ezza army descended on Ukhobo by night attacks after defeating Ekwetekwe and Okpoto, respectively, it was a protracted war before Ukhobo was defeated. Many Ezza warriors lost their lives but reinforcement with under-aged fighters from Ezza Nkomoro revived the daunted spirit of the remaining Ezza soldiers who fought gallantly until Ukhobo was defeated.

Nonetheless, the fall of Ukhobo was a disaster to the Ezza army. Some young Ezza warriors hastily partitioned the conquered territory to themselves without consulting the Ishi-egu who had the responsibility of sharing any conquered territory in Ezza wars among the Ezza communities that took part in the war. All the young warriors died mysteriously one after the other. The remaining warriors were advised to vacate their portions to stem further deaths. The vacated region has remained uninhabitable till the present times. But the entire Ukhobo land was occupied by the Ezza who renamed the territory as part of Ezza-egu community. What was left of the Ukhobo escaped Onicha Amagu Nze.

### **Ekwetekwe**

Ekwetekwe community was not originally part of the Ukhobo coalition of communities against the Obeagu group. But it was close enough to serve as possible military base to the enemy. From Ezza's reconnaissance, it was discovered that attacking and occupying the community would rob the Ukhobo and its allies of the advantage the community possessed.



Other communities recommended for destruction in the reconnaissance report were Nera, Iluokpara, Amagu Nze and Akpugo. But Akpugo wisely send for peace with the Ezza warriors on the ground that Akpugo Eze and Ezekwa were the same people. All the above communities, including Ekwetekwe, were in the Nkanu area of present day Enugu State.

### **Okpoto:**

Okpoto was one of the strong allies of Ukhobo. It was a veritable military group with a good numbers of warriors. Located in today's Ishielu area of Ebonyi State, the community originally includes Onumoeke Ojiegbe, Ede-Mungwu, Onuoji, Ekeugwu and Amazuzu. Many of these sub-communities later into the hands of the Ezzaa people through areas. Being a strong military force, the Ezza people deliberately avoided go to war with Okpoto without justification.

The opportunity came when three Ezza boys were said to have been killed by Okpoto community taken as an aggression, Ezza declared war on Okpoto, chasing the people out of their original place of settlement to the other side of the Ebonyi River. The abandoned areas were taken over by Ezza soldiers who adopted the Ebonyi River as the boundary between the two enemies.

### **Oworima**

This community was originally situated at the present Ugbo-enyim village now occupied y the Ezza as part of Ezza-egu land. It was a member of the Ukhobo

alliance that was bent on expelling the Ezza out of the region. Having defeated Ukhobo, leader of the alliance, the Ezza marched into Owrima and attacked it in a brief encounter that saw many of the indigenes escape to Onicha Amagu Nze. From Onicha Amagu Nze, run away Oworima soldiers mobilized themselves into a guerrilla force that intermittently attacked the Ezza in a bid to recapture their lost home.

To permanently end the Oworima incursion, some Ezza warriors like Ogbute Offia Igwe (a Dibia) and others, organized an ambush that saw the Oworima guerrilla soldiers captured and buried alive, that brought an end to Oworima's perturbances on the Ezza till the present times.

### **Ogiri**

Ogiri was blessed with a large expanse of arable land, good enough for agriculture. Its original site was across the huyabu River in the Nkanu region of Enugu state from where the Ezza dislodged the people Ogiri in a brief war in about the 1890s.

Initially, Ogiri was part of the Ukhobo alliance that stood against the Ezza expansionist bid from Ezza-egu territory in Obeagu Isu to her other neighbours, far and near. Ezza's attack on Ogiri was deliberately delayed till the dry season of 1890 when Ogiri was having a festival. The Ezza adopted night attacks, burning houses and farms in the process, and killing every living thing in sight. The attack

which saw many Ogiri people killed, lasted for a few days. Many indigenes of the community who were not ready to surrender to the Ezza soldiers decided on mass suicide, and jumped into a swamp at a place that is today called **uruanwu efie**. The Ezza occupied and renamed the Ogiri territory as Azu Ofia village which they annexed to their Ezza-egu community in present day Enugu State.

### **Agbon**

The community formally known as Agbon was part of the present day Nkanu East Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. It was part of the Ukahbo alliance that challenged the Ezza rescue mission in Obeagu Isu community. But in an Ezza counter offensive, Agbon was wiped out in an encounter that did not last many days. The territory was taken and occupied by the Ezza who dropped the name “Agbon” and joined the territory to their Ezza-egu community which today, is an integral part of Nkanu East Local Government Area in Enugu State.

### **Akpaka**

This community like the Ogiri community, was part of the Ukhobo alliance. Situated in present day Nkanu East Local Government Area in Enugu State, Akpaka fell under the Ezza onslaught like all other members of the Ukhobo coalition.

The Ezza-Akpaka war was brief. Akpaka people abandoned their land to the Ezza warriors and escaped for safety in neighbouring communities like Onicha Amagu Nze, Onicha Nke, and so on.

### **Onicha Nko/Onicha Amagu Nze**

These two communities were within the Nkanu area in present day Enugu State. They were strong opposers of the expansion of the Ezza into their territory. As part of the Ukhobo coalition, the two communities fought gallantly against the Ezza-Ezza-egu group. Njoku Afoke and Paul Nworie recorded that war eventually broke out between Ezza and the two communities in their attempt to force the Ezza to return to their Ezza-egu home. The war later took a dramatic turn when Ebiem, an Amagu Nze giant, challenged the Ezza to provide their strongest man for a duel with him. Nome Nweze, an Ezza strong man of note, accepted the challenge on behalf of the Ezza world.

The duel was agreed to start as a wrest-thing match but whoever three his opponent would behead him. That would mean victory fro his side. The Amagu Nze giant was described as “a man mountain because of his size”.<sup>4</sup> As the two men wrestled, the giant throws down the Ezza representative, Nome Nweze. But as the giant ran to pick his cutlass from where he hid it, Nome’s brother was said to have ambushed the giant whose arteries he cut apart from the heeks. The giant collapsed instantly to the ground while sprang up immediately and reached his

own cutlass, and beheaded Ebiem, the giant, to secure his Ezza people victory in that contest. With the death of their giant, the perplexed soldiers of Amagu Nze Nkanu abandoned the territory and ran for their lives while the Ezza soldiers pursued them far deep into their settlement.<sup>5</sup> That forced a wide migration of both Onicha Nko and Onicha Amagu Nze people who were close neighbours, to different locations. With the land vacated, the Ezza settled there and fortified the area against possible reprisals.<sup>6</sup>

### **Iyionu**

Iyionu is a community in present day Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. A member of the Igbo-Ezza group of communities in the area, Iyionu had suffered consistent threats of extermination from its Amagu Nze and Amechi Idodo neighbours in Enugu State. Afraid of losing its ancestral home to its enemies, and having heard of Ezza exploits in Obeagu Isu, Iyionu elders decided to seek Ezza's assistance against the Onicha Amagu Nze and Amechi Idodo people.

Meanwhile, these communities had occupied some sectors of Iyionu but on learning that Ezza warriors had been brought into assist the community against them, abandoned those occupied territories and ran back into their ancestral home lands.

### **Amechi Idodo:**

Ezza's relations with Amechi Idodo community in Nkanu West Local Government Area of Ebonyi State started with its invitation by the people of Iyionu community in Ishielu Local Government Area in Ebonyi State assist checkmate the incursion of Onicha Amagu Nze and Amechi Idodo people into Iyionu territory. But the planned war never actually take place as both the Amagu Nze and Amechi Idodo people abandoned their already occupied areas within Iyionu territory and escaped back to their own homes.

However, to make the war real, the Ezza warriors pursued them to their homes, and forced them, in the process, to abandone those home to Ezza warriors. Today,the villages of Egu Egede, Amazuzu, Enyim, Ogba-egu and Ogbovum which are presently occupied by the Ezza, were formerly owned by the people of Onicha Amagu Nze and Amechi Idodo communities<sup>7</sup>.

### **Ezza Neighbours, 1915-1930**

This section considers such the Ogbeagu and Ezillo communities among many others that the Ezza assisted in wars. This preferential attention on the two communities is due to the spectacular war approaches adopted by Ezza warriors to ensure permanent relief for their hosts. In the case of Obeagu, the Ezza was faced with three enemies from two Local Government Areas in Enugu State who

decided on surprise attacks on Ezza's arrival at Obeagu. They were the Amakanu people in Nkanu West Local Government Area, and Ehamufu and Umueru people in Isiuzo Local Government Area. Ezza warriors decided to share themselves into three camps against the enemies.

In Ezillo, the Ezza saw the Ngbo people as the only enemy to face. Though taken on a surprise intense attack on arrival by the Ngbo, Ezza's quick response pushed the enemy far back into their territory. It was at a time that the Ezza were deeply engaged on containing the Ngbo that Okpoto warriors, nursing the wounds of their earlier defeat by the Ezza, fiercely attacked the Ezza army from the rear before a reinforce of Umuezeokolu warriors arrived the area in defense of the Ezza soldiers.

### **Ezza Neighbours, 1927 – 1930:**

#### **Obeagu:**

Obeagu is in Ishielu Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. It shares boundaries with Amakanu in Nkanu West Local Government Area as well as Ehamufu and Umueru communities in Isiuzo Local Government Area, all in Enugu State. These three communities had consistently desired the compulsory expulsion of the Obeagu community from its present location because they claimed the site belonged to them.

They had occupied parts of Obeagu land, demanding that the people should join their kith and kins in Obeagu Isu in present day Onicha Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. While forcefully expanded Southward into Obeagu territory, Amankanu and Umueru were expanding eastward and Northward, respectively.<sup>8</sup> Thus, not ready to lose their home to the enemies, the elders of Obeagu solicited the assistance of Uzu Ochioku, an Ezza blacksmith living in their midst, to lead them to Onueke to meet the elders of Ezza land for assistance against the enemies of Obeagu. At Onueke, the Obeagu appeal was received with good ears; and therefore, was given immediate approval. Ezza people living in Ezza-egu were thus, mandated to go and rescue the Obeagu community.

On Ezza's arrival at Obeagu, the people of Amankanu, Ehamufu and Umueru launched a surprise attack on the Ezza soldiers in a desperate effort to frustrate their mission. Meanwhile, Ehamufu people had pushed the Obeagu people far beyond the Atori River which had served as the natural boundary between the communities<sup>9</sup>. To accomplish their mission, Ezza soldiers shared themselves into three camps with each taking on each of Amankanu, Ehamufu and Umueru communities. The strategy was to attack these groups simultaneously.

As the war began, amankanu and Umueru fell within few days, leaving Ehamufu to face the combined forces of Ezza's three camps of soldiers. Ehamufu was able to sustain the fight with a stiff resistance until, forcing the Ehamufu



soldiers to abandon the places they had occupied in Obeagu to the Ezza soldiers who pursued the three groups of Amankanu, Ehamufu and Umueru far deep into their own territories. Altogether, the additional territories gained by the Ezza soldiers were renamed as Ezza-egu Amede, Ezza Ikem, Ezza Akaza, Ezza Neke, Ezza Agbaogazi, Ezza Umueru, Ezza Ugwu-Umueru, and many others. These Ezza communities are all in Nkanu West and Isiuzo Local Government Areas of Enugu State. The communities now serve as boundaries between Obeagu community in Ishielu Local Government Area in Ebonyi State and its erstwhile enemy neighbours in Enugu State. The Obeagu rescue mission lasted between 1915 and 1916.<sup>16</sup>

### **Ezillo**

Ezillo community suffered regular threats of extermination from her Ngbo neighbours. Not ready to lose their land to Ngbo community, Ezillo elders decided to send a delegation in early 1927, to Onueke to solicit for Ezza assistance against Ngbo who had encroached deep into Ezillo land beyond the Ebonyi River, up to the present site of Ezillo Water Scheme, and to the East, up to the Okpoto-Ezillo boundary. Ezillo people had believed that the Ezza would help them recover their land than the British colonial government in which Ngbo already had prominent people. Again, with the Ezza stayed between them and Ngbo the incessant insurgence of the latter will permanently end.<sup>11</sup>

At Onueke , the terms and conditions for Ezza military assistance were reeled open to the Ezillo delegates who accepted all, provided that would ensure their victory, freedom and total recovery of their lost land from Ngbo.<sup>12</sup> The Ezza elders then mandated some Ezza warriors to follow the Ezillo delegates back to their community for an inspection of the disputed regions. The team went round Achi-Edede, Egu Ugwu (Ugbo-Ongah and Ndiagu-Ugwu), Anwu-Mini, Egu-Echara, Iyi-Utu, Egu-Ite-Odo, Egu-Ali-Okpo, Egu-Ohuu-Anwu, Egu-Okwuru, Aba-Ogodor, Ikpete-Agbo, Egu-uzu Oge, up to Akparata-gberungor.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the survey, the traditional Ogbu Ezekuna was planted for the Ezza people at Azu- Iyi - oto to signify their right to a permanent stay in Ezillo<sup>14</sup>.

For the actual war against Ngbo, only the Ezza Umuezeoka people who were living close to the disputed regions of Ezillo were directed to engage in the rescue operation against Ngbo. It was agreed that the Ezza Umuezeokohu would be released as a reinforcement to the Ezza Umuezeoka should the Ngbo prove too tough. On hearing of Ezza's arrival at Ezillo, Ngbo declared a surprise attack on the Ezza and Ezillo forces. Though the Ezza responded proactively, they remained resolute in their hurried training with the Ezillo forces at their caps at Amauji and Ama Offia areas. Frightened by Ezza's proactive response to Ngbo's attack, Ezillo elders moved for a covenant (Igba-ndu) with the Ezza warriors to forbid the

shedding of each other's blood by any of the two sides during and after the war. The request was granted by the Ezza warriors, and covenant was undertaken.

Meanwhile, the Ezza warriors deliberately delayed their full attack on the Ngbo from May to November of 1927, when everywhere was dried enough to be burnt with ease. As the combined forces of the Ezza and Ezillo raged, burning homes and farms, and killing every living thing in sight, both Ngbo and Ezza-Ezillo suffered casualties.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, to the Ezza and Ezillo army, Okpoto still nursing old wounds of her earlier defeat by the Ezza, allied with Ngbo forces and attacked the Ezza and Ezillo army from the rear as they were busy pushing into Aba-Ogodor, an Ngbo territory. However, help was readily made available to the Ezza/Ezillo forces as the warriors of Ezza Umuezeokohu were directed to take on the Okpoto soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Though afflicted with heavy losses, Ezza Umuezeokohu successfully forced a retreat on Okpoto who abandoned parts of their homes for safety elsewhere. It was at the fall of Ngbo, fearing eventual Ezza invasion decided in 1930 to unite the British colonial administrations from Abaunkeleke. For permanent peace between Ngbo and Ezza-Ezillo people, the colonial administrations began the demarcation of the boundaries between the three groups using live trees.

Beginning from Ndiagu-Obu in Okpo-shi Eheku in Ngbo, to Azu-Iyi-Oto in Ezza-Ezillo, down to Amofia Ngbo and Umuezeokohu-Ndiagu Ugwu village at Okpoto/Ezillo boundary, the colonial government marked the boundaries with live trees.<sup>17</sup> That was in 1930, making the Ezza rescue mission in Ezillo land to last for four years, 1927 to 1930.

## **Endnotes**

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16. Batholomew Ugbo, C. 67. Chairman, Ochinkpuru Council. Interviewed in Umuezoka, 21/07/2017.

