Ikeduru and Her Neighbours during the Nigeria's Civil War

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Abstract

The Nigeria Biafra war triggered new forms of relationships between Ikeduru and her neighbours. It was a defining and cataclysmic experience of almost every Ikeduru cum Igbo communities that changed the history of not only Ikeduru nor Igboland, nor Nigeria but Africa in general. The war which was infamous for its savage impacts on the Ikeduru and her neighbours as well as other Igbo communities who fought in it on the side of Biafra, many of whom were starved to death, after the Nigerian government's blockade of their borders; changed the course of not only Igboland but Nigeria. Ikeduru people, however, epitomized these changing relationships as a result of the war and how that war affected the Ikeduru people, led to the reorganization of production, distribution and consumption of commodities as well as reshaping social and political structures already in place during and shortly after the decolonization. Equally through their roles as individuals at home- mainly women, children and the aged, soldiers in the war front or as production of propaganda, the war, as it affected Ikeduru people created opportunities for redefinition of the relationship between her and her neighbours which is hereunder historicised.

Introduction

On the account of the outbreak of the Nigeria's civil war, Ozigbo (1999:155) noted that:

> Followig the declaration by Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the then Military Governor of Eastern Region, on May 30, 1967, the Republic of Biafra was created. Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu stated: Fellow countrymen and women, you, the people of Eastern Nigeria, conscious of the supreme authority of Almighty God over all mankind; of your duty to yourself and posterity; Aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria; Believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves…

Consequent upon the declaration of the Republic of Biafra, Ozigbo (1999:155) and Njoku (2002:91) stated that:

> Nigeria's Head of State, Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, in response, declared war on Biafra. The shooting started on July 6, 1967 and the first shot was fired at Gakem, Ogoja. It was allegedly a war to keep Nigeria one.

With the attacks on Ogoja and Nsukka, the Biafra side by Nigeria, the war took a more serious dimension as Njoku (2002:92) observed that "Biafra confronted the rest of Nigeria for thirty months of the war". Already, in this work, the discussion on the various ethno-political, and socio-economic considerations, which acted as the harbinger which brought the declaration of the Republic of Biafra and later the war had been scantily rendered as a background to the study, the full details and its prosecution, have been discussed in many literatures.

As the war kick-started, for Ikeduru, many returnees appeared not to have received the news of the outbreak of the war with much shock or surprise. This was partly due to the ugly experience they shared during the 1966 pogrom that

forced the Igbo to return to the east in their numbers. With the exception of those who enrolled in the Army and the enlightened, the rural populace in Ikeduru never knew first hand what the war meant until they began to feel its pangs and throes. The effects were in the forms of forced conscription, air raids, hunger, starvation, refugee influx, diseases and deaths among other challenges and negative impacts that attended the war. It was not long the war started, before the true meaning and implications were felt by the people of Ikeduru and her neighbours.

Herneit -Sievers, et al (1997:76) revealed that:

> At the incipient stage of the war, recruitment into the Biafra Army was on voluntary terms. Many young men were highly enthusiastic and too eager to rush to join the Biafra Army.

Initially, as many young men were highly enthusiastic and too eager to rush to join the Biafra Army, Herneit -Sievers, Ahazuem and Emezue (1997:76) contended that "enlistment was attractive to younger men, especially those who returned from other parts of Nigeria after the killings of 1966". As the war unfolds, young ladies later volunteered to join the Army. Many people also enrolled into different militias to contribute quota in different ways to the war efforts. The major rationale behind this was mainly to defend their fatherland, Biafra from perceived injustice of invasion by Nigeria. There were other rationales behind the voluntary enrollment into the Biafra Army. For instance, Onyewuibeya (2024) said that:

> The decision to join the Biafra Army was because, at the onset of the war, many schools closed, the young boys joined the Biafra Army as that appeared to be the only employment available.

He, alongside his brother, who died in the war front joined the Biafra Army because there was no other job available. People enrolled in the Army to eke out a living and take care of their families.

The war caused the closure of many local trade routes, and prevented people from having access to food stuffs, such as fish, rice, salt, food items and other household

commodities. Under this prevailing circumstance, Onyewuibeya (2024) revealed that:

> When the war came closer to Ikeduru, especially, to Mbaitoli, Owerri, Umuahia, Mbano and Mbaise, trade routes became closed. The trade route to Aboa in Rivers State where we bought fish was cut off. Abakaliki fell and the production of salt and rice stopped. Many did not know what next to do for a living, salaries for civil servants and other workers were not mentioned any more…

As the war raged on, it came much closer to Ikeduru area. Evidently, when Owerri fell to the Nigerian Army, the Biafra Army was moved to Atta-Ikeduru, (one of the Ugiri Mbano groups of towns transferred to Ikeduru during the British colonial administrative reorganization) and a community in Ikeduru as at the time of the war till the time of writing. This action meant that the war indeed reached Ikeduru and her neighbours. Madiebo (1980:280) confirmed that:

> There was not much anyone could do immediately to strengthen our resistance, as we had practically exhausted our human and material resources in pushing the enemy out of Oguta the previous day. Before long, the enemy was in Ahoada town and was still advancing from there towards Avu and Obinze on the outskirts of Owerri…

The fall of Owerri and its subsequent capture by the Nigerian Army cost Colonel Nwajei his job.He was replaced by Colonel Kalu. Within the same time frame, the enemy's brigade advanced to Mbaise another neighbour of Ikeduru. As already noted, Atta had become the new headquarters of the Owerri Division. Mbaitoli and Mbano appeared to have been drawn into a very dangerous situation, considering their proximity and location to Atta and Owerri respectively. Then, the Mbaise area was already under the enemy' siege. Perhaps, Mbaitoli and Mbano were not equally free. Madiebo (1980:281) further explained that:

> Shortly after Kalu took over, Okpuala junction fell into the hands of the enemy, thus exposing the whole of Mbaise to the

> enemy…soon the enemy linked up Aba and Owerri and began a two-pronged advanced into Mbaise.

The advance of the enemy brigade posed a big threat to the entire area. Obviously, the fall of Owerri was attributed to the exhaustion of human and material resources. There were little or no ammunition and reinforcement to sustain the resistance against the advancing and well armed to the teeth Nigerian Army. There was fear that Umuahia, the then capital of Biafra, may even be captured. Madiebo (1980:281) expressed his concern that:

> In the absence of ammunition and reinforcement and with little or no prospect of getting them in the immediate future, the situation was very grave and almost too hopeless to be described properly. If the enemy got to Inyiogwugwu, not only would the bulk of 14 Division around Owerri town be rendered useless and disorganized, there would not have been a single soldier available to stop them from moving from Inyiogwugwu to Umuahia, the then capital of Biafra…

This preemptive distress call from Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu to Colonel Kalu suggests that the Biafra Army was in danger and bad shape. The fear of the advancing enemy's Army sent jitters into the spine of Ikeduru people who expected the worst as the area was surrounded by Nigerian soldiers on all sides. At this juncture, recruitment into the Biafra Army was no longer voluntary. The need to strengthen the human and material resources of the Biafra Army caused voluntary recruitment to be replaced by conscription. Ikeduru apparently became not just a recruitment centre but also saw the establishment of military training posts in schools in the area.

According to Alaribe (2024)

> Due to the harsh conditions at the time, people were conscripted into the Biafra Army. A random picking was made despite age and they were given two days training before they were sent to the war front. A time came, when there was no need to train any person at

> all. It was a situation of a person being caught, armed with a gun and taken to the war front…

The war situation had its intrigues, dynamics and implications following the establishment of military camps in Ikeduru and other neighbouring communities. That the headquarters of the 14 Division of the Biafra Army was moved to Atta-Ikeduru underscores the fact that the war reached communities in the interior and to the people of Ikeduru and her neighbours. Forceful recruitment or rather conscription into the Biafra Army compelled many young men to go into hiding. Some men took female names in an attempt to disguise themselves, so that when being called female names, the soldiers scouting for them for forceful conscription, may not know that they were actually male. For instance, Onyewuibeya (2024) revealed that:

> Guavas Onye from Amaobu Amakohia Ikeduru in order to avoid being forcefully conscripted into the Biafra Army, disguised himself like a woman and equally took the name Margret (female name) during the Biafra war...

Thus, men took female names so that when they were called by such female names, having disguised like women, the Biafra Army scouting for men for forceful conscription may not know that they were actually male. There was also more disquiet on the part of refugees that moved into Ikeduru from captured parts of Igboland. Notably, the issue of refugees in Ikeduru during the Nigeria -Biafra War took the centre stage and brought changes in some aspects of inter-group relations in the area. The loss of jobs and the closure of trade routes and military blockade to the importation of food, drugs and materials into Biafra, by Nigerian government and her Army, worsened the situation. Achebe (2012:209-210) noted that:

> With the economic blockade and starvation, the Biafrans paid a great humanitarian price by ceding a great deal of territory to the Nigerians. The famine worsened as the war raged, as the traditional Igbo society of farmers could not plant their crops. Gowon has succeeded in cutting Biafra off from the sea, robbing its inhabitants of shipping parts to receive military and humanitarian supplies.