17. Paul Okute Egbe, C. 67. Community Leader. Interviewed in Umuezeoka, 21/07/2017. See also “Land Dispute: Ezillo vs Ezza”, The Notice Newspaper, 2009. P. 22
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## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **WAR AS A MEANS IN EZZA RELATIONS WITH HER NEIGHBOURS**

Ezza land is a place where war became a necessity in the drive for farm lands. The drive became obvious in the 1800s when the Ezza had fought and exterminated some non-Igbo communities that are today extinct within the Abakaliki area. By their war drive, the people acquired several settlements across Ebonyi State. However, a closer examination of Ezza settlements within the state and outside it reveals that all Ezza settlements were not acquired by war alone. There were other peaceful means and methods by which the Ezza people expanded their territory, and achieved their economic interests. While many would hastily conclude that the people waged wars against weak communities that were easily dispossessed of their lands, not many are aware that the Ezza rarely went to war unless provoked or invited, and that the invitation must first be thoroughly evaluated by the elders and an acceptable justification drawn. The community engaging the Ezza people in an alliance against any enemy must accept to give out permanently a portion of their disputed land to their Ezza ally if victory eventually turns in their favour. That condition, rather than any financial reward, was to appease the spirit of Ezza warriors who may lose their lives in battle in defense of a foreign land. To an average Ezza man, no size of land for whatever purpose could be adequate to pay for the life of a human being. Death, the Ezza said, was

truly irreparable. Accepting land for Ezza dead warriors was one way of maintaining the peace in the face of hopelessness and lack of a better compensation.

On the other hand, whenever the Ezza was provoked into war against any community, they must have exhausted all avenues for peaceful resolution of the differences between them and that other community. Such measures were actuated by the belief that war was a very expensive venture and impacted negatively on both the victor and vanquished. If the Ezza went into such a provoked war, they went with all determination for absolute conquest to silence permanently the troublesome community. That was because Ezza people, according to Iduma Nwite, needed peace to practice their agriculture and engage in other industries that held promises of promoting the life of the Ezza man. The Ezza believes that ‘without peace, no form of progress can be possible<sup>1</sup>. The clan never went to war except as a last resort.

That peaceful disposition of the Ezza people was said to have been inculcated by Ezekuna, the Ezza ancestor, an acclaimed disciplinarian who made his children to imbibe discipline as a way of life. Batholomew Ugbo said of Ezekuna,

*Among the sons of Ekuma Enyi, Ezekuna was the most disciplined... As a disciplined man and a disciplinarian himself, Ezekuna warned his children to avoid unjust wars and acts, and to live peacefully with their hosts wherever they may go.<sup>2</sup>*



That instruction seems to have been discarded, possibly few years after the death of Ezekuna. There have been occasions when the Ezza warriors were engaged in unjust wars against some perceived enemies of Ezza clan. For instance, the war against the Agba community by some break-away forces of Inwere Nta, one of the major warriors of Ezza land, is qualified as an unjust war. The Agba people who had before been forced out of their earlier home close to Idembia, refused to be defeated a second time in their new home in present day Ishielu Local Government Area. Frustrated, the Ezza soldiers by-passed the Agba settlement to an empty land where they named Ezza-Egu (Ezza farm land).<sup>3</sup> There were also the unjust wars against the Oshiri which lasted several years with heavy casualties on both sides until the Ezza involved the Igwe ka Ala Oracle of Umunneoha before winning the last war. Thus, Ezza expansion took four different diplomatic means-wars of expansion by provocation, wars of expansion by invitation, wars of expansion by greed, and expansion by sheer negotiation or peaceful means.

### **Wars of Expansion by Provocation:**

Oral accounts recalled some of the wars the Ezza were provoked into as Idee/Ubomi war, Ezza-Ntezi/Okpoto war, Ezza-Agala war, and the Ezza-Agba war.

The Idee and Ubomi were said to have jointly terrorized the Ezza clan for a long time, invading, destroying farm lands, looting property and raping the women. All efforts by the Ezza for peace to exist between the communities were not heeded. During an Ubomi festival to which the people of Idee were invited, the Ezza seized the opportunity and avenged their losses. The Ezza warriors were said to have sneaked into the vacated Idee community and burnt down the entire area and everything in sight. On their way back, the Idee people saw their village on fire and promptly, fled to the Cross River area. Ezza warriors descended on the people of Ubomi who were still feasting, forcing them to flee to Itigidi while many of them were slaughtered<sup>4</sup>. Thus, Ezza occupied the vacated territories.

Ntezi and Okpoto were non-Igbo communities and neighbours to the Ezza in the North. For a long time, they were said to have constantly invaded Ezza farm lands, destroying them in the process. They also took away cattle, abducted women and children. On regular basis, many of the women were raped. Again, the Ezza were said to have entreated for peace to no avail which informed their joining forces from all Ezza village groups against Ntezi and Okpoto communities.

At the end, Okpoto was chased out from their original home while Umuezeoka and Umuezeokoha warriors seized a large portion of land from Ntezi after killing thousands of of them.<sup>5</sup>

In the north, in today's Benue state, Ezza migrants enjoyed a very cordial relationship with their hosts, the Agala people, until some indigenes of the community decided to alter the tide. It was said that the Ezza migrants had been shown a sacred tree called Agba that stood on one of the farms owned by an Ezza migrant, and were warned never to cut it nor the branches, down. The Ezza people had accepted the rule and had kept it until some indigenes went by night and cut down the branches in order to incite their people against the Ezza settlers. In the morning the trouble-markers raised an alarm, alleging that the Ezza migrants had violated the order the community gave them. The Ezza were summoned, and after arbitration, were fined heavily. The game continued for sometimes until one Ezza man refused to pay. He was said afterwards summarily executed. Angered by the killing of their innocent brother, the Ezza migrants were said to have contacted their brothers in Ezza-Effium and attacked their hosts. They razed Agala down and looted whatever they could take. The attack was so severe that many Agala people, including the traditional ruler, Ogabu Agala, were captured as war prisoners to Ezza-Effium where they were all killed and Ogabu Agala was beheaded and paraded around Ezza-Effium.

The Ezza were also provoked into war by the Agba people who were said to be the original inhabitants of the present territory of the Ikwuate and Umunwagu villages in Idembia Ezza. They were forced out to their present settlement in Ishielu. Professor Uchenna C. Anyanwu wrote that there were many other wars fought by the Ezza that cannot be remembered. Nwaofeke Ofia agreed that the Ezza fought so many wars to dislodge many non-Igbo speaking people from the present Abakaliki area. He maintained that many of those wars were fought even when Ezekuna was alive.<sup>6</sup>

### **Wars of Expansion by Invitation**

As the Ezza emerged victorious in all their wars, they acquired the status of a regional super power dreaded and respected by all communities within the North-Eastern region of Igbo land. Many communities befriended the Ezza while many others got into military alliance with them for protection against external attacks. Thus, in time of threat, these communities ran to Ezza to defend them from danger. Few such cases will suffice. First was the Effium community who had ambitious expansionist Ngbo and Izzi as neighbours. Effium had suffered many attacks from these neighbours that she sought the assistance of Ezza on condition that she will give a section of her disputed territory if her enemies were defeated. As usual, the traditional covenant was made which culminated to the

planting of an Ogbu tree for the Ezza people at a centre popularly called 'Nwangangbo umaberu Ezza Ogbu' in Effium.

Second, when the people of Echara and Nkaleke in today's Ebonyi Local Government Area in Ebonyi State, had almost lost their farm land at Oji-enya Izzi to Ngbo Community, they invited the Ezza military group from Umuoghara Ezza to save them. The usual traditional covenant was gone into by Echara/ Nkaleke and Ezza people and an Ogbu tree was planted on a section of the disputed land for a permanent Ezza settlement. Ezza went into war and emerged victorious for her ally, and is today permanently settled at Oji-Enya, the disputed territory, to serve as a buffer against further encroachment from Ngbo.

A third example was the invitation of Ezza people by Nkwubo Nike Community against the frequent harassment of the Amorji and Owo communities in present day Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State. Nkwubo Nike was said to have contacted the Ezza leader, Ukoro Edene, at Umuhuali, through a hunter named Uwhoo Ezoke. On accepting the invitation, Ukoro Edene rather opted to pay the sum of fifty pounds (£50) for the land that was to be given to his people. He was said to have paid an initial £30 while the balance £20 was paid after the traditional covenant was ratified with the planting of an ogbu tree by the representatives of the six families that make up Nkwubo Nike.

There were other wars the Ezza were invited into as an imperial protector. Examples were the Inyimagu (Ikwo) war against Abaomege and the Ezillo-Ngbo war. Other military alliances the Ezza had with other communities were the Ezza-Inyionu alliance, Ezza-Nkomoro alliance, Ezza-Nkalaha alliance, and Ezza-Obegu alliance. Although these were not all the military alliances the Ezza had, one significant lesson is that the Ezza clan had reached her military apogee to serve as a protector of nations. Those protected were comfortable to part with a section of their territories to have the Ezza in their midst as a deterrence to their vile neighbours. An Ezza elder, Nwaofeke Ofia maintained that:

*No one wins (the Ezza) in a war. Anywhere there is war, we are always hired to help; and if we go, there will be peace. We are peace makers.<sup>7</sup>*

### **Wars of Expansion by Greed**

There were many wars that the Ezza waged without any enemy provoking them or an ally inviting them. They were simply wars of expansion by greed for farm lands. While all Ezza wars were targeted at grabbing land randomly for farming and settlement, the wars fought out of greed could possibly, be passed for unjust wars for the same purpose. That was against the instruction of Ezekuna, the Ezza ancestor, who was said to have warned his children against unjust wars and acts. Bartholomew Ugbo had maintained that

*Among the sons of Ekuma Enyi, Ezekuna was the most disciplined... As a disciplinarian himself, Ezekuna had warned his children ... to avoid unjust wars and acts.<sup>8</sup>*

An unjust war is the application of a destructive force to reach an end at the expense of an opponent. Onyemaechi Eke defined force as the ability of an actor to secure his will irrespective of the obstacle posed by an opponent.<sup>9</sup> Many Ezza wars, by their nature and extent, fit well into that definition and qualify for genocides against many communities whose land were grossly taken over by the invading Ezza army. Chuka Enuka said that genocide occurs whenever an ethnic group is forced to leave its homeland; even if no one is killed.<sup>10</sup> Despite the killing of thousands of inhabitants, whatever remained of the entangled people were forced to leave their homes and seek settlement elsewhere. Though the Ezza will not tolerate the killing of any of its own by any host community, they did not see anything wrong in wiping out an entire generation of a people in order to occupy their land.

One victim of Ezza wars of expansion by greed were the Agba people whose initial home was said to had been at the present sites of Ikwuate and Umunwagu villages in Idembia, Ezza South Local Government Area. The names of the dislodged Agba communities were Ochuchu Agba Ebo Ndiagu and Orié Agba Elu. The Agba community was said to have been besieged by the Ezza warriors such that the people had to abandon their homes and flee into safety at

their present home in Ishielu. Anyanwu reported that Ezza soldiers went after the Agba people in their new home but could not push them out again because the people had to put up a gallant defense which forced the Ezza soldiers to by-pass them into an empty land they later named Ezza-egu (Ezza farm land).<sup>11</sup> Another was the unprovoked war against the Oshiri. The remote cause of the war was said to be a vast expanse of fertile land on the Oshiri side of the Ebonyi River which the Ezza coveted and secretly nurtured plans to appropriate from the Oshiri. Suddenly, the Ezza Idembia people who had related friendly with the Oshiri through trade, descended on their Oshiri neighbours, drawing up a catastrophic war that lasted several years between 1885 and 1905.

### **Ezza Expansion by Peaceful Means**

On many occasions, Ezza people did not wage war against any group to occupy a land. Through hard work and most often, subtlety, many landlords willingly offered Ezza migrants good portions of land, enough for both settlements and farming. Settlements so secured are found mainly outside the Abakaliki Area and are rightly called the Ezza in Diaspora' within the traditional Ezza homeland.

Ugo Chukwuma wrote that the

*Ezza have both aborigines and those in Diaspora. This is due to the nature of their soil in their original area of inheritance. For the Ezza... normal life is to farm, and farming requires fertile lands which they lacked from onset of their history.*<sup>12</sup>



A second reason for Ezza's expansion to distant lands was said to be increasing population growth which created many intra Ezza conflicts among some Communities. It was mainly to prevent such internal conflicts that many Ezza people sought permanent homes in the Diaspora. One of such Ezza diasporal settlements is found in Onuogba Nike in Enugu East Local Government Area of Enugu State. It was said that some Ezza migrant labourers had gone to Onuogba Nike in about 1958 as daily paid labourers. Their dexterity and committed farm works coupled with their honesty and submissiveness, soon won them the love and admiration of Onuogba Nike indigenes, and within two years, precisely February 24, 1960, they got a grant for an Ezza permanent settlement. The people of Onuogba Nike, led by Agbo Anike, Agbo Aniji and Onyeani Oko, and others, began visiting Ukoro Edene of Ezza Nkomoro, informing him of their readiness to grant his people enough land for their permanent settlement. A couple of negotiations and exchange of visits between the two communities were said to have taken place for a mutual conclusion of the agreement. Ukoro Edene, head of Ezza Nkomoro, Ezeoke Njoku and Nwambara Ituma led the Ezza team while Aneke Nwede, Lawrence Anike, Agbo Anike, Onyeani Oko, Agbo Aniji and Aneke Agbowor led Onuogba Nike in the negotiations. A final agreement was said to have been reached with the usual customary oath taken in the house of an Onuogba Nike elder, Pa Oke Ede, where Onuogba Nike people swore to

*Have Ezza Nkomoro people settle ...at Onuogba Nike at the place ... marked out with an Ogbu tree planted specifically (to identify) their settlement... and in accordance with custom, a sacrifice of a goat, fowl, Kolanuts, and other things, was made on the Ogbu tree to mark its significance. Then, it was unanimously declared by the elders of Onuogba Nike that the Ezza Nkomoro people shall farm and enjoy the land as they wish for planting farm crops-yams, cassava, rice, et cetera, and shall remain as long as the world exist in their settlement.<sup>13</sup>*

There are other communities where Ezza people peacefully secured permanent homes as a result of their hosts appreciating their hard work and humility. Bartholomew Ugbo said that such communities include Agbo-Ogazi (Enugu State), Ishiagu (Ivo Local Government Area, Ebonyi State), Ikorodu (Lagos State), Aba, Acho and Uturu (Abia State), Four Corners, (Ikoma, Cross River State), Sabon Ngeri (Kano State), and others. Ugbo said that these settlements were secured in peace because the Ezza people were found submissive, hard working and honest to their hosts. He maintained that:

*We are very, very friendly to people. It is by all these means that the Ezza win the hearts of their hosts and sustain their good relationships.<sup>14</sup>*

Ugbo revealed other reasons for Ezza migration to distant places. According to him, during the Nigerian civil war, some Ezza men were engaged in dubious services that were inimical to the collective interest of Ezza people. At the end of the war, a secret plan was hatched to kill off all the men but their friends

and relations were said to have leaked the plan, leading to the escape of the men to some of these Diasporal Ezza settlements that exist today. Ugbo said that

*None of them can freely come to Ezza land except secretly. Their off-springs may visit Ezza land and go back to their diasporal homes, if they want. They observe all the cultural festivals of Ezza land in their new homes, and they have their own traditional rulers there.<sup>15</sup>*

Ugbo did not say the distant places where those Ezza men escaped to nor whether it was for the Nigerian army or Biafra the men worked.