> The afflictions of marasmus, and kwashiorkor began to spread further...

Though with time, the international agencies came in to remedy this ugly situation the much they could. Notable among these international agencies that came to Ikeduru were the Red Cross Society, the Caritas Organization and the World Council of Churches (W.C.C). The War time relations, especially the refugee problem and the reversed roles in the aspects of the economic activities were quite disheartening, as the discussions below will demonstrate.

4.7.3 War Time Relations: The Refugee Problem

The war actually began on July 6, 1967 with the first shot at Gakem, Ogoja that led to sporadic shooting, forcing several Biafra enclaves one after the other to surrender to the military might of the well equipped Nigerian troops. Ozigbo (1999:157-159) observed that:

> Biafra conceded Ogoja, Nsukka, Enugu and Bonny to Nigeria by the end of 1967; and by the close of 1968, all military areas of Biafra and one-third of Igboland were in the hands of Nigeria…

As events unfolds, Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and partly Mbaise also fell, pushing refugees into Ikeduru and her neighbours, especially, Inyishi and Amakohia in Ikeduru; Ehime and Ugiri in Mbano, just to mention but a few. The fall of the major cities triggered mass migration and flight from the war ravaged and affected areas to calm and quiet rural communities for refuge and safety. Anozie (2024) observed that:

> The war made us to understand that Ikeduru and their neighbouring towns, especially, Mbano are at the heart of the then Biafra or Igboland...

Though some parts of Ikeduru and Mbano witnessed sporadic shootings, they remained among the Igbo areas, whose communities were disposed to housing many refugees from all around Igboland during the war. The number of refugees which could run into thousands that were housed in people's houses, schools and

churches is not known. Ikeduru and her neighbouring communities constituted a safe haven for refugees from all places. Ejimadu (2024) alluded that:

> Many of the refugees came from PortHarcourt, Cross River, and Akwa-Ibom. For instance, his aunt, Wiko married to Rumukpokwu in today's Rivers State, and her family were among the refugees housed in our compound (Anoshie's compound) in Amaobu Amakohia Ikeduru…

Many people, especially, women contributed cassava and other edibles at the initial stage to feed the refugees on arrival from their war ravaged areas. As the numbers of refugees alarmingly increased, those who could not be accommodated found refuge in churches and schools. Most prominent personalities from the government ministries were housed in the schools. It was noted that some of the refugees came with bullet wounds from air raids; others sustained different degrees of injury while escaping for their dear lives. Those who managed to return from the North and the West at the incipient stage of the war were devastated and equally constitute a different phase of the refugee's problem. They scampered for safety without adequate preparation, their belongings, possessions and the where withal to face the war situation. It was a disheartening experience for most returnees and refugees in Igboland. Describing the refugee situation, Isichie (1976:245-246) stated that:

> Only the Igbo know the whole terrible story from the 600,000 or so refugees who have fled to safety of Eastern region-hacked, slashed, and mangled, stripped naked and robbed of their possession; the orphan, the widows, and the traumatized…

Most of the returnees to Ikeduru were said to have lost their lives on their way to safety. Ikeduru and her neighbours were warmly disposed to refugees. They lived and co-existed with each other and one another as one people to the end of the war, when they retired back to their homes. The refugee situation was not without implications. According to (Ozigbo 1999:158) "The population flight from the area under federal control created ever increasing refugee problem". Communities in Ikeduru and her neighbours were inconvenienced in accommodating the

strangers that came as refugees. Issues of accommodation space, hunger, and outbreak of war related crimes and diseases were rampant. The refugees were not all Igbo speaking people. There were people from Calabar, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers areas and a lot more. People were overstretched in accommodation and feeding the refugees. Most houses were at the time made of thatch and red mud and most families were rendered homeless in sheltering refugees from afar. The refugee situation also brought with it an increased persistent scarcity already in place due to the blockage by the federal government. Above all, this appeared not to have deterred Ikeduru and her immediate neighbouring communities in the interior from receiving, sheltering and feeding the refugees under the war situation.

Iwu (2024) expressed that:

> He was delighted on how the war situation helped Amakohia people in Ikeduru to establish their relation with refugees from Ikwere people in Rivers State. According to him, amidst the, relations sprang and flourished as many people married their wives from among the refugees and vice versa…

Plate 1.1: Renovated Amakohia Secondary School used as refugee camp during Nigeria-Biafra War.
Source: (Anoshie Field Trip, 5/07/2024).

On the other hand, Ibekwe (2024) informed on the refugee situation in Ehime Mbano. He said:

> The refugee problem in Ehime was alarming. The closeness of Ahiara to Umueze 11 caused Mbaise people to run into Mbano in their numbers to seek for refuge. Mbano and part of Mbaise, especially, Ihiteafoukwu and Eziama (the whole of Ekwereazu) have common historical ties. They were protected as our brothers when they ran to our villages for safety

Suffice it to say that contemporaneously, the people of Ihite-Uboma and Etiti communities- neighbours of Mbaise and Mbano shared the same experience as Mbalisi (2015:214) quoting Innocent C. Obiukwu at Umuezegwu saying that:

> We enjoyed peace till refugees from Calabar, Port Harcourt, and Owerri came into our villages. It was through the refugees that Uboma and Etiti people knew the war was close to the area. When the war reached Ahiara and Umuahia, the people moved towards Umunumo, Nsu, and Agbaja...

As already stated, Ikeduru and her neighbours hosted many refugees during the war. As earlier mentioned geographical location of some of the communities in Ikeduru and her neighbours, especially Mbano further afar from the major cities and war concentrated areas, helped make the areas largely safe. The influx of refugees into these areas imposed hardship on the people. Many people abandoned their farms. Ikediala (2024) revealed that:

> Many people dared plant anything. Those who did had their crops stolen before harvest time. Under the war situation, people did whatever they could to survive. So we may not call that 'real stealing' let us say people 'took' whatever they saw to survive the hunger brought by the war (this could be ascribed as character by circumstance). Cassava and yam were the major foods that were produced by Ikeduru people notably, Inyishi, Amaimo, Amakohia and Uzoagbo among others…

The Mbaa River that runs across Inyishi- Eziama axis in Ikeduru and Oka Mbano as well as the Orammiriokwa River that runs across Ugirike-Okwu- Amakohia-Avuvu axis among other communities in Ikeduru attracted refugees to the said area. According to Alaribe (2024) thus:

> The Mbaa and Orammiriokwa rivers attracted refugees to the communities within the river axis. Many people depended and survived by fishing from the rivers. It was a source of protein and drinking water at the time. Oka Mbano and Inyishi Ikeduru are like brothers. All those who came into Ikeduru and Mbano communities as refugees were protected and the relationship was mostly cordial until the war ended and it continues till date. The name Biafra bound us together as brothers to assist one another,

> unlike the rabid Nigerian soldiers who moved around killing our people.

The social, economic and cultural lives of the people suffered greatly. Afigbo (1987:24) observed that "different communities in their actual day to day experiences have had to co-exist and interact in peace and in war time". Relations between Ikeduru and her neighbours were warmly and largely peaceful as mechanisms were available to quickly assuage unsettled nerves. The war itself was a factor of contact and interaction between the people on the one hand, and the refugees that ran into the area on the other hand. The war however, made people to mutually aid one another.

It could be deduced that the long-aged mutual relations between the people were factored by their clam to a common ancestry as exemplified in the numerous socio-cultural practices celebrated to mark their brotherhood. It is pertinent to note that the idyllic myth of a traditional society such as Ikeduru and her neighbours and other Igbo communities before the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, was such that the responsibility of power or wealth was conceived as for the maintenance of the social order, where everyone catered for his brother. In Ikeduru, this social orders were propped by a predominantly socio-cultural and religious world view of onye-aghala-nwanne ya (be your brother's keeper) as article of faith. Therefore onye-aghala-nwanne ya (be your brother's keeper) as an article of faith in Ikeduru and the belief in common ancestry, played out in the way the people cooperated during the Nigeria-Biafra War. Alaribe (2024) said that:

> Our people understood their neighbours were also their brothers, so people from different communities continued to cross boundaries to trade with their neighbours (evidently the barter mode of exchange, which had its origin in the pre-modern times resurfaced) in the area.

Community leader were also said to have used age grades and able bodied men to ensure that inter-community movement were safe between neighbours. Especially, traders and people that went to fetch water from the stream located in neighbouring communities. For instance, Mbalisi (2015:219) expressed that "this

situation existed between Inyishi Ikeduru and Ogbor, Amaimo Ikeduru and Umuozu Ugiri, and Ugirike Ikeduru and Umueze 11 in Ehime Mbano". The mutual relations that existed between the people probably made it possible for refugees to find Ikeduru and some of her neighbouring communities' safe during the war. If Ikeduru and her neighbouring communities were hostile to one another, refugees would have avoided the area. Not-with-standing the challenges of over population, shortage of food, increase hunger, out-break of diseases and discomforts associated with refugees, many of the refugees were accommodated by the people. Those refugees who were safeguarded in Ikeduru will never erode their experience and hospitality accorded them. However, those who lost their love ones still live with the grievous experience, though such deaths were the acts of God.