### **Techniques in Ezza Expansionist Drive**

The expansion of Ezza clan beyond the boundaries of its ancestral homeland was a venture of many parts. While some parts followed a bloody trend, others followed peaceful means. Although both the bloody trend and the peaceful means aimed at the same target-securing more farmland, their final outcome differed. The bloody trend approach inflicted fatal bodily harm on man everywhere the Ezza expanded to, and left a trail of hatred for the Ezza by the victims of their bloody expansionist drive. Till the present, many communities, including Izzi and Ikwo, are still animus against the Ezza for injuries and losses suffered in the hands of Ezza warriors many years ago. In fact, in the early days of colonialism in the Abakaliki area, many of those communities actually launched revenge attacks on the Ezza in the hope for British protection in the face of reprisals from the Ezza. Professor Uchenna C. Anyanwu recorded that:

*Some... groups like the Oshiri, Agba and even Ntezi, took the initiative and attacked the Ezza with the hope that with the presence of the British, there would be little or no reprisals from the Ezza. Groups like Effium, Umuhuali and Nkalaha who signed a pact of protection with the Ezza also saw the presence of the British as an opportunity to repudiate such pacts or agreements. In sum, northeastern Igbo groups who feared the Ezza military might and aggression could now point the Ezza to the face with little or no consequences at all.<sup>16</sup>*

That was the extent of the final result of Ezza bloody exploits for farm lands in the entire Abakaliki area. But the peaceful means for the same end had a different result. The harmonious relations between the Ezza and their host communities within Ebonyi State and outside it as evidenced in the level of autonomy enjoyed by Ezza communities, their feeling of safety and profound sense of belonging to these host communities, are eloquent testimonies of the differences between the bloody approach and peaceful approach to territorial expansion. In Ishiagu, Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, where Ezza settlers have been deeply integrated with the indigenes, asking the Ezza people to leave the community and return to their ancestral homeland may be fiercely resisted. Njoku Afoke and Paul M. Nworie noted that:

*Many Ezza people in Ishiagu have achieved greatness through the acquisition of large parcels of land in different areas in the community. They have also built large houses in places they settled... it is pertinent to note that an Ezza Ishiagu man/woman may not forgive any one who makes a suggestion calling for their return permanently to their original homeland.<sup>17</sup>*

These two different results for the same purpose were made possible by four notable means-wars, hunting, labour mobility and hard work.

**Hunting:** Many Ezza settlements outside the ancestral homeland were secured by Ezza hunters who had first contact with such communities. During hunting expeditions some Ezza hunters stumbled into communities that were under constant raids or threats of war from their neighbours. Such communities seized the opportunity of the presence of the hunters to request the assistance of the Ezza against their enemies with a promise to offer a portion of land to the Ezza for a permanent settlement. A series of visits usually followed after between the hunters' home community and that in need. That was meant to allow the needy community an opportunity to formally make their request direct to the head of the Ezza community and his council. On the other hand, Ezza return visits to such a community offered an opportunity for the Ezza to ascertain the size and suitability of the land they would later inherit at the end of negotiation. Ezza settlements in Effium and Nkwubo Nike (in Enugu State) are examples of Diaspora settlements secured through Ezza hunters.

In the case of Effium, oral accounts maintained that a group of hunters from Umuezeoka and Umuezeokaoha in Ezza went hunting to Effium at a time the community was facing the challenge of losing their land to Izzi and Ngbo communities. Effium elders summoned the hunters, identified as Mgbabu Obashi,

Akochi Nwode, Omaka Nwangbo Oketa and Oko Akam, and appealed for Ezza military assistance against their enemies. The appeal was granted, and the traditional covenant was entered into by the two groups, with the Ogbu tree planted for the Ezza to symbolize their eternal stay in Effium.

Nkwubo Nike in Enugu State, was constantly threatened by Amorji and Owo communities. One day Nkwubo people encountered an Ezza hunter called Uwhoo Ezoke, from Umuhuali. He was told of the problem facing the community and his assistance was requested in exchange of a permanent settlement in Nkwubo Nike. Uwhoo was said to have led the elders of Nkwubo to Umuhuali where Ukoro Edene, Head of Umuhuali community then, after hearing the appeal and promise of the Nkwubo elders, offered to pay fifty pounds (£50) for the land promised his people. His offer was accepted by the elders, and Edene made an initial payment of £30 while the balance was paid after the usual traditional covenant was finalized and the elders of the six major families of Nkwubo Nike planted the Ogbu tree or Ogbu Ezekuna to mark the beginning of Ezza settlement in their community.

**War:** War had been a veritable means of conflict resolution even in the early days of the ancestors of the Ezza. To the Ezza, war was indicative of the stronger man when strength was matched with strength. Thus, there was the need to train every male Ezza in the art of war for him to be able to defend Ezza land and interests

anywhere. Therefore, military training was compulsory and was started very early in the life of an Ezza boy. At the end of his adolescent circumcision, he was given gifts of a gun and matchet as reminders that he was born into an aggressive world and should always be prepared to defend his father land from external aggressions. Later, he was graded through the age grade system for further and harder training. From the youngest age grade, Ogbo Akpapi, where the boy was groomed in the art of espionage for the Ezza army, he graduated to an older age grade, Ogbo Iruali, where he participated in clearing paths and other internal activities in the community. As a member of the Ogbo Uwaoma age grade, he protected the farms from straying domestic animals and was engaged in some military exercises like hide and seeks games, archery, mock battles, wrestling and shooting competitions with bows and arrows. Occasionally, macheting competitions were organized for the boys where their left hands were tied at each end of a long piece of rope while they cut each other with their matchets in the right hands. One of the contestants must cut the rope and run away as a mark of surrender for a winner to emerge. The purpose was to train up all Ezza boys to endure pains and to become hardened in defense of Ezza land when they came of age. At the age of 20 to 30 years, the Ezza boy belonged to the Ogbo Abaragumba, the group that showed extraordinary bravery in Ezza wars and often returned home with human heads as a show of their valour.

There were other techniques by which war was made attractive to the Ezza male youth and adults. The first was the carrying of the Ukoro war drum which was believed to stir up the zeal for war in all Ezza men wherever it was sounded. It was said to be the basic war tool with the power of motivating Ezza warriors into victories in their wars. The ceremony for carrying the Ukoro was usually performed by men circumcised within the same year who must purify themselves through certain rituals. The second technique was the Ogbu Ishi (head cutter) society which was exclusively organized to honour those who returned home with fresh bleeding human heads. The society had a special war drum called Ikpa which beat the warriors' music during initiations and their burials. An Ogbu Ishi member enjoyed some exclusive privileges in Ezza land. He wore a parrot's feather on his cap, danced the Ikpa music and Ukoro drum beats, and at his burial after death, was honoured by other members with a procession accompanied with the Ikpa music.

At battles, the Ezza used surprise attacks to overwhelm their enemies. They attacked at odd hours when such an attack was least expected. It could be in the wee hours of the day or late in the night when the enemies were still sleeping. It could be during festivals in enemy communities when the attention of everybody was focused on merriment. Or it was by ambush where the Ezza warriors hid in



trenches by the road sides from where they swooped on their targets as the latter walked past the Ezza warriors.

Finally, Ezza women were not left out in the pre-colonial war strategies of Ezza clan. Though they played minimal roles in battles, their involvement was significant in boosting the morale of the men. They cooked for the warriors, and through the members of the Ogbo Akpapi age grade, sent weapons and food supplies to the men at war fronts. But during the Ezza-Ikwo war, the women were said to have been active in taking home war prisoners while their men engaged in mop operations.

**Labour mobility:** Land was a necessity in Ezza land but it was a necessity that was scarce. Ezza population grew faster than normal, and the available land remained inelastic. More farmers grew out of the growing population without enough land to carry out their farm works. Soon, communal squabbles developed out of struggles for the little space available. Though the elders intervened on time, that did not provide the much needed space of land. The only alternative was an outside push for land elsewhere. Many young men left home in droves as migrant labourers with the hope of finding a settlement later. Many inhabitants of Ezza Oji-Enya community, a diasporal Ezza settlement, admitted that such outside push was simply because of land problem.<sup>18</sup>

The migrants traveled in groups to distant and near communities where they subjected themselves to daily paid labour. With time, as hired labourers, they began to rent portions of land from their landlords for personal farms. As their populations rose in the respective communities where they lived, a system of enlarging their personal farm lands by encroaching on their landlords land, was devised. That was how small Ezza settlements began in places like Ntezi, and other distant towns like Yako (in Ogoja), Umuahia, Uturu (in Abia State), and Udi (in former Udi Division of Enugu State).

There were other groups of migrants who traveled out in search of collar jobs in the railways and other construction sites. Their target was to earn the colonial taxes and experience a new life style outside farming. They traveled to Ondo, Ikom, Nkanu, Awka, Enugu, Calabar, Obubra, and other towns to seek wage labour. In all, these migrant labourers were the major links in Ezza inter-group relations within the period under study.

**Hard work:** The ploys adopted by the Ezza migrants to win the hearts of their hosts everywhere were hard work and submissiveness. These worked like a powerful love potion that turned the Ezza workers irresistible to their landlords. Oral accounts said that hard work and submissiveness were traits deliberately ingrained in the Ezza man as he came of age. James Nweke said that a young Ezza man, at the end of his fattening period after the adult circumcision was given a gift

of hoe to remind him that he was born into a farming society where he needed hard work and resilience to survive happily as a man. He was equally made to understand that humility was an assurance to his success.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the Ezza young man served his employer everywhere with loyalty and worked without getting tired. In many towns, these traits brought to Ezza people the nick-name of “Ndi ogu ukwu na ako n’amagi oke” (people of the big hoe who plowed without minding boundaries).<sup>20</sup> The target of such over concentration, apart from the normal wage for his labour, was to secure a settlement in diaspora. Ezza Ishiagu, Ezza Idanre (Ondo State), Onuogba nike (Enugu State), Ezza Uturu (Abia State) were said to have been created by this technique.

In addition, Ezza people had the habit of forming work groups that worked rotationally in members farms. The system extended to Ezza homes in the diaspora and encouraged wider intra and inter-group relations between the Ezza and many of their host communities. The practice worked well between Ezza Umuhuali and its parent community, Ezza-egu; between Nkomoro and Ezza-egu; between Idembia and Echara; between Umuezeoka and Nkomoro. There were many others. With time, the practice led to what A.E. Afigbo classified as primary migration by which people moved from their community of birth to another community where they set up new homes.

Blacksmiths were also part of the Ezza migrants who left their ancestral homeland with the hope of creating a settlement outside. The Ezza blacksmiths were famous fabricators of big hoes and matchets because of the peculiar soil of Ezza land. These they traded in distant and near communities where they soon began acquiring land for both farm works and settlements. Many landlords granted portions of land to the Ezza out of volition for their skills, hard work and submissiveness.

### **Effectiveness of War as a Means of Inter-group Relations in Ezza Land**

From all considerations, the approaches adopted to expand Ezza territory beyond the ancestral home land, were successful. There are now several Ezza settlements within and outside the Abakaliki area where Ezza people are happily living. Notwithstanding, there have been reports of pockets of revolts against the Ezza in some communities. That is the case especially, in those areas where the Ezza secured their settlements through blood and iron.

If war is truly a necessary part in human relations, why should more wars result from the first war? If by war, Ezza was recognized as a super-power in the Northeastern region of Igbo land, why should those who cheered the Ezza into war, and benefited from Ezza war prowess, want to be free from their lords? Is war a coin of two sides in one since both sides seem to drive at one thing – interest. The interest may be great or petty but interest is interest, and war does not

consider the size or extent of an interest. The euphoria in victory over-rides all considerations. Barash and Webel wrote that

*the sheer wastefulness of war has been appalling...During the Battle of the Somme (1916) in world war I... the British sought to pierce the German lines, gaining a mere 120 square miles at a cost of 420,000 men while the German lost 445,000. At the Battle of Ypres (1917), the British advanced 45 square miles, in the process losing 370,000 men. During World War I alone, Europe lost virtually an entire generation of young men.<sup>21</sup>*

The meaning Barash and Webel are pointing out is the senselessness of wars. The gain does not always justify the costs in both material and human resources, and always wars end up compounding the human situation. How many Ezza men, women and children, together with those of the Agba community dislodged from their original homes within the Idembia territory presently occupied by the Ikwuate and Umunwagu villages of Ezza, collectively paid the price for that tiny space of land? How beneficial has the dislodgement of the Agba been to the Ezza, even in the present? Would not the Oshiri-Ezza Idembia relations have been better and healthier if the Ezza did not covet and desired to possess a lushy parcel of fertile land on the Oshiri territory across the Ebonyi River? After the colossal waste of materials and men by both sides in several years of bitter wars, the Oshiri are still occupying their land due to the British intervention in 1905 which halted the Ezza expansionist drive. The Effium, who had voluntarily sought Ezza assistance against the Ngbo and Izzi in exchange for a

permanent settlement for the Ezza, later wanted a repudiation of that pact. If war is a just means to an end, how can it be justified in the face of an end turning volatile, resulting to more wars that take more lives and materials?

One nature of all wars is the inability of war-mongers to determine the true implications of their wars. The target of every war is material gain at the expense of human lives. In other words, wars are rituals with human lives for some material gains. Whatever constitutes that gain-money, trade, land, Jewelleries, et cetera, serves as booty to the war-monger but never ends his quest for more gains. In many instances, the Ezza warriors dislodged several communities to gain more land, thereby altering a natural order by creating Ezza settlements where they never existed before. In international diplomacy, what the Ezza warriors as actors, engaged in, was exclusive diplomacy which ignore negotiation and deny people their rights and opportunities. In such situations, the only hope of the people will be to exist under the imposed rule of their conquerors while nursing the wounds of the injustice done them. The Orri group, a non-Igbo community, were said to have existed within the Abakaliki area but were conquered and assimilated by the Ezza. But though the Orri are now undiscernibly integrated with their conquerors through a traditional blood oath, they still nurse a deep animosity against the Ezza whenever they hear or read about the bitter historical experience of their ancestors. Likewise, the subjugation of Africans under the draconic imperial rules of Europe

before, during and after colonialism is a similar example. What that means is that war, as part of diplomacy according to some scholars, instead of bringing sustainable development, peace and security, up turns these golden dreams of man by throwing him back into penury, despair and want. It is said that a leader who does not demonstrate a true willingness to develop skills that will build relationship rather than break them, is not leading in the direction of peace and co-operation.<sup>22</sup>

If inter-group relations are taken as diplomacy, they should not just reach an end without satisfying every party involved. If they have to be effective, they must create confidence, raise hope, and widen the scope of business opportunities between individuals, groups or states. Inter-group relations must build peace across borders and lead in peace processes. Policy makers must learn the skill of relating and communicating with other people who have different interests from those of the policy makers. The un-named on-line authors of “Effective Diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” noted that:

*while wars write history books, only moments of effective communication write legacies, build great leaders and great nations, brick by brick... (only effective communication has) the remarkable ability to elicit our limitless potential to relate, communicate and solve seemingly insurmountable people's problems.<sup>23</sup>*

When the means of Ezza expansion- wars and peaceful means, are weighed against each other, the real meaning of effective diplomacy is made clear. Every

war victory kept the Ezza on an eagle alert for possible reprisal. Development initiatives were neglected to secure the conquered territories and the mainland. The scattered pattern of settlement was evolved not for comprehensive farming operations in the conquered territories but to wade off unpredictable reprisals. As noted earlier by Elizabeth Isichei, all the powers that aggrandized themselves by violent means paid a price for their conquest. They lived in constant fear of reprisals.<sup>24</sup>

Njoku Afoke, a historian of Ezza extraction, described life in pre-colonial Ezza society as 'extremely barbarous and crude'.<sup>25</sup> That explains the extent of people's disdain for war as a means to any end. War is unnecessary except as self-defense against an external 'aggression. Any end is reachable by peaceful means where greed does not lead. The Ezza became aggressors who engaged in ruthlessness and unprogressive militarism and ipso facto, their relationship with their neighbours was that of a cat and a dog'.<sup>26</sup> To actually explain the effectiveness of war and peaceful means in Ezza expansion, few of the colonies created through these approaches will be considered here. Onuogba Nike (in Enugu state), Ezza Oji-Enya, Ezza Ishiagu and Ezza Ezillo will suffice.