Biafran Veterans' Experiences, Biafran made Weapons and Relief Agencies

To the superpowers who were aiding Nigeria against Biafra, Ojukwu (1969:6) argued that:

> The White Powers supporting Nigeria blame Biafra for the continuation of the blockade and for the starvation and suffering which that entails.

This act of the foreigners underscores the fact that there were many forces against Biafra. Before the White Powers intervention, Ottah (1980:9) noted that:

> Not even the rapidity of the advance of the German Army into Russia on June 22, 1941 can compare with the lightning celerity with which Ojukwu's troops moved into and overran the Midwest State in the early hours of August 9, 1967. Were there no Federal troops in the Midwest State to oppose the advance of Biafra?

Perhaps, Ottah asked the rhetorical question to express what seemed to him as a surprise gallantry showcased by the Biafran forces in the Midwest. To many war analyst, it was like nearly three months after the Arab- Israeli war that another military phenomenon was to be seen, with the very tiny Biafra conquering the forces of the gigantic Nigerian Government. Forsyth (1969:6) observed that: "a

sudden motorized push at that time along any one of the three major roads available would have put Biafran forces deep into the Yoruba heartland and at the gates of Lagos. Such was the order Colonel Ojukwu gave". Forsyth (1969:35) further wrote that:

> By August 20, 1967), the highly terrified Gowon had had ordered his private plane to be ready, the engines warmed and a flight plan prepared for Zaria in the North; and the British High Commissioner, Sir David Hunt and the American Ambassador, Mr. James Matthews had held a long and serious talk with Gowon in Dodan Barracks, as a result of which the nervous Nigerian Supreme Commander agreed to carry on with the battle which was to him full of uncertainties…

However, what later transpired as a somersault was summarized by Ndiokwere (1998:37) "Biafra was crushed precisely by the same foreign forces that had kept the black race in perpetual servitude". Some people who took part in the war had some harrowing and worrisome experience.

Among Ikeduru and her neighbours, some who joined the Biafra Army experienced hard times during training, especially, those conscripted. Narrating his experience and what he saw at Atta Girls' Secondary School, which served as the new quarters of Owerri Division, led by Colonel Kalu, who replaced Colonel Nwajei, after the fall of Owerri. Njoku (2024) said that:

> Many young boys were conscripted in communities in Ikeduru and her neighbours, especially, Mbano area and brought to the new headquarters of Owerri Division at Atta Girls' Secondary School. They were poorly trained and sent to war front. A lot of them died because of lack of food and lack of stamina. The strong ones who stood the harsh training were taken to war front, but only a few returned…

Many able-bodied young men who voluntarily joined the Biafra Army at the incipient stage absconded and deserted when they were confronted with the stack

realities of the war. Many parents hid their young male children in the bush or on the *uko* (wooden hanger in the kitchen where food was stored) to evade conscription. The brutal way the soldiers went about the conscription brought fear in the communities and made movement of people difficult during the closing stages of the war, especially for the young males. There were pandemonium and confusion as people struggle to avoid being killed or captured. Relating to people from different and distant communities became almost difficult; markets were deserted. Njoku (2024) further revealed that 'Attack Trade' (Smuggled Trade) emerged as a very lucrative but dangerous form of trade. This 'Attack Trade' was a form of wartime market transaction which became very famous and popular because of its lucrative nature and mode of operation. It was given the name 'attack' because it was carried out in a manner reminiscent of military operations and was associated with the gravest risks. Chigbo (2013:19) noted that "Attack Trade' was a very risky and hazardous business". According to Njoku (2024) "some women who could not for reason of age, health, distance or risk involved in 'attack trade' , engaged in the less complicated but equally lucrative and popular "overnight" markets". As the name suggests, women involved in this kind of trade during the war, usually stayed overnight, so as to dispose of their wares; and to purchase those ones they needed. As would be expected, the overnight markets were located at very remote places, or in areas far removed from major roads and streets. This was because in such hidden places, the fighting forces carried out less bombing and other attacks than transaction carried out in very strategic locations and in the day time. This situation in part, explains the fact that most trade transaction between Ikeduru and her neighbours during the Nigeria-Biafra War occurred in the night, under big shady tress inside the bush in order to provide cover for traders (women). Ijezie (2024) added that "market operations in the war days did not follow the usual four market days or eight days, weekly pattern. Instead, market operations became a daily event".

Church buildings were also attacked. In fact, interactions reduced as movements were almost impossible, because to do so was almost suicidal.

Anozie (2024) shared his horrendous experience during the war thus:

> The Nigeria-Biafra War was a bad omen that I do not want to remember again. It was a devastating moment that disorganized

> ever body in Igboland. Personally, I hate to hear nor talk about it, because the poverty I am faced with today, is as a result of that civil war…

Honestly, listening to this heartbroken uncle of mine from Umuigwe in Eziama Ikeduru (my maternal home) narrate his war ordeal evokes emotion. Many people had similar experiences in Ikeduru and her neighbours in particular and Igboland in general. In a related manner, Mbalisi (2015) 201-202) gave an account on how Peter Ogu told him that:

> His son Ogu Nnamdi, escaped to Mbano through Ezealakpaka stream, when he was conscripted. He luckily escaped when the soldiers were on the chase for another young man that tried to escape. His son was rescued by Mr. Iheanacho Iwuoha from Umudimodu Mbano. Mbano, Mbaise and Ikeduru are really good brothers and neighbours…

Deliberate moment calls for deliberate action. The challenges faced by Biafra soldiers in terms of inadequate weapon and ammunition, forced Biafrans to manufacture their own weapon and ammunition. They must salvage the situation, if Biafra must survive the onslaught of the well-armed Nigerian Army. Ogbudinkpa (1985:17) stated that:

> One fact of the Nigeria-Biafra war was the seemingly many innovations in the field of mechanical engineering in the blockade and war-torn Biafra. If these are accepted as significant technological innovations, they seem to bear testimony to the often heard expression that necessity is the mother of inventions. Consequently, Biafrans assembled a team of engineers to manufacture a number of weapons and ammunitions…

In furtherance of his account, Ogbudinkpa (1985:18-40) stated that:

> Uzummuo, the Biafran ghost innovator was an indigenous illiterate innovator who harkened to the desperate but clarion calls of the secessionist Biafran government to its subjects to use high level

> manpower and resourcefulness rediscovered during the war to help the blockade economy to withstand the strain of hostilities. Uzummuo led his men in tinkering with every mechanical device that would help check the powerful Federal Army…

Notwithstanding the innovations and technological ingenuity of the Biafran soldiers, Nigerian Army however, had the upper hand and with their superior and sophisticated weapons and ammunition, Biafra was forced surrender. The horrendous war situation imposed untold hardship, hunger and diseases on the defenseless Biafrans. Ikeduru and her neighbours were not left out of the ugly situation brought by the infamous war. Mbalisi (2015:103) stated that:

> He was told 'that the Biafra Ogbunigwe was used at Amaraku in 1969'. The Ogbunigwe created a hole on the road to stop Nigerian soldiers from entering the Ugiri area down to Ikeduru area, where most refugees were accommodated.

The influx of refugees into the Mbano and Ikeduru areas caused increased hunger and hardship.

The presence of some international relief agencies provided succour and helped to alleviate the plight of those who managed to survive.

According to Okpomeshine (2009) thus:

> Christopher Ugwu, my kinsman was the Catechist at St. Brendan's Catholic Parish Amakohia Ikeduru during the war time; and he served as World Council of Churches (W.C.C) agent at St. Brendan's Catholic Parish, where the Caritas of the Roman Catholic and the Red Cross rendered relief materials and help to people. These bodies were very helpful to those who could get to them to survive. Christopher was a source of help to many who survived and as the Catechist and the World Council of Churches (W.C.C) agent, he did not discriminate in the distribution of relief materials to people.

Such items like corn meal, milk, salted fish, egg and drugs and clothes were supplied to those affected and many people survived through their help. Ugwu (2024) revealed that:

> People with kwashiorkor and pregnant women were taken to the sick bays situated in Catholic Convent in Okwu Ikeduru, for proper care by the Revered Sisters and Nuns. Even some healthy people were attended to and assisted with some quantity of corn meal to curb their hunger at the Convent".