According to an agreement signed by the people of Onuogba Nike and Ezza, and dated 24/02/1958,<sup>27</sup> Ezza migrants began settling in Onuogba Nike in about 1958, and within two years had earned the admiration of their hosts so much



so that a covenant had to be entered into by the two communities to ensure Ezza peaceful settlement. In Onuogba Nike, the economic achievement of the Ezza settlers is high, and far better than what the Ezza Oji Enya settlers have achieved. In Onuogba Nike, the Ezza settlers enjoy in their community all the social amenities- good drinking water health care facilities, schools, electricity, good roads, and many others enjoyed by their hosts. There are other visible individual achievements of the Ezza in Onuogba. These include Filling Stations (oil dispensing outlets), retail and wholesale shops, mechanic workshops, private primary and secondary schools, and many others. But in Ezza Oji-Enya the reverse obtains. A typical farm settlement, in every sense of the word, the community exists in squalor without any sign of the necessary basic amenities in sight anywhere. In the two communities, their difference in standard of living is clear: life in Onuogba has better meaning, and the standard of living is higher than what obtains in Ezza Oji-Enya.

Ezza Oji-Enya was secured through a war between the people of Echara and Nkaleke, the Ezza hosts, and the people of Ngbo. It was said that Echara and Nkaleke had invited the Ezza from Umuoghara to help them fight off the Ngbo people on condition of a permanent settlement if the Ezza won the war for their land lords. But the relationship between them is so frosty now that the Ezza in Oji-Enya Izzu in Ebonyi Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, live in constant fear

of a revolt. The reason, James Nweke, Community Head of Ezza Oji-Enya, said is that they have refused to drop Ezza from the name of their community in Izzi land. That has contributed to the poor standard of life in the community.

In Ishiagu, Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, there are several Ezza settlers that have prospered more than many indigenes. The Ezza in Ishiagu run their own autonomous community under the leadership of His Royal Highness, Eze Nwainyere, who represents his people in all Ishiagu affairs. The Ezza had acquired large expanse of land where they built large houses, health care centres, primary and secondary schools, and a market. They enjoy all kinds of amenities in their own section. No Ezza Ishiagu man or woman would tolerate a request that he or she return permanently to the father land.<sup>28</sup> Ezza migrants were said to have started settling in Ishiagu since 1931 as a result of the railway construction works there by the British colonialists. The earliest migrants were said to be from Ogboji, Nkomoro, Umuezeoka Ekka and Inyere Communities of Ezza ancestral home land. Gradually, more migrant wage labourers and farmers joined and the acquisition of land for both farming and settlement began. Since then, there has been no report of any form of dispute between the Ezza and their hosts in Ishiagu. Peace is the beauty of inclusive or effective diplomacy and co-operation among all concerned is the result. Ishiagu indigenes have tolerated the Ezza settlers who in turn, have submitted to the ways of their hosts without losing

knowledge of their ancestral homeland and its peculiar practices. Ezza people would travel back to their respective villages to be part of major cultural occasions of Ezza land.

On the other hand, if the relative peace and prosperity seen in Ezza Ishiagu is compared to what obtains in Ezza-Ezillo, for instance, it will be seen that the Ezza wars against the Agba and other communities of Ezillo many years ago, have not been forgotten. The attack on the Ezza community by a combined forces of other Ezillo communities in Ishielu in 2008, after so many years that the Ezza sacked the Agba community from original home in Idembia and pursued them to Ishielu land, is a proof that the wounds of war, no matter how dried, do not heal so easily. Even though Bartholomew Ugbo says that the Ezza have dropped every idea about war to embrace negotiations anywhere the Ezza have disputes with their hosts, fact remains that memories of the many wars of expansion by the Ezza will linger to eternity, and direct victims would always nurse the hope for vengeance. Can Africans ever forget the imperial wars of Europe against their continent since the 1450s which left the indelible marks of poverty, backwardness and instability on the African continent? Many African youths would prefer picking up arms against Europe and to die in battle than to live the walking corpses that they were forced into by imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

## Endnotes

1. Iduma Nwite, c.72, retired civil servant, a community leader and farmer in Ezza Oji-Enya. Interviewed 29/07/2017.
2. Bartholomew Ugbo, c.69, an Ezza elder and chairman, Ochinkpuru Council. Interviewed at Udenyi Umuezeoka, 21/07/2017.
3. Uchenna C. Anyawu, *Treading the Rough And Tumble Field (Oral Tradition And History In Northeastern Igboland)* Engu Magnet Business Euterprises, 2005. p.138
4. U. C. Anyanwu, p.138
5. U. C. Anyanwu, p.139
6. Nwaofeke Ofia, c.97. Interviewed in Ezza Oji-Enya. 29/07/2017.
7. Nwaofeke Ofia
8. Bartholomew Ugbo
9. Onyemaechi A. Eke, *Strategic Studies: Logical Focus In The 21<sup>st</sup> century*, Abakaliki: WillyRose and Appleseed Publishing Coy, 2007. p.47.
10. Chuka Euka, *NATO in Kosovo (Armed Humanitarian Intervention in Post-Cold Conflicts)*, Awka, Anambra State: Arise and Shine Press, 2015.p.43
11. U. C. Anyanwu, p.140
12. Ugo Chukwuma, *Polytheism: The Gods of Abakaliki. (A Historio-Religious Link)*. Enugu: Handel Books Limited, 2003 p.26
13. Joseph N. Nweke, "Ezza in Diaspora." B. A Project Submitted to the Department of History and International Relations, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, 2015. p.38
14. Bartholomew Ugbo
15. B. Ugbo
16. U. C. Anyanwu... p.156

17. Njoku Afoke and Paul M. Nworie, *Ezza History, Culture And Civilization*, Enugu: CIDJAP Press, 2010. p.37.
18. It was a unanimous opinion of the elders of Ezza Oji-Enya community, that land was the major driver of Ezza expansion, whether by war or any other means. They were responding to the Researcher's question in a group interview in their community on 29/07/2017.
19. James Nweke, c.56, Community Head of Ezza Oji-Enya, in an interview with the Researcher. 29/07/2017.
20. U. C. Anyanwu... p.127
21. David P. Barash and Charles P. Webel, *Peace and Conflict Studies* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), California: SAGE Publications, 2009.p.17
22. "Effective Diplomacy In The 21<sup>st</sup> Century, "Internet: <http://www.oic-worldpeace.org>. Accessed 17/10/2017. 5.30p.m
23. "Effective Diplomacy..."
24. Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press, 1977.p.91
25. Njoku Afoke, "Ezza Warfare And Inter-Group Relations, an Undergraduate Project submitted to the Department of History, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1974. p.41
26. U. C. Anyanwu... p.26
27. "Land Agreement between Ezza Komolu and Onuogba Nike dated this 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1958." Source: The library of Chief Joseph Nwadibia of Ekeugwu Ezza-egu, on 24/04/2017.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REVIEWING WAR TACTS IN EZZA RELATIONS WITH HER NEIGHBOURS

#### **Ezekuna as a spirit of war in Ezza land**

Throughout the period of our field work in and outside the Abakaliki area, the general opinion of respondents was that the Ezza were a war-like group right from their ancestors. It was held that the human memory can not recollect the details, even the names of some extinct communities, of all the wars the Ezza fought in the pre-colonial times. While some named the war against the Agalagu Okpa as Ezza's first war, others said it was the Ezza-Orri war. Still some suggested that Ezza's first war was Ezekuna's primogeniture rights-war against his supposed cousins-Izzi and Ikwo. In all the opinions, it was obvious that the Ezza made wars its main factor of inter-group contacts in the quest for farm lands, an economic interest. Ezekuna, the Ezza progenitor, was described as 'the spirit of war' by Afoke and Nworie who analyzed the effects of Ezza wars of expansion as negative<sup>1</sup>. They said

*It may be pertinent... to briefly examine the consequences of these wars. These wars decreased the population of north eastern Igbo as defeated foes were at times beheaded or offered to the gods. Enemy villages were torched and their inhabitants massacred or taken into slavery... Ezza people defeated the Agalagu (Okpa Ezea) people, a non-Igbo group ... half of Amuda and Okpomoro villages were put to the sword. The only survivors among them were those saved by Ezeokoha<sup>2</sup>.*

In the face of such a callous waste of human lives and property, can war truly be justified as diplomacy or an aspect of it? If a sketchy comparison is made between the peace beliefs of Eri, the Igbo ancestor, and his techniques to achieving them, and the Ezza quest for land and their techniques to achieving it, can the Ezza example be taken as diplomacy above the peace approach of Eri, given that diplomacy seeks peace between man and man, and between community and communities? Diplomacy, in its simplest definition, is a process that involves all parties in a kind of brain-storming (dialogue or negotiation) under a peaceful atmosphere for healthier inter-group relations. In other words, diplomacy means peace-talks or efforts that tend to deflate wars from taking place. In order to ensure healthier economic relations, Eri turned instruments of war to instruments of peace, and created the institution of priests to enforce compliance to his peace order. He sent those priests as ambassadors to preach peace, settle disputes and ordain kings (Ndi Eze) or rulers that ensured peaceful co-existence, not just in Igbo communities but with neighbouring communities. Eri believed that economic progress and prosperity was possible where peace existed. *Ebe udo n' adigi, Oganiru ama adi.*

The pre-colonial Igbo of Eri times did not see any justification in dispossessing a people of their God-given habitat for whatever reasons. Land was revered in pre-colonial Igbo land as the greatest possession from God to man. It

was believed to have the power to protect the people living on it as well as giving them bountiful harvests when they planted on it. Thus, the land or earth was respected as a force with supernatural codes known as ‘nso ala’ (the laws of the earth) by which they related with the earth. These codes were the basis of Igbo traditional religion which held that the earth abhorred blood shedding, infidelity in marriages, theft, covetousness, false witnessing, falsehood or lying, witchcraft, and poisoning of fellow men under any cover. In Okposi (in Ohaozara local government area of Ebonyi state), the traditional religious concept of “Ometari vuru, Omeziri rizie” (one should bear the consequences of his deeds, and he should eat the fruits of his good deeds) is related to the codes of ‘nso ala’. Once any of the laws of the land or earth was broken, sacrifices for absolution were made to avert the consequences on the people<sup>3</sup>. In addition, the earth was periodically appreciated through different festivals for ensuring the good health of the people, protecting them from all dangers as well as giving them bountiful harvests. The earth was believed to possess the power of benevolence and vindication.

Given these stringent codes that were said to have been instituted by Eri himself out of his deep religious nature, how did the Ezza acquire their notorious war instinct within Igbo land, Eri’s kingdom? Ezza, by Fidelis Idigo’s account, is a part of the direct descendants of Eri. Idigo related the Abakaliki people to the



children of Ogbodudu who had settled at Amanuke and latter spread to the village units around Udi, Nsukka and Abakaliki areas. He cited Elizabeth Isichei to establish our earlier account on the origin of the Abakaliki people<sup>3</sup>. (See Chapter Two). Ezekuna was said to have mingled with some warrior countries like Akpa, Idah, Tiv, and others as a young man. For his early life, Philip Nwinya said:

*Having been brought up as an orphan... (Ezekuna) learnt so many things in his life such that he can bear hardship... while away from home, he got in touch with the Akpa group of warriors. Also, he visited so many towns like... Iddah, Tiv, etc<sup>4</sup>.*

A common oral account in the Abakaliki area has it that at an earlier age Ekuma Enyi sent Ezekuna and his two half brothers-Noyo and Nnodo, to get some food from the bush, for there was none in the house. Nnodo came back with yam; Noyo came back with fish; while Ezekuna brought home a human head. Ekuma Enyi then blessed each of them thus: To Nnodo he said, “Well done, you are going to be a great farmer”, and to Noyo, he said, “well done, you are going to be a great fisherman”, and finally, to Ezekuna, he said “well done, you are going to be a great conqueror”. This explains why Ezza became warlike<sup>5</sup>.

While it is obvious that a human head was not part of Ekuma Enyi’s food staples against hunger, and that Ezekuna’s blessing was delayed to the end because Ekuma Enyi did not see any relevance in his human head to the family need for food, the last blessing Ezekuna got was a curse rather than a blessing. That is proved in the meaning of ‘conqueror’ and God’s reaction to the issue of

murder. In examining the experiences of the Ezza after the death of Ekuma Enyi, the negative consequences of shedding the blood of fellow men were made glaring. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined a 'conqueror' as 'a person who conquers', and 'conquer' as taking 'control of a country or city and its people by force'.

God hates the shedding of human blood. His commandment is: "thou shall not kill". His reaction to Cain, the first man to kill a fellow man, his blood younger brother, Abel, was a curse.

*And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not hence forth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vanguard shall thou be in the earth. (Gen.4:11-12)*

Ugo Chukwuma was acceding to the fulfillment of God's curse on murderers when he said that Ezza land has from the 'onset' being unfertile and unfavourable for farm works.

*The Ezza have both aborigines and those in Diaspora. This is due to the nature of their soil in their original area of inheritance. For the Ezza... farming requires fertile land which they lacked from onset of their history. This has led to a lot of migrations by the people to other lands in a bid of this search.<sup>6</sup>*

That Ezza people suffered such acute drought which forced them to wander about for land for settlements and farm works was a fulfillment of God's curse on murderers among his people. Even though the Ezza pre-colonial environment was

described as belli-cose as a justification of their aggressive enterprises then<sup>7</sup>, the account of Ezekuna's early life as an orphan who mingled widely among aggressive groups paints a picture of replication of learned culture in that environment. His primogeniture war against his cousins-- Nnodo and Noyo, when he eventually returned home<sup>8</sup>, was a proof. From then on, the average descendant of Ezekuna began to see war as the best and only option out in a crisis situation.