By the closing years of 1969, there were unmistakable pointers that an end to the war was imminent. People had been disillusioned with the war as Biafrans ran out of ammunition and manpower. The Nigerian Army bombarded every possible place in Igboland including markets, hospitals, schools, churches and private homes towards the end of the war. There were no safe havens anymore. The number of casualties increased tremendously day by day. Achebe (2012:212) stated that:

> In February, 1969 alone nearly eight hundred civilians were massacred by targeted Nigerian air force strikes on open market near Owerri -Umuohiagu and Ozu-abam…

Furthermore, Achebe (2012:212) revealed that "in October 1969, Ojukwu reached out desperately to the United Nations to 'mediate a cease-fire as a prelude to pace negotiations', his pleas were met with a deafening silence". In a bid to usher in the most sought for peace in Biafra land at such critical point in time, Achebe (2012:125) attested that:

> Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe had outlined a fourteen-point peace plan to be implemented by a proposed 'United Nations peace-keeping force made up of international and local peace-keeping forces', Azikiwe's proposal which was submitted to both United Nations officials and the Federal Government of Nigeria was rejected as unworkable.

Consequently, six months from February, Nnamdi Azikiwe decided to discontinue any public support for the secessionist aspiration of Biafra and turned in his diplomatic credentials. There was general outcry and dissatisfaction over the escalating number of casualties on possible negation impasse.

The situation disrupted and hindered the peaceful socio-cultural, political and economic relations of Ikeduru her neighbours. The desertion of markets hindered effective trade relations between the people. The notable markets in the area such as Eke Atta, Nkwo Amaimo, Orie Amaraku, Eke Onummiri, Eke Ahiara, among others that used to serve as points of contacts and interaction between the people from different communities became moribund. Trade articles such as palm oil, salt, fish and rice were in short supply. Hunger and disease claimed many lives and kept many more on the fringe of death. Most hospitals and sick bays were either attacked or bombarded; and health workers scampered for safety and left the shadows of the remaining bombarded buildings deserted. Many families were devastated towards the end of the war. At this point, the centre could not hold. Ikeduru and her neighbours were said to have joined the clamour for the end of the war. The Biafrans could no longer afford to continue their course. It was as if fate turned against them, as hopelessness and despair and thought of the unknown consumed the people. What was more, on January 10, 1970, the news reached the villages that Ojukwu, the resident Biafran leader and General of the People's Army, in company of a few others had left the Republic of Biafra for Ivory Coast for safety and 'in search of peace'. Biafra was left in the hands of Sir Louis Mbanefo, the Chief Justice of Republic of Biafra and Major General Philip Effiong, who eventually surrendered Biafra to the Gowon led Nigerian government on January 12, 1970. On January 15, 1970, Biafra delegates arrived in Lagos for a peace talk. The following day, January 16, 1970, General Yakubu Gowon, then Head of State received an unconditional surrender from Biafra and added that the war of brothers had ended in 'no victor, no vanquished'.

Socio-Economic Effects of the War

When the war ended the way it did, there was the question of what was going to be the fate of the Igbo in the country. The story of Biafra surrender to Nigeria began with the news of the flight by the Biafra Commander Colonel Ojukwu and the subsequent loss of heart by the Biafran troops, which led them to desert the war

front. The Nigerian troops closed in as Biafran defenses collapsed. As stated earlier, on January 12, 1970, the then acting Head of State of Biafra, Major General Philip Effiong, yielded to the pressure from Biafran troops to sue for peace. In a broadcast that afternoon, he called on the Biafran forces to lay down their arms and stop fighting. The war thus ended on January 12, 1970. Ozigboh (1999:162) claimed that "General Gowon ordered the Federal troops in Biafra to stop fighting on January 14, 1970".

The people of Ikeduru and her neighbours jubilated and heaved sighs of relief as they were informed by returnee Biafran soldiers about the end of the war. Mixed feelings reportedly pervaded the communities, at least in then Biafra enclave. One thing was certain, their fears, sleepless nights and sufferings would reduce. On the other hand, the fear of the unknown and how to survive the hard times at the end of the war preoccupied their thoughts. The refugees left Ikeduru and her neighbouring communities, where they had sought refuge. Many feared uncertainties and stayed longer in their host communities. Ejimaduekwu (2024) informed that:

> Some refugees including Wiko his aunt and family members from Rumukpokwu in Rivers State were in our compound till late February 1970 before they returned home, though one sad event that took place was that Wiko lost his only male child during the war because of kwashiorkor.

The end of the war exerted a devastating and overwhelming pressure on the socio-economic and general living conditions of Ikeduru people and her neighbours in particular and Igbo in general. According to Achebe (2012: 226) thus:

> The thirty-month war that claimed over one hundred thousand military service men and women and over three million Biafrans ended with the declaration made by General Gowon in a national broadcast where made his 'no victor, no vanquished speech…

Ikeduru indigenes at home and in diaspora were affected by the war. Many private houses, farms, school buildings, markets, churches, bridges, among other

infrastructure, had been destroyed by the air raids. The health centers and hospitals were not spared. Every nooks and crannies of Ikeduru communities were shattered and battered. The people could only but count their losses and pick up their pieces. The socio-economic effects of the war certainly are unqualifiable, as there is no parameter to measure the collateral damages done to the people. The war destroyed and impeded infrastructural and general development in Ikeduru and around Igboland. Ozigboh (1999:172) aptly stated that:

> By the time Nigeria declared war on Biafra in July 1967, the Igbo had attained a high degree of economic prosperity, modern industrial growth, educational advancement and social sophistication…

These developments in infrastructure were either put on-hold, hampered or destroyed. Some of the secondary schools built before the war, were shattered. For instance, Amakohia Girls Secondary School (later Amakohia Secondary School) built in (before) the war was destroyed by air raids. Others destroyed were Girls Secondary School Atta built in 1965, Boys Grammar School (later Ibeme High School) built in 1963, and St. Aquinas Secondary School, Anara built by the Catholic Mission in 1962 to mention but a few . The same destruction visited the primary schools used as refugee camps in Ikeduru and her neighbours. They were equally attacked and shattered by air raids. Consequently, upon the destruction, many people were rendered homeless, school children who were able to return to school, studied under the trees before the buildings were reconstructed. Economic activities at Eke-Onummiri, Eke-Atta, Nkwo-Amaimo, Orie-Amaraku, Eke-Ahiara, Nkwo-Umuezeala, Nkwo-Ogwu, and others major markets in the area, were carried out under the hot scorching sun or drenching. Business men and women who lived in urban centres such as Aba, Owerri, Onitsha, Port Harcourt and Enugu were forced back to their villages without property. Opara (2024) said that:

> As a result of the war, most people lost all their property, especially those that were resident outside Ikeduru…

Conclusion

Obviously, the outcome of the war had implications for relations between Ikeduru and her neighbours. Firstly, the cessation of hostilities, enabled refugees to return to their homes. Ikeduru communities were freed from the challenges of over-population caused by the war and its social vices aforementioned. Secondly, schools that were closed because of the war were reopened. School children and teachers resumed learning. Mutual and peaceful interactions between pupils/students from different communities resumed. Markets were cleared of bush and repaired where necessary and trade resumed. Trade and cultural relations between communities which were affected by the war resumed as people went to different markets to buy sell. Movements of people from one place to another gradually improved. Social security and peace that had been jeopardized by the war became restored. Other cultural practices and festivals that were abandoned during the war time, were revamped and lives became meaningful again. Most farms that had been taken by bushes were weeded and crops planted. Many people who lost their farm crops to thieves and were discouraged from further planting amidst the risk of losing their crops to thieves, started planting again with social security and peace evident after the war ended. Irrespective of these ordeal and harsh conditions witnessed by Ikeduru and her neighbours, the people of Ikeduru and indeed Igbo were resilient enough in their survival endeavours.

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Appendix for Ikeduru and her neighbours during the Civil War.

Interview with Onye Leonard (80yrs) Biafran Veterans from Amakohia Ikeduru on 5th July, 2024.

Interview with HRH Eze Alaribe Umunnakwe , Eze Oha 111 of Amakohia Ikeduru (70yrs) on 5th July,2024.

Interview with Chief Anozie Christopher Nnodim (82 yrs) Biafran Veterans from Eziama Ikeduru on 6th July, 2024.

Interview with Iwu Victor (63 yrs) from Amakohia Ikeduru on 6th July, 2024.

Interview with Opara Alphonsus (80yrs) from Aboh Mbaise on 10th July,2024.

Interview with Nze Ndubuisi Zebedee Ibe (71 yrs) Biafran Veteran from Ahiazu Mbaise on 10th July,2024.

Interview with Ejimadu Oliver Anoshie (73yrs) from Amakohia Ikeduru on 5th July,2024.

Interview with Ikediala Peter (70 yrs) from Amakohia Ikeduru on 6th July,2024.

Interview with Ijezie Maximus (75 yrs) from Amakohia Ikeduru on 6th July,2024.

Interview with Okpomeshine Jude Anoshie (80yrs) Biafran Veteran from Amakohia Ikeduru on 24th January,2002.

Interview with Ugwu Evaristus (75 yrs) from Amakohia Ikeduru on 6th July,2024.

Interview with Njoku Chinedu (50 yrs) from Inyishi Ikeduru on 6th July,2024.