Nonetheless, it remained a taboo in pre-colonial Igbo land to kill a kinsman, a brother or a neighbour who had done no wrong. The penalty was either banishment or suicide. No Igbo community could accept to kill such a murderer. Usually, the murderer was first excommunicated, then allowed to commit suicide or he was banished out of the community or handed over to the family of his victim, if from a friendly neighbouring community. Depending on the turn of negotiation, his son or daughter was accepted as a due compensation to the family of his victim. Chinua Achebe illustrated this tradition when he wrote that when a

*Daughter of Umuoffia was killed in Mbaino... Okonkwo had been chosen by the nine villages to carry a message of war to their enemies unless they agreed to give up a young man and a virgin to atone for the murder of Udo's wife and later the elders of the clan had decided that Ikemefuna (the young man) should be in Okonkwo's care for a while.*<sup>9</sup>

In Ezza land, murder was honourable, and it was committed without an effort to purify the land. The Ogbuisi cult was used to recognize the cutting of

human heads as a noble art. Men who returned home with a human head as Ezekuna had done, were admitted into the cult, and then celebrated. Those who could not return home with human heads, were regarded and treated as effeminate or weaklings. To live safe and continue beheading other men, Ezza warriors traveled to far towns to acquire charms that could immune them from bullets and war instruments. Igiri Daniel Omogo noted that many actually went to far lands to invite famed medicine men to help them defeat their enemies.<sup>10</sup> Warriors such as Njoku Chita, a popular Ezza warrior, were said to have been ‘boiled’ beyond human destruction in preparation for battle. Afoke and Nworie observed that

*Njoku Chita was described as (having been taken by his father, Akirike Ogwanyi)... to a native doctor who ‘boiled’ him, making him immuned from machet and bullet wounds... unlike his colleagues, he was never wounded in any battle. Njoku Chita was a great warrior who believed in surprise attack of the enemy.<sup>11</sup>*

Ugo Chukwuma said that Ezza acquired gods from neighbouring states like Cross River, Old Bendel, and Benue States. Gods such as Ivom-eji-eje-Ogu became ‘a privilege for some families to acquire (because) it gave them victory in wars’.<sup>12</sup> But despite the war victories at all fronts, peace remained elusive to the Ezza man. Elizabeth Isichei said that the Ezza conquerors lived like fugitives even in their conquered territories. She observed that

*Like other powers which aggrandize themselves by violent means, the Ezza paid a price for their conquests. They lived in constant fear of reprisals.<sup>13</sup>*

All these aggressive developments and their impact were the results of the kind of cultural socialization Ezekuna was exposed to in his early life. That culture later became part of Ezza tradition, and war was adopted as a way of life which was made part of a socialization system for young men of about twenty years of age to undergo a ritual circumcision where a gun (for war) and a hoe (for farming) were given them to mark their introduction to the world of aggression as emerging adults. Nwofoke Offia said that Ezekuna and his world view became the ultimate law-customs and traditions of Ezza clan.<sup>14</sup> To demonstrate the high regard the Ezza had for Ezekuna for military victories, the age grade that declared wars in the Clan and trained the warriors on traditional methods of warfare and tactics as were assumed to have been used by Ezekuna in his days, was named Ogbo Ezekuna. That name and functions of the age grade uphold the Ezza confidence in Ezekuna as ‘the Ezza god of war.’<sup>15</sup> Thus, in preparation for every Ezza war, the warriors visited the Nchonu Shrine (the Ezza national shrine) where prayers and sacrifices are made to the spirit of Ezekuna for the protection of the warriors. Ezekunna was always promised bountiful thanksgivings in return at the end of every successful war.<sup>16</sup>

### **Failure of War Tacts in Ezza Relations**

What is the value of war if conquerors can not have peace even in their conquered territories? The chaotic state of the contemporary inter-national system

is the consequence of past wars in Europe, Africa and other regions of the globe. Imperialism, the European war on Africa and the rest of former colonies, was worse than genocide. It wiped out communities and relocated many others to strange lands where they knew nothing about the traditions and cultures of their hosts. The endless ethnic conflicts and wars in the continent is the outcome of that unnatural mathematics called the partition of Africa. Up to the present times, no scholar has been able to justify war directly as diplomacy or diplomacy as war. Professor J.H. Enemugwem identified diplomacy in four areas of human interactions –economic, political, social and cultural. He did not include war.<sup>17</sup> A.E. Afigbo and Uchenna C. Anyanwu maintained that war was one of the factors that brought the Igbo into contacts with other communities. They did not say categorically that war was diplomacy or an art of negotiation or dialogue in any part of Igbo land.<sup>18</sup> From origin, diplomacy has always been the re-builder of fences destroyed by wars while war remains the destroyer of fences mended by diplomacy. The two mean different things and they work at variance with each other, never together.

When the Ezza speak gleefully of the war exploits of their forebears, they seem always to justify war as diplomacy in their own world. Nwaofeke Ofia said that the Ezza are invincible peace-makers because ‘wherever they were invited to assist in a war, peace was always restored.’<sup>19</sup> Fact remains that mercenaries are no

peace makers, and cannot be qualified as that. That the Ezza accepted portions of land as prices for their military assistance qualified them as mercenaries. Their victories for their clients were justifications of the prices (the portions of land) paid to them. By a layman's definition, a mercenary is a fortune soldier who meddles or fights in a war of a foreign nation for a ransom. The ransom he collects motivates him to fight harder to ensure victory for his employer. The condition and nature of his employment or contract restricts him from doing any other business, including negotiating peace, with the enemy of his employer. Bartholomew Ugbo, an Ezza elder and chairman of the Ochinkpuru Council, spoke in a tone that shows the Ezza have realized the failure of war as a factor in inter-group relations. According to him

*Diplomacy is a way of relations between two or more people in which mutual interactions or dialogue become the rule. People should learn from the example where dialogue resolved crisis and saved human lives. In Ezza, we have stopped going to help communities in wars.<sup>20</sup>*

Ugbo said that the new turn in Ezza inter-group relations was to encourage Ezza nationals every where to always negotiate with land owners and buy whatever portions of land they needed for homes or businesses. He noted that pure diplomacy meant winning an ally to do your biddings without confrontation but through dialogue. That is the new assignment to the Ochinkpuru council in the

expanding Ezza world of the modern age, and that imply an acceptance of the futility of war in all human relations.

The alliance system whereby European nations traded their interests against each other, failed to achieve anything significance save the more dangerous Thirty Years War (1618-1648) which forced a search for an end on the continent. The eventual result was the Westphalia Peace Talks of 1815. The British imperialists who had over-ran the Ezza military might in 1905 and finally in 1915, had imposed a heavy fine of about £750 on the people, and a forced migration on more than one thousand Ezza men,<sup>21</sup> also paid heavily to the two World Wars (1914-1918 and 1939-1945). The effects were such that Britain lost its leadership of the global economy. To save face, the country began a secret arrangement with the United States of America which had become rich and powerful as a result of its policy of “non-interference in European conflicts”, to take over the global leadership, one year to the end of the Second World War, precisely 1944. The end was the Bretton Woods Conference of the same year which crowned America as the new leader of the world. Barash and Webel observed that Europe lost an entire generation of young men to the First World War alone, while the effects of the Second World War forced the continent to seek solace in multilateral diplomacy to end the shameful waste of men, their environments and their resources.<sup>22</sup>



War has never answered the question of peace for an increased economic growth for man. Rather, it creates wounds that do not heal, and forces submission to an extent. War evokes inhibitive memories that with time bring about reprisals which recreate the war. Uchenna Anyanwu said that many communities like Izzi, Ikwo, Ngbo, among others, that had suffered Ezza defeat, seized the opportunity of the presence of the British troops, to seek a restoration of their lands formerly lost to the Ezza. And the British who had always condemned the Ezza as common land grabbers, gratuitously granted their requests.<sup>23</sup>

### **Ezza Last Wars in Her Relations Before 1900**

Wars as a culture in pre-colonial Ezza land were widely articulated and justified by man, ancestors and gods. Ezekuna, the grand ancestor of the Ezza, was said to be a disciplinarian who instructed his children while alive, to avoid unjust wars; and after his death he was deified as the Ezza god of war. In that capacity, Ezekuna attracted consultations and pleas for protection and success in wars. In those consultations, the elders sought the consent of other ancestors and gods of Ezza land through a series of sacrifices for a confirmation that the anticipated war was a just one, and that the Ezza nation was permitted to engage in it.

That procedure tended to give a divine and mortal justification to all Ezza wars, especially the ones they engaged in within the last five decades of the nineteenth century. That is, 1850 to 1900. That period saw the Ezza warriors

engage in interventionist wars to save communities from the threat of destruction and extinction by their aggressive neighbours. In today's world, interventionist war means a state or group of states interfering in the internal affairs of another state whose civilian population mostly, is under threat from an aggressive neighbouring state or a rebel group within. Chuka Enuka observed that

*Due mainly to the post-cold war disheartening situation of continued intra-state conflicts of internecine kinds with its concomitant devastating consequences on the civilian population, especially women and children, the age long grasp of sovereignty as sacrosanct is being increasingly soft-pedaled. Compassion for the suffering of the helpless civilian population has evoked intervention and interference with the affairs of a state by another state, several states or a group of states.<sup>24</sup>*

The last wars of Ezza land between 1850 and 1900 qualified for wars of “intervention and interference with the affairs’ of communities where, not only militias but non-militias were under acute danger of death and extermination by diseases and hunger as a result of the constant ferreting of their territory by aggressive neighbours. In pre-colonial North-eastern Igbo land, groups that were so threatened often ran to the Ezza to save them. According to Philip Nwinya:

*Tired of running and fearing possible extermination, groups unable to withstand their enemies sought the friendship of Ezza and hired them to fight their wars....or live in their midst as a protective measure or deterrence to their stronger neighbours.<sup>25</sup>*

In the entire north-eastern Igbo land of the pre-colonial days, the supremacy of the Ezza might was not in doubt which gave rise to the wide saying among the

*Ezza: Owa eli, Owa ali; Owa Ezza. (This is the heaven above; this is the earth below; between them, the Ezza reign supreme.)*. It was that in-group belief among the Ezza that spurred the kind of determination which always ensured victories for them in wars. Communities threatened by any aggressive neighbour ran to the Ezza for liberation, most often, in exchange for a portion of land for farming (Ezza's predominant occupation) and permanent settlement. That served as deterrence to the aggressive neighbour and safety to the hosts. The communities of Ukhobo, Oworima, Agbon, Akpaka, Ogiri, Onicha Nko and Onicha Amagu had formed a coalition to seize the territories of their Obeagu-Isu neighbours. One Afor day in about 1849, Ede Nwogo, a leader in Obeagu-Isu community, met Njoku Chita, an Ezza veteran warrior and business man from Ezza Nkomoro, on his way to the Nkhobo market. Nwogo narrated to Chita, how the neighbouring communities to Obeagu-Isu were frequently raiding his community, raping the women, destroying their domestic animals, burning their houses, looting their belongings, kidnapping the people and using them for sacrifices during burials. Chita was said to have felt sympathetic to the ordeals of Obeagu-Isu, accepting to assist them. But he scheduled a second meeting the next Afor day when Ede Nwogo would re-state before some other witnesses, what he had told the Ezza war lord.

The next Afor day appointed, Chita brought Edene Okogba, another war veteran from Ezza Nkomoro, as a witness while Ede Nwogo brought some elders of his community who assented to his horrid account. Chita and Edene promised to assist the Obeagu-Isu people but had to request that a delegation from the community should accompany them to Onueke where the same story should be told the Ezza elders whose right it was to approve and declare wars on any community. On the appointed day, Chita and Edene led the Obeagu-Isu delegation to Onueke where Ezza elders were said to have approved Ezza assistance to Obeagu-Isu on condition that the Ezza warriors should be shown round the boundaries of Obeagu-Isu community, and a portion must be given out as a price to the warriors both as a camp and permanent settlement. The people of Obeagu-Isu accepted the conditions.

Chita and Edene went back to Obeagu-Isu with the elders of the land to survey the boundaries of the community and to ascertain the portion to be given to the Ezza, as directed by the Ezza elders at Onueke. Edene Okogba had wisely gone with some Ogbu (Fig tree) stems in his bag which he presented at the end of the survey exercise to be planted to mark off the portion earmarked as Ezza camp in the community. The planting of the Ogbu stems by Obeagu-Isu elders followed immediately after the ritual which included the burying alive of a sheep, to eternally establish the bond that Obeagu-Isu and Ezza people will never spill each

other's blood. Nwaofeke Offia opined that the "Ogbu" tree was an important plant in Ezza traditions and can not be uprooted or cut down by a community that had planted it for an Ezza group. That would mean tampering with Ezekuna's belief in Ezza's genuine manner of acquiring land for expansion. 'Ogbu Ezekuna can not be cut down. Otherwise, Ezza will go to war against the community'.<sup>26</sup> The fig tree stems were planted at Azu Nweke Ubia (behind the present Nweke Ubia market) while the live sheep was buried at a village square close to Edene Okogba's compound. The entire Ezza camp in Obeagu-Isu was named after Edene Okogba because he provided the fig stems that were used in securing the area permanently for Ezza nation. The place is known till date as "Egu Edene Okogba" (Edene Okogba's farm land).<sup>27</sup>

### **Strategies for the Obeagu-Isu Rescue Mission**

Three Ezza veteran warriors led the Obeagu-Isu mission. They hailed from three Ezza communities-Ogboji, Izzo and Oriuzor, each of which had a special skill that served useful purpose in every Ezza war. For instance, Ogboji had the expertise in the use of a "Evuma", a biological weapon prepared with a liquid drained from toads and poisonous barks of some trees. When spread on the foot path and matched on by a victim, the concoction caused a serious damage to the body and eventually killed the victim within hours. Also, Ogboji warriors were

famous guerrilla fighters, especially in the nights. The tactic was popularly called “Arimogu”. Ugbala Alia, an Ogboji Warrior, was famed for the use of “Arimogu”.

Izzo warriors were great with the “Owaka”, a war charm that kept the Ezza warriors invisible within an enemy territory and created poisonous smoke that caused dizziness to the enemy when inhaled, making it easier for Ezza soldiers to make easy prey of him (the enemy). It was brought to Ezza land by the legendary Ihwere Nta Alioka during the Ezza wars of expansion to Nkomoro. Edene Okogba, who hailed from the Unwu Alioka kindred in Izzo Community, brought the charm to Ezzaegu, and then into the Obeagu-Isu mission. Oriuzor community produced physically strong but quick tempered warriors. Powerful warriors like Njoku Chita, Nome Nweze, Nweke Ereke, and many others, were sons of Oriuzor. Common to all Ezza communities during war times, was “Akpam”, a war charm for spying an enemy territory before a full scale war was launched.<sup>28</sup>

At the Ezza camp at Nweke Ubia, elaborate war plans were mapped out and roles assigned groups under the three major warriors. A series of marksmanship training were handled by some Ezza medicine men (Dibia) who prepared charms that fortified the warriors against harms from enemy weapons. They also prepared charms to ensure the invisibility of Ezza soldiers in war fronts. Ogbule Ogali was appointed to direct regular supply of logistics from Nkomoro to Obeagu-Isu throughout the war period. Meanwhile, spies under the guidance of the “Akpam”

charm were sent out to survey the enemy villages and camps while Edene Okogba, one of the war leaders, went on reconnaissance survey under the guide of the “Owaka” charm, beyond Ukhobo territory. Communities surveyed and recommended for destruction as a prelude to the actual war, included Ihuokpara, Nera, Amagunze and Akpugo whose leaders quickly sued for peace on the ground that Akpugo Eze and Ezza Ezekuna were one and the same people.”<sup>29</sup>

### **The Wars Begin**

Ezza warriors were aware of the Ukhobo’s alliance with other communities. Thus, they avoided direct confrontation with the community but attacked communities on the peripheries first. First to fall to Ezza on-slaught was Ekwetekwe; then Okpoto, a strong war like community and an ally to Ukhobo, where three Ezza spy-boys had been killed. The Okpoto territory included Onunweke Ojiegbe, Edemungwu, Amazuzu, Onuoji and Ekeugwu which were all attacked by night and occupied as the indigenes escaped across the Ebonyi River, the present boundary between Ezza-egu and the new Okpoto settlement. Involved in the Okpoto war were Ezza warriors such as Ejem Awo (the most prominent because of the number of human heads he brought home), Opoku Egbe, Ogbule Odada, and Nwankwo Chukwu.

From the conquered Okpoto, Ezza soldiers under Njoku Chita, Edene Okogba, Ugbala Alia, Eleke Orugbala, Ola Nwodada, Ogwogu Obashi, Ugban

Ekechi, Umoke Nwele, and others, attacked Ukhobo in whose defense other alliance members rose. These allies were Oworima, Agbon, Akpaka, Ogiri, Onicha Nko and Onicha Amagunze, who were bent on forcing a retreat on the Ezza warriors. But the Ezza tactically decided on attacking them one after the other, with due consideration to favourable seasons as an important factor. The Ukhobo war was fierce and protracted as many Ezza soldiers were killed. But reinforcement was quickly made with under- aged children. Ukhobo was eventually subdued and divided among Ezza warriors as the indigenes escaped to Onicha Amagu. The war ended in February, 1850.<sup>30</sup> But the Ezza warriors soon began to encounter ill-consequences like mysterious deaths, illness and others, for their failure to consult with the Ishie-Egu, Ezza elders who were incharge of deciding how conquered territories should be shared. The warriors were directed to vacate their various portions to discontinue the ill-consequences. Till date, the vacated portions have remained uninhabited.

From Ukhobo, Oworima was attacked and occupied as the indigenes fled to Ihuokpara and Onicha Amagunze. The war was brief. But from Onicha Amagunze, some Oworima fighters organized guerrilla attacks on the Ezza until many of them were captured and buried alive by some Ezza warriors such as Ogbule-Ofia Igwe (a Dibia), Elibe Ovu and Okehu Nwafor. Ugbo-Enyim and its surroundings were formerly the Oworima settlement. It was from there that the



Ezza crossed the Inyaba River to attack Ogiri, its next target which had an expanse of lush farmlands. The attack which lasted for a few days had been deliberately delayed till a festive period in the dry season of 1890. Several Ogiri people were killed while many others jumped into a swamp to avoid being captured alive by Ezza soldiers. A mass burial was organized at a place called Uruanwu Efie for the slain Ogiri people. The conquered Ogiri territory, now part of Ezza-egu, was renamed Azu Ofia village. Till date, many in Ezza-egu believe that unusual sounds are often heard from the swamp. Finally, in 1891, Onicha Nko and parts of Onicha Amagunze were attacked and occupied by the Ezza as many indigenes fled their homes to other locations. All the conquered areas in Onicha Nko and Onicha Amagunze were re-named Egu-Egede, after one of the Ezza warriors.

Following the successive victories of Ezza troops over Ukhobo and its allies, the people of Iyionu Community under threat of displacement by the people of Amagunze and Amechi-Idodo, sought assistance from the Ezza Warriors in 1895. Led by some Ezza Ezza-Egu elders, the elders of Iyionu went to Onueke to intimate Ezza council of elders of their community and to request assistance. After hearing the Iyionu elders, the Ezza elders' council directed all Ezza indigenes in Ezza-Egu, to rescue Iyionu from its enemies. Meanwhile, the enemies had occupied more than two thirds of Iyionu before assistance could reach the community. But on the information that Ezza warriors had been engaged by

Iyionu people, the enemies from Amagunze and Amechi-Idodo abandoned their occupied territories and fled. A source from Ugbo-Enyim in Ezza-Egu was quoted as saying that the present sites of Ogbovum, Amazuzu, Enyim and Ogbagu Villages in Ezza-Egu were formerly occupied but abandoned by the people of Amagunze and Amechi-Idodo.<sup>31</sup>

There were other wars in the series of Ezza last wars of expansion before 1900. But an improvement point was the picture the wars made of the Ezza Clan to the British troops that intervened in 1905. The British colonizers believed that Ezza clan was a true force to reckon with within the North-East of Igbo land. Hence, they classified the clan as trouble-makers, land-grabbers, greedy lots, an imperial power and colonizers that ought to be stopped with all necessary and available force if the British were to encounter no competition in their control of the region. It was that ambition that defined the level of determination in crushing the Ezza might in 1905, and the high handedness employed in the administration of the clan afterwards.

## Endnotes

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**CHAPTER SIX**  
**CHANGES AND CONTINUITIES IN EZZA LAND AFTER BRITISH**  
**INTERVENTION, 1900-1960**

**Effects of the British Intervention on Ezza Relations with Her Neighbours**

The coming of colonial rule to the Abakaliki area altered the people's pre-colonial methods of diplomacy, especially the Ezza people, affecting their drive for land acquisition, humbling their self-ego as the only super power in the North-Eastern Igbo land, and finally, encouraging the rise of weaker communities against the might of Ezza warriors. These were the main historical events that took place in the Abakaliki region between 1900 and 1960 when British troops invaded and took over Ezza land. After the British conquest of the region in 1905, Ezza people were forced to adopt peaceful means to reach their quest for land. Many of them were taken forcefully to Calabar to build quarters for their British captors. Others were forced to migrate elsewhere to seek wage labour to pay the newly introduced taxes that could only be paid with British currency. Such was the case of Ezza migrants to places like Ishiagu, Umuahia, Enugu and other places where the British engaged in construction operations. Many Ezza farmers migrated to some rural areas like Ondo, Ikom, Ikorodu (in Lagos State), Onuogba Nike, and many other places, in search of farmlands. Direct taxation, the catalyst of Ezza wide

dispersal to distant towns outside their ancestral homeland after 1905, was introduced in South-Eastern Nigeria on April 1, 1928.<sup>1</sup>

The coming of the British troops to Ezza land was necessitated by the frequent and insurmountable Ezza wars of expansion against their neighbours until the arrival of the British forces. Before then, the Ezza were dreaded by all their neighbours and admired by those who sought their (Ezza) mercenary services against the enemies of the admiring communities. It was unbelievable to many, that a force existed that could surmount the Ezza military might. Ezza hegemony in the Abakaliki area finally crumbled in 1918, after their 1905 punitive war against Izzi for inviting and accommodating the British forces which saved them from losing Amegu, their ancestral home stead, to the Ezza. The 1918 defeat of the Ezza military by the British forces came as a result of the repeated attacks on the Oshiri by the Ezza military, despite the British call for armistice.<sup>2</sup>

It was that defeat and the consequent imposition of British rule over the land that changed the face of diplomacy in Ezza land. The quests for war were reduced, and many Ezza young men migrated to other communities to seek wage labour to meet the demands of the new British system of administration. Bartholomew Ugbo said that Ezza people had realized the vanity of war as a way of inter-group relations. He observed that pure diplomacy was the ability to live

friendly with strangers while influencing them to do your biddings.<sup>3</sup> Ugbo stressed that:

*Ezza people are always submissive, hard working and loyal to their hosts. They are very, very friendly to people. It is by these means that they win the hearts of their hosts and sustain their relations with them.*<sup>4</sup>

Ugbo further noted that the new trend in Ezza inter-group relations was to adopt dialogue in resolving all differences between the Ezza and any other community where the Ezza had settled before the coming of the British or the Ezza migrated to as a result of the demands of the new British rule. He said that the Ezza have noted with concern that dialogue was the only way the modern man can have peace and security in the pursuit of his economic interests in relation with other men. The drastic turn around in Ezza diplomacy was attributed to the humiliation of the people by the British conquest which emboldened weaker communities to rise individually against Ezza's right to own permanent settlements among them, including those that had been saved from their enemies by the Ezza. Finally, the Ezza pride of *owa elu, owa ali, owa Ezza; ono g' anyi ha nweru uwa* changed to *'owa elu, owa ali, ewezuge nwa mbeke, ala ma atu onye egvu?* (Translated: *This is the heavens above, this is the earth, and this is Ezza; the three own the world became 'this is the heavens above, this is the earth; apart from the white man, who does the Ezza fear?*).<sup>5</sup>

Romanus Nwafor, Chairman of Ezza Oji-Enya Welfare Association, said that the worst impact of the British conquest on Ezza supremacy in the entire North-Eastern Igbo land was the boldness it encouraged among weaker communities that once dreaded the Ezza military might. For instance, Nwafor said that Echara and Nkaleke people had invited the Ezza Umuoghara to help them drive away Ngbo people from Oji-Enya Izzi land on the promise that a section of the disputed land would be given to the Ezza to inhabit permanently if Ngbo people were defeated. Nwafor maintained:

*The Ezza accepted that agreement and went into war against Ngbo people. We defeated Ngbo and planted the Ogbu Ezekuna as can be seen in our settlement. But surprisingly, our hosts have been trying different tricks to force us out of the settlement. They have been threatening us on all fronts.<sup>6</sup>*

James Nweke, the 9<sup>th</sup> Head of Ezza Oji Enya Community, said that the allegation against the Ezza in Oji-Enya, was that they have refused to drop “Ezza” out of their community. That he said, has robbed them of every necessary social amenity and employment opportunities in Izzi Local Government Area because they were looked upon as non-indigenes. The Ezza had settled several boundary disputes with their hosts. Nweke said that:

*In the face of all these, we have remained peaceful. We have accepted modern civilization but we know that without peace, that civilization will achieve nothing. We levy ourselves to provide some basic social amenities like primary schools, culverts, bore-holes, and so on. Ezza people have ruled out wars*



*in their inter-group relations. So, we will not take up arms against our hosts, no matter the provocation. That does not mean we will fold our arms if any of our people is killed. No! We will avenge such a death.*<sup>7</sup>

An oral source in Echara said that the Ezza were having a problem with their greed for land. He maintained that if the Ezza in Oji-Enya could take an observer round their settlement, it will be discovered how far the people had encroached into the land of both Ngbo and Echara/Nkaleke people. The source maintained that:

*But the Ezza will always raise the first alarm if told to keep off other people's land. We are all farmers in this part of the world, and our own population also increases like any other.*<sup>8</sup>

Nkalagu youths had revolted against the Ezza community in Nkalagu in early 1900s over boundary disputes. In that uprising, Ezza farms were destroyed with their crops, and many Ezza houses were burnt down. The Ezza Nkalagu people ran to Ezza elders at Okpoku Ezekuna in Onueke, requesting that war be declared on Nkalagu. The elders were said to have ordered the Ochinkpuru Council of Ezza Clan to investigate the report, and establish, among other facts, whether Nkalagu people had invited the Ezza to assist them in any war or if any evidence of an Ezza covenant with Nkalagu people over land existed. The feedback from the Council proved the non-existence of any of the needed evidence. Bartholomew Ugbo said that the efforts of the Council to mediate a

peaceful settlement to enable the Ezza victims return to Nkalagu were fruitless.<sup>9</sup>

Ugbo stated that:

*If there was an evidence of a past Ezza war assistance to Nkalagu, the elders would have declared war on Nkalagu people. But there was no such evidence. So, the Ezza victims of that revolt were advised to bear their losses. Going to war against Nkalagu in the prevailing circumstances would be unfair and unjust. That would be against the instruction of Ezekuna to his children, which has been passed down from one generation to the other. It can not be violated in our own generation.<sup>10</sup>*

Peace is now imperative in Ezza's inter-group relations. Bold efforts are made to ensure success in negotiating tolerance and peaceful co-existence in communities where the Ezza are having problems with their hosts. There is now a retreat back to the Igbo old means of peace diplomacy. Ugbo maintained that dialogue has become a major trend in our inter-group relations.

*We don't want to be engaging in wars to secure our interests. We no longer assist communities in wars. We now go by dialogue, no matter the provocation. We have realized that wars are no longer fashionable in the modern age when all lands are legally owned by societies. We now dialogue.<sup>11</sup>*

The Ezza Council of Elders (Ndi Nze na Ozo) whose prerogative it was to declare wars on perceived Ezza enemies, has mediated peaceful settlements for a good number of Ezza communities in the diaspora through the Ochinkpuru Council. Nwaofeke Offia said that the Council was the actual administrative institution of the Ezza world. The council decides what is Ezza tradition or

custom. Its decision on any matter is final, and cannot be questioned by any body.<sup>12</sup> It was with that unquestionable authority that the Ochinkpuru Council secured peace for Ezza indigenes in Agbogazi (in Enugu State), Nkalagu and Ezillo.

*The success of our new position was recorded in our negotiation with our Agbogazi hosts in Enugu State. The dispute there was amicably settled and our community is now clearly demarcated from their hosts... We made the same success in our negotiation with Ezillo people before the Ebonyi State government... intervened and demarcated our own settlement as a permanent autonomous community.*<sup>13</sup>

Ugbo said he was a victim of the Ezza-Ezillo crisis, and will go back to his Ezillo home because he was born there and had lived there for sixty-nine years before the outbreak of the crisis. He maintained that the adoption of dialogue in resolving their inter-communal differences did not imply that people should unilaterally snatch away what belongs to the Ezza people, especially where the Ogbu Ezekuna stands as a proof of Ezza's legal right.<sup>14</sup>

*No! We will always rise in defense of our rights as a people. But we will never go to intimidate any group because of our large population. Ezza people are traditionally disciplined.*<sup>15</sup>

## **Conflicts between Foreign and Indigenous Cultures in Ezza Land**

### **After the British Intervention**

Two foreign institutions – colonialism and Christianity, penetrated the Ezza Clan in the early years of the twentieth century, and disrupted the social foundations of the people, leaving them disorganized and totally ignorant of all the

antics of the new social systems imposed on them. In the modern age, an average Ezza man is a total stranger to the systems that govern him in his own land. He obeys rules that were formed and imposed on him from foreign lands, and he was forced into a tax system articulated from outside his land for the benefits of his imposed rulers.

Colonialism came to Ezza land in 1905 when British troops invited by the people of Izzi land, invaded Ezza Clan following Ezza's refusal to honour an invitation for peace talks over their conflict with Izzi. The Ezza had tried to resist that invasion but were soon overwhelmed by the superior powers of the British forces. That resistance gave the Ezza out as a stubborn group which compelled the British to start implementing some social ideas that consolidated their authority over the Clan. One of the ideas was the establishment of a Native Authority Court in 1908 in Abakaliki Town, Headquarters of the Abakaliki division which Ezza was part of. The Ezza representative in the Court was Warrant Chief Oken Epelu of Umuoghara Ezza.<sup>16</sup>

However, both the Court and its functions were strange to the people. The Court failed in its fundamental duties of preventing conflicts and extra judicial murders of deviants. Moreover, the members were widely alleged to be involving in corrupt practices. As a result, an Ezza native court was established in 1916 as a way of keeping a close watch on the people as well as exerting a total British

control over the Clan. Membership of the new court was drawn from nearly all Ezza communities. But soon all the members were resented by their people for alleged corrupt practices. The result was the establishment of the Ezza clan court in September 1920, a higher court of the Grade “B” category. The members were expected to hand over to the court deviants from their communities for proper prosecution. The order was effective to an extent but could not prevent the secret killing of thieves, even as eight elders had been killed for the extra judicial killing of some thieves. In January, 1931, some elders of Nsokara Ezza, numbering about fifty to sixty, according to Afoke and Nworie, had a secret oath never to hand over any deviant from their community to the Ezza Clan Court. But inspite of the wide resentment and calls for the removal of the court members who, by their membership of the courts, were the people’s Warrant Chiefs, the British refused to hear or listen.<sup>17</sup>

The second foreign institution that badly affected the pre-colonial Ezza people and their ways of life was Christianity. Christianity was introduced into Ezza land in 1939, about three decades after colonialism. The Catholic Missionary Society (CMS), was the first to build churches in Akohu Unohu, Nwenu Egu and Achiegu Ezza. In 1949, the Sacred Heart Mission followed by establishing its first church at Onueke. But like colonialism, the new faith was widely resented, especially by the elders whose authorities in the land were openly challenged by

adherents of the new religion. The position of the elders notwithstanding, the religion enjoyed wide acceptance and spread like wild harmattan fire throughout Ezza land.

That wide acceptance of the Christian faith was rooted in some fundamental social factors. One, the Christian missionaries were sympathetic to the cause of the poor and needy in the land. The missionaries cared and showered love on these dejected class most of whom were slaves who saw in Christianity an escape route from the oppressive customs and traditions of Ezza land to which they were subjected. Between 1950 and 1954, the population of Christian adherents had grown so strong that they could challenge some pre-colonial practices of the land such as clearing the village square (Ngangbo) in preparation for the new yam festival (Neswoha). The Christians held that the age-old sacrifices associated with the festival were profaneous.

It was such open condemnation of Ezza customs and traditions that brought the Christian faith into a collision course with the traditional religion. The first attack on Christianity was in 1950 at Ezzama community while the second was in 1954 at Umuezeoka<sup>18</sup>. Rapidly, the conflict degenerated and spread to all communities of Ezza land. The Christians failed to convince the greater number of Ezza people that everything original about the Ezza man was offensive to God, the supreme being and owner of the whole world (*Onye nwe Mgboko*) who was

central in the Christian faith as well as the traditional Ezza religion.<sup>19</sup> One major cause of the conflicts between the two faiths was the Christian logic that held that marrying more than one wife by one man was a sin against God. Throughout pre-colonial Ezza land, the elders held polygamy high as a man's source for economic relevance and social prestige in his community. Condemning it was an illogical rationality and an unpardonable repudiation of the social fabric that made the community a normal human society.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, colonialism and the Christian religion caused a disruption in the pre-colonial economic, socio-cultural and political institutions of Ezza land, and affected very seriously the people's position in their inter-group affairs with neighbouring communities. The consequences have continued into the present state of Ezza clan such that the elders now accept having lost the instruments of leadership in the Clan to children who care little or nothing about what were the culture and traditions of the land.<sup>21</sup> Both colonialism and Christianity alienated the young men and women from farming, a predominant occupation of the clan, reducing the labour force and harvests of the people. This alienated class, ever growing in population, now depend on the depleted labour force for all the foods they consume.<sup>22</sup>

The disruptive effects of colonialism and Christianity are also seen in the Ezza language which makes it impossible to transmit the traditions of Ezza land to

the younger generation, a development that has brought the Ezza language to a state of total disappearance. The imposed English language has taken over the people's tongue as the only medium of communication in official transactions in the land. The sanctity of eldership which upheld truth and the fear of God as qualifications for public life in pre-colonial days is eroded and replaced with a belief in falsehood. Many Ezza people were said to be comfortable living by falsehood as a norm without a concern for its consequences. The warrant chiefs who, unfortunately, were all elderly men, were corrupt and selfish, and the Ezza young men and women have become unequivocally corrupt, promiscuous and heady, to an extent that terrible crimes are committed with impunity, unlike in the pre-colonial days when the Ngburuma policed the communities and maintained law and order.<sup>24</sup>

The Ezza women have become such a loose lot that they now engage impetuously in certain activities like climbing of trees, which they were hitherto forbidden from. Promiscuity among young men and women has become so rampant that girls proudly lose their virginity without marriage, and married men and women engage in adultery without regrets and fear of its consequences. Felix Mgbada observed that colonialism and Christianity destroyed the Ezza culture, especially the good ones. He maintained that the destruction has affected the basic economic and social order of the clan so much so that the pre-colonial philosophy



which saw the Ezza people as the wisest and strongest rulers in all Northeast Igbo land has now given way to a pre-packaged European thought patterns that hold the Ezza man in position of no advancement.

### **The Ochinkpuru Council and the New Phase of Ezza Relations with Her Neighbours**

The quest for peace has been a great concern to all societies in all ages. This is because peace is the plat-form of friendship, the guarantor of mutual interactions and co-operation. The pre-colonial Igbo recognized peace as paramount to economic and social development when they said that '*ebe udo n'adigi, Oganiru ama adi (where there is no peace, there will never be progress)*'. The pre-colonial Igbo people demonstrated the value of peace, and their love for it, by turning all weapons of war to instruments of peace which they issued to their Priests who preached peace among Igbo communities and their neighbours. Those instruments represented the symbols of Igbo strong belief in peaceful co-existence for progress. Till the contemporary times, elders in Igbo land are still highly revered as the very soul of each community. Disputes in Igbo communities are largely over farmlands, and occur mostly during the planting seasons. But each of such conflicts is always curtailed by the quick intervention of the elders of each community. That order originated from the early Igbo settlements that cropped up as a result of population increase after the death of Eri.

Externally, the concepts of clear conscience (*Aka ocha*), peace (*udo*), stamina (*Ikenga*), and wisdom (*Ako na uche*) in pre-colonial Igbo diplomacy are still held in high esteem. Their application in the day-to-day struggles for survival by the Igbo is responsible for the wide spread of the people to all communities and nations of the world, no matter the hostilities of the hosts. *Obodo Ndigbo na 'nogi bu obodo ndi muo. (A community without Igbo settlers is a community of spirits).* In every community, the Igbo adopts his pre-colonial diplomatic cultures to empathize with the strange cultures he finds himself in until he cuts a niche for himself in the face of difficulties. Good examples include the efforts of Igbo ex-slaves like Olaudah Aquiano (Olaedo Akwino) in Europe, Mbaneso Ozurumba (Jaja, who later carved a kingdom, the prosperous Opobo kingdom) of his own, Oko Jumbo (of the famous Mannila Pepple House in the Niger Delta, and a host of others. In every clime, an Igbo would readily integrate with his host through the concept of *Ako na uche (wisdom)* but hardly disintegrates completely from his natural identities. This practice manifests in the names of several pre-colonial Igbo settlements in the diaspora such as Obi-Igbo (now Oyigbo), Nkwerre (Ikwerre), Umu-Igbo (Rumuigbo), Umu Omasi (Rumuomashi), Umu Okoro (Rumuokoro), and Obi Akpo (Obiakpor), all in Rivers State of Nigeria. Several others exist elsewhere.

The Ezza, a sub-Igbo clan in the Abakaliki area, have rekindled that beauty of pre-colonial Igbo diplomacy as a worthy root in their quest for peace with all communities within and outside the Abakaliki region. Before, they were widely known and addressed as a war-like people because of their propensity for wars. But the Ezza said they no longer fight wars because they have realized peace as the only foundation of real development. They now seek peace with their near and distant neighbours through dialogue.

The Ochinkpuru council, part of the general Ezza council of elders, is charged with the responsibility of charting the course of peace with Ezza neighbours, far and near. Bartholomew Ugbo, a sixty-nine years elder, is the chairman of the Ochinkpuru council, and unfortunately, a victim of the Ezza-Ezillo crisis. He said that the average Ezza man has realized that the only way to real development among a people was to accept the fact that man was born to complement his neighbours in their day to day co-existence. Ugbo emphasized that:

*We have come to the conclusion that building bridges of peace should take over the place of war in the Ezza man. We don't want to engage in wars to secure our interests. We now go by dialogue, no matter the provocation. We have realized that wars are no longer fashionable in the modern age.*<sup>25</sup>

He maintained that dialoguing for peace has already started yielding dividends for Ezza people. In Ezillo, for instance, the Ezza have gained through

dialogue, an autonomous Ezza community under the headship of an indigenous Ezza traditional ruler, with an all Ezza cabinet members.<sup>26</sup> Ugbo, whose buildings and other belongings were destroyed in the crisis, said he had started planning to return to his Ezza-Ezillo community. He was born and brought up there, and lived sixty years there before the crisis forced him out in 2008. Edeh Onuoha, another Ezza victim of the Ezillo crisis, was grateful that peace was restored to Ezillo land. Onuoha, who lost three members of his family to the crisis, besides their belongings, was still finding difficulties on how to return as a fresh man to a community he was born and lived in for seventy-three years.<sup>27</sup>

Clement Uzor, a retired teacher and an indigene of Ezillo, said that the crisis times in his community were no good times to any body because of the enormous waste of resources and human lives on both sides of the conflict, including commuters that were plying the Abakaliki –Enugu high-way. Uzor said that nobody had the time to think of developing the individual or the community. If a whole family was not roasted in a late night inferno by an enemy, the concern was how to escape the bullets and gashes of flying machetes by day and by night. He maintained that:

*War is the highest form of human wickedness when man's ingenuity is turned down to a level beyond that of the wildest beast of the forest. War holds nothing good for anybody. Now that peace is restored in Ezillo both the indigenes and settlers have to start thinking how to rebuild what they collectively*

*destroyed; and it is not always easy to re-build things that were destroyed.*<sup>28</sup>

Dialogue failed in Nkalagu where the indigenes had rebuffed the attempts of the Ochinkpuru council to reconcile the displaced Ezza settlers with their Nkalagu hosts. Nkalagu youths were said to have staged an uprising against the Ezza settlers in the early 1900s for their unilateral appropriation of some portions of land from Nkalagu people. Bartholomew Ugbo who, as chairman of the Ochinkpuru council, headed the Ezza team on the failed negotiation, said that the reaction of Ezza council of elders was that the Ezza victims should bear their losses since there was no evidence that Nkalagu people had a military pact with the Ezza. But in Agbogazi (Enugu State), the Ezza peace machinery successfully negotiated a permanent demarcation between the Ezza community and their hosts. Ugbo, who again, led the Ezza team in the negotiation, said that true diplomacy was the ability of a person to influence an ally into doing his biddings without confrontation. He was of the opinion that:

*The power of dialogue was seen in the successful settlement of the dispute between our people and their Agbogazi hosts over land boundaries. The dispute was amicably settled, and our community is now clearly demarcated from their hosts. Nobody will think of trespassing across the demarcation.*<sup>29</sup>

In Ishiagu, Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi state, many Ezza settlers are counted to be wealthier than many indigenes. Njoku Afoke and Paul Nworie said that an average Ezza-Ishiagu man or woman would pick an offence in any

suggestion to return to his ancestral Ezza home land.<sup>30</sup> Again, they maintained that the large population of Ezza settlers in Ondo state had grown so rich that many of them are engaged in leasing or buying of large houses, an indication that an independent Ezza community may emerge there very soon.<sup>31</sup> The Ezza have lived in Onuogba Nike since about the 1960s, and have prospered in diverse trades because of the cordial co-existence between them and their hosts. The foregoing prosperity account are indications of the enterprising spirit of the average Ezza person, and his readiness to respond to peace situations to achieve the most for himself. Nwaofeke Offia said that the Ezza man migrates out to a distant land in search of farmlands but would not hesitate to diversify into other trades whenever he experiences peace with his hosts. He maintained the view that:

*The Ezza man is hard working; he prospers easily through hard work anywhere he finds peace with his host. It is the attitude of his hosts that the Ezza man responds to. The Ezza can not think of investing his resources in other trades in a hostile environment. Rather, he focuses on his farms and how to defend them. Yes, our people have prospered more in communities where they enjoy peace with their hosts.*<sup>32</sup>

Nwaofeke observed peace as imperative to real development in all societies, and cautioned that people should seek peaceful resolutions to their differences. The world, he said, had grown beyond the stage where any group, no matter how powerful, could go on invading and dispossessing other people of their land. He maintained that thinking of war as an option in any situation would be

difficult to justify now because no situation was actually impenetrable that negotiation can not get through it. He continued:

*Look at how our people are prospering in communities where they enjoy peace, and see the difference in hostile communities. People just kill themselves and waste their property, only to start all over again.*<sup>33</sup>

Bartholomew Ugbo maintained that the new turn in Ezza inter-group relations stemmed from Ezekuna's instruction to his children on peaceful co-existence with friendly hosts or settlers in Ezza land. Ezekuna was said to have forbade his children from engaging in unjust wars against any group. Ugbo said that:

*The challenge Ezza union was now tackling was to sow the spirit of diplomacy in every Ezza man and woman everywhere. We now know that dialogue was the ultimate in the face of crisis.*<sup>34</sup>

Ugbo strongly avered that the Ezza man did not always see force as the only way out of troubled situations as erroneously held by many non-Ezza people. He maintained that except an Ezza man was pushed to apply force in self-defense, he naturally believed in peaceful means in his relations with other men. Ugbo further noted that even though Ezekuna was a strong man and a warrior of note, possibly as a result of his hunting experiences, he always adopted peaceful approaches to all forms of aggression until his peace motive was rejected. The submissive nature of the Ezza man, Ugbo said, was learnt directly from Ezekuna's good examples. To the contemporary Ezza person, diplomacy was a way of relations between two

or more people in which mutual interactions become the rule. By that the Ezza have learnt that peace tends to progress always while confrontations tend to destruction, and they have chosen to follow peace with all men. Ugbo said that:

*In Ezza, we have stopped going to help communities in wars. We now encourage our people who want to have homes or farmlands outside Ezza land to always negotiate and buy whatever size of land they want. Wars are no longer fashionable in today's world.<sup>35</sup>*

Ugbo counseled for a world council of elders in emulation of the pre-colonial Igbo system of government to advice restraint to youths, if genuine peace and security were to be attained in the world. He observed that the displacement of the elders by the youths in all communities was responsible for the chaotic state of the present age. The youths see the elders as too slow to act and they (youths) cannot see the dangers the elders try to avoid. Ugbo wants the United Nations Organization to create an international council of elders in every country, State, down to the villages, to address youths' restiveness. He maintained that there was no way the world could experience genuine peace when industries that produce weapons of destruction were daily proliferated with the backings of their various governments. Ugbo counseled a return to the Igbo situation of Eri days where wars and conflicts of all kind, were discouraged by turning all instruments of war to instruments of peace, where peace campaigns were carried out by ambassadors



commissioned by the highest authority, and where the word of an elder was respected and accepted as wisdom.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the Ezza have found another use for their great population. In their pursuit of peace with all men, they will gather themselves as one people for political purposes and profits in Ebonyi state, and Nigeria as a whole. That, according to Eze Iyioku of Ugwulangwu, would help turn around the fortunes of Ezza people for good. Iyioku said

*We should all come together as one people to stand behind all Ezza contestants during general elections in Ebonyi state and Nigeria. That way, we will be able to claim our due positions at all levels. That is the only way our population scattered all over the world can be of relevance to us now, and to our children and their own children.*<sup>37</sup>

Iyioku was hailed high, and the people's general agreement resonated:

*Ezza Jikotara onu!!  
Nde a ni, olu a ni!!!!  
(United Ezza people!  
One people, one voice!!!)*

### **Prospects and Challenges of Dialogue in Ezza New Relations**

Dialogue is a formal discussion between two groups or countries when they are trying to settle a problem or end a particular disagreement or enter into a dialogue to commence a relationship. Dialogue works under peaceful conditions without which the discussants will not be comfortable to sit together to discuss a way out of a problem. Between two warring groups, dialogue is

impossible unless an armistice or cease fire is obtained. If the claims of Ezza people about Ezekuna, their progenitor, and the kind of discipline he instilled in his children, are anything to go by, then the prospects of successful dialogue by the Ezza with communities that rise against them over boundary issues are high. But land is too dear to an average Ezza person that life seems meaningless without his control of the greater size of it for farming purposes.

Ugoh Chukwuma alluded to that when he wrote:

*The Ezza have both aborigines and those in diaspora. This is due to the nature of their soil in their original area of inheritance. For the Ezza, to refuse to farm means refusal to live a normal life, and normal life is to farm, and farming requires fertile lands which they lacked from onset of their history. This has led to a lot of migrations by the people to other lands in bid of this search. Thus, whether they are found in Effium or Ishielu (Eha-Mufu) or Onicha or at Enugu (Mpi), they are ready to adapt to the life-style of their host, provided they do their farming.*<sup>38</sup>

Ezza wage labourers were said to have migrated massively to Ishiagu in about the 1930s to seek employment at the railway station there. The migration was the immediate fall-out of the introduction of direct taxation in 1928. After a while at the railway station, the migrants began buying lands to build their own houses, and then turned parts of the lands to farms. Almost immediately, they began gradual encroachment into the lands of their landlords and neighbours. Whenever challenged, the Ezza went apologetic, and immediately sought settlements. That soon became a permanent trend of acquiring more and more

land by the migrants such that within a short space of time, an Ezza community developed and was firmly integrated into the indigenous community. Njoku Afoke and Paul Nworie said that it would amount to an unpardonable sin to tell an Ezza-Ishiagu man or woman to return to his Ezza ancestral homeland.<sup>39</sup> There has been no report of an open conflict between the Ezza migrants to Ishiagu and their hosts. But in places like Agbogazi (Enugu State), Nkalagu, Ikwo, Izzi, Ishielu, Effium, among other places, the Ezza have had to contend with open conflicts over land boundaries. That successful peace was brokered in some areas was because of the tolerance and willingness of the indigenous people to continue with Ezza communities in their midst. On the other hand, that the Ezza migrants are always found encroaching on the land of neighbours and landlords is an invitation to avoidable conflicts and crises.

If a community had sought and received Ezza military services in exchange for a piece of land, and if at the end of the war the Ezza population increased beyond the capacity of the land legally allotted the Ezza, encroachment would be a criminal option for more land. The contention of Afoke and Nworie that population increase forces Ezza's reckless search for accommodation<sup>40</sup> is unjustifiable. Fertility is not peculiar to Ezza people. Every population in the world increases because birth is a natural trend in all living things in every society. The Igbo expression for the dynamism of populations is: *amuta madu, ya amuta*

*ibe ya*. It means that every human population, no matter how small, grows in a continuum. The tenacious hold to the opinion that at times host communities invited the Ezza to help them drive away an enemy for a reward in a parcel of land, if the enemy was defeated,<sup>40</sup> is a smart jump into an irrational conclusion that is silent on whether that promise included that Ezza had the right to expand the land allocated to them any time their population increased. Afoke and Nworie's conclusion seems a justification of Ezza's unilateral encroachment into people's lands which is a major precipitator of conflicts and crises between the Ezza and many of their hosts and neighbours. That was the case in the Ezza-Oshiri Wars, Ezza Ikwo Wars, Ezza-Agbogazi crises, and several others.

Afoke and Nworie later accepted that fact when they wrote that:

*For a people that engage in practical shifting cultivation, access to new and unused land was a constant temptation. But there was bound to be resistance that often results to wars when one group encroaches into a neighbour's land.<sup>42</sup>*

Throughout Igbo economic history, from pre-history times, Ezza people were not the only group that practiced the shifting cultivation culture. That was a common practice in all communities of Igbo land where lands were left fallow for a number of years to regain lost nutrients before they were returned to. In Akpoha Clan, for instance, lands were often left fallow for up to seven years to encourage better yields when they were eventually returned to. The people have no record in their history when they invaded a neighbour's unused land. Oral accounts revealed

that Akpoha people related with their Ekwurekwu southern neighbours, and hired portions of Ekwurekwu's Otiga farmland every farming season. That relationship was steadily maintained until the out break of the Nigerian Civil War. Even after the war, many families in Evo-Akpu village in Amaogu community renewed that relationship and are still having their farms in Otiga.<sup>43</sup> The natural and permanent boundary between Amaogu-Akpoha community and the Ekwurekwu people is the Ebonyi-Akpoha River which equally forms the boundary between the Ezza Idembia community and their Oshiri neighbours. But as neighbours united by a common boundary, the Ezza-Idembia grew covetous of the lushy stretch of land on the Oshiri side of the Ebonyi river and decided to invade and dispossess the Oshiri of it, leading to several years of many bloody wars. With the facts of those wars running throughout history, can an Ezza dialogue with the Oshiri to lease or hire out any part of that lushy stretch of Oshiri land to an Ezza man for any purpose be successful?

Bartholomew Ugbo said that the Ezza peace- talks failed in the Nkalagu youths' uprising against the Ezza-Nkalagu community. The victims of that revolt were advised by the Council of Ezza elders, to bear their losses and never to return to Nkalagu, if possible.<sup>44</sup> But in the Agbogazi-Ezza conflict, the dialogue was successful because the original boundary covered by the earlier Agbogazi-Ezza covenant was identified and the Ezza were made never to cross that boundary.

With the youths of Ezillo dissociating themselves from the supposed successful peace negotiation between their elders and Ezza elders as evidenced with an Ezza-Ezillo autonomous community already gazetted by the Ebonyi State Governemnt,<sup>45</sup> the situation in Ezillo remains unpredictable until the position of the youth is properly addressed. All through history, imposed peace has always been as precarious as no peace. It breeds rebellion, guerilla warfare, mercenary interventions, assassination of leaders, ethnic divisions and cleansing, arson, destruction of public property, and so on.<sup>46</sup>

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### Summary

The Ezza people, according to Fidelis Idigo, are descendants of Eri. Following the wide dispersals of the Igbo after the death of Eri, the Ezza migrated to their present homeland in the north-east Igbo land where some bellicose non-Igbo communities forced them to take up war as a means in inter-group relations. That addition was considered necessary to curtail the frequent attacks on the Ezza by some non-Igbo speaking communities that were found in the region on the arrival of the Ezza. Such communities included the Orri, Ntezi, Okpoto, Agalagu Okpa Ezea, and many others. Later on, the Ezza had to negotiate with other communities within and outside the Abakaliki area for permanent settlements through mercenary services and peaceful dialogue. That way, the Ezza not only expanded their immediate territory but secured large expanse of land externally to encourage their agricultural interests. Thus, it was observed that the Ezza fought their many wars and secured several settlements by provocation, by invitation, by greed, and by peaceful means, using the techniques of hunting and labour mobility. The hunting technique resulted to several Ezza mercenary assistances to different communities in war and to the discovery of many fertile lands in communities that sparsely used their lands. Labour mobility resulted to the

establishment of Ezza settlements outside the Abakaliki region especially, which has given rise to what is now commonly called the Ezza Diaspora.

Though there were gains in the war approach of the Ezza people, it is recently realized by the people that war is no longer fashionable in the modern age. Therefore, the Ezza have turned to using dialogue or negotiation in their inter-group relations. The idea is to showcase the other side of the Ezza man as a lover of peace, humble, friendly and disciplined in respect to the acclaimed instruction of Ezekuna, the Ezza progenitor. With that peaceful approach, the Ezza have secured autonomous communities in many of their settlements outside their ancestral homeland. They no longer encourage war nor offer military services to communities in war. All Ezza nationals everywhere are encouraged to negotiate prices with their landlords for whatever size of land they would need either for homes, farms or any other business enterprise. That is the position of the Ochinkpuru council of Ezza land, the group of Ezza elders' council charged with the responsibility of restoring the dignity of the Ezza man through peaceful negotiations with communities of frosty relations with Ezza immigrants.

## **Conclusion**

Ezza is a distinct group in the Abakaliki area of Igbo Land. From the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the people had engaged in fighting wars as a means in their relations with their neighbours for peace and to have more land for their extensive farming

occupation. They expanded their territory in the process, dominating other communities in the entire region. With that success, the Ezza became known as a war-like clan and emerged as the sole supreme military power in the whole of northeast Igbo land. The name “Ezza” struck awe to all troublesome communities in the entire Abakaliki region and beyond. As a result, many communities befriended the Ezza to stay safe both from their erstwhile enemies and others that nursed ill feelings against the friends of the Ezza people.

Thus, the Ezza became a peace-keeping community among the communities of the northeastern region of Igbo land. Communities that were under the threat of war and possible extermination resorted to inviting the Ezza to live with them to check the menace of their hostile neighbours.

Many of such communities went into the traditional covenant of union of brotherhood (Igbandu) with the Ezza to secure the people’s permanent stay in the troubled community. One significant term of community. One significant term for the Ezza to accept such a covenant as binding was the was the condition of having the fig tree (Ogbu) known in the Ezza world as “Ogbu Ezekuna”. Once planted for the Ezza in any community, the tree became a sacred institution. Any attempt to cut it down at any point in time meant a violation of the covenant with the Ezza settlers, and would attract their attack as a defense of their right in the brotherhood.

That covenant was equally used to seal Ezza's acceptance for a direct involvement of the war of any community against her neighbor or neighbours. In such a mercenary service, the usual agreement was that the Ezza should pursue the enemy far away from the territory of their host. The extra territory that normally fell within the enemy's land was an additional war booty to the Ezza who renamed such an area and annexed it to the territory of their covenant with a host. That was how the Ezza expanded to several lands well beyond their ancestral home land. The target was to have an extensive land mass to encourage their farming occupation. But many communities whose land had been forced out of their possession by the Ezza were never comfortable losing their farm lands, and sometimes their living quarters, to the Ezza group.

Thus, when the British colonial troops arrived the Abakiliki area in 1905 through an invitation from the Izzi clan, a sister clan of the Ezza, many communities saw it as an opportunity to force a retreat out of their territories on the Ezza while others sought a repudiation of their earlier agreements to have the Ezza in their communities. With the account of Ezza's exploits made available to the British colonial authority, the British patrol force was set in place to stop the expansionist drive of the Ezza. Though many of the accounts were actually nebulous and unnecessary, the British who had no alternative account to assess the unpopular

peaceful nature of the Ezza, descended on the clan in a full military candor, bringing the Ezza reign in the northeast Igbo land to an end.

Since that defeat by the British, the Ezza have resorted to peaceful means as an option in their relations with other communities, no matter the status of the communities. An institution, the Ochinkpuru Council, a section of the Ezza Council of Elders, has been in place in Ezza to manage the peaceful relations of the Ezza nation. The council receives reports of frictions from Ezza nationals everywhere, and initiates peace talks with host communities for peaceful solutions. The purpose is to permanently avoid wars and the use of force in all Ezza's relations with other communities. Batholomwe Ugbo, Chairman of the Ochinkpuru Council, said that the Ezza no longer go to war nor encourage war. He maintained that the Ezza people have realized that war was not a better option in all human relations, adding that diplomacy (negotiation) was indispensable in all human affairs.

This work sees that new thinking in a war-like clan as a welcome development, especially now that every section of the globe seems tired of blood-letting. The Ezza example has yielded positive results in communities like Agbaogazi in the Udi area of Enugu State, Nkalagu, Ezillo, and other communities within Ebonyi state, Enugu state, and beyond where the Ezza have successfully negotiated peaceful co-existence with their neighbours.

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Alieze, Ede	c.73	A victim of the Ezza-Ezillo crisis/Farmer	Oshiegbe Umuezekoha, 30/07/2017
Aloh, D.I	c.69	Traditional Ruler	Agelegu Ikwo, 14/09/2016
Anyanwu, U. C.	c.64	A Professor, Department of History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka	Nsukka, 26/08/2017
Asadona, Njoku	c.51	Palm Wine Tapper	Amalekwune, Ameke 22/10/2016
Azi, Ibor	c.85	Charman Council of Elders	Ewurigo, Okofia/18/08/2016
Chukwuma, Ugoh	c.56	Senior Lecturer, Department of History and International Relations, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	Abakalki, 12/12/2017
Egbe, Nwankwo	c.67	Farmer	Ezza- Ntezi, 22/04/2017
Egbe, Paul	c.67	Community leader	Umuezeoka, 21/07/2017
Elom, Ekuma	c.68	Farmer and Trader	Obeagu, 03/10/2016
Ekechi, Livinus Agbom	c.76	Rtd. Teacher	Nkwubo Nike, 27/10/2016
Ele, Linus O	c.67	Community Leader and Farmer	Amagu, Amata Akpoha, 10/12/2017
Elechi, Agha	c.83	Farmer and Traditionalist	Amaogu Akpoha, 10/12/2017
Enemugwem, John H.	c.65	A Professor, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, University of Port-Harcourt	Port-Harcourt, 28/8/2017
Enyi, Joseph	c.64	Driver	Onueke, Ezza, 11/08/2016

Epelu, John	c.67	Traditional Ruler	Effium, 06/11/2016
Igboke, Ewa	c.87	Paramount Ruler	Umuoghara, 17/04/2016
Igboke, Joseph	c.54	Retired Teacher	Abakaliki, 23/12/2017
Iyioku, Raphael F.	c.72	Traditional Ruler of Ugwulangwu Community, Ohaozara L.G.A., Ebonyi State Community leader	Okpoku Ezekuna, Onueke, 11/07/2017
Michael, Ogbuji	c.62		Obeagu, 03/10/2016
Ngele, Gilbert	c. 68	Community leader	Oriuzor, 26/04/2016

Nwafor Cletus	c.72	Farmer	Okposhi-Umuoghara, 24/05/2016
Nwafor, Romanus	c.56	Chairman, Ezza Oji-Enya Welfare Association, and Farmer	Ezza Oji-Enya, 29/07/2017
Nwahi, John	c.47	Civil Servant	Abakaliki, 18/01/2017
Nwangbabu, Innocent	c.60	Chief priest	Umuezeoka Ezza, 24/08/2016
Nwankwegu, John	c.52	Road Safety Officer	Abakaliki ,9/9/2016
Nwankwo, Ugota	c.67	Community Leader	Abali, Ezzama, 27/02/2016
Nweke Jerry	c.62	Civil servant	Abakaliki ,22/11/2016
Nweke Joseph	c.66	Community Leader	Enyigba, Izzi, 12/09/2016
Nweke, James	c.59	Community Head and Farmer	Ezza Oji-Enya, 29/07/2017
Nweke, Theophilus	c.48	Youth Leader	Ezza Oji-Enya, 29/07/2017
Nwinya Dominic	c.86	Rtd. Civil servant	Onunwafor. Ebete Ezza Umuhuali, 13/02/2017
Nwite, Iduma	c.72	Community Leader and Farmer	Ezza Oji-Enya, 29/07/2017
Nwite, Odom	c.50	Palm Wine tapper	Onuogba Nike, 20/10/2016
Offia, Nwofoke	c.97	Ezza Elder and Traditionalist	Ezza Oji-Enya, 29/07/2017
Ochuri, Ngele	c.71	Traditionalist	Ezillo, 13/03/2017
Ogo, Nnayere	c.52	Senior lecturer, Department of History and International Relations, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki	Abakaliki, 12/12/2017
Okonkwo, Uche U.	c.54	Historian and Senior lecturer, Department of	Nsukka, 26/8/2017



Okwor, Agbo	c.82	History and International Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Farmer	Ngb0, 18/05/2017
Omah, Moses	c.51	Public Servant	Obeagu, 03/10/2016
Ugbo, Bartholomew	c.69	An Ezza Elder and Chairman, Ochinkpuru Council	Udenyi Umuezeoka, 21/07/2017
Ugo, Chukwuma U.N	c.61	Senior Lecturer, EBSU	Abakaliki, 20/11/2016
Ugo, Chukwuma U.N	c.61	Senior Lecturer, EBSU	Abakaliki, 12/12/2017
Ugota, Nwakpata	c.95	Community leader/ traditionalist	Idembia, 10/02/2017
Ukpai, Okere	c.76	Member, Elders Council	Ezza-Ntezi, 22/04/2017
Uzor, Clement	c.56	School Teacher (Rtd), and an Ezillo Indigene	Abakaliki, 30/07/2017

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