
The Interrogating Role of Iwhuruohna in Rivers State during the Nigerian Civil War 1967 – 1970: A Historical Imperative

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Abstract: *Iwhuruooha is an ethnic nationality within the State of Rivers located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This work is intended to examine the plight of Iwhuruooha people and their interrogating role during the civil war in the making of Rivers State. Ikwerre people's experiences during the civil war are indeed the most unacknowledged in Rivers State as they bore the brunt of the dehumanizing effects of the traumas of the war within the region. During the period under review, food crisis, rape, insecurity, disease and hopelessness were among the significant challenges they were made to cope with. In this however, prostitution, trading, fishing and hunting, were among the various strategies the people adopted for survival whereas others joined the Biafran militias and Nigerian civil defence out of frustration. These adopted mechanisms were in essence the means through which Ikwerre people got the opportunity to prove that they could sustain themselves in the absence of any concerted collective efforts to repulse the occupiers of their land at the time. In spite of the contributions of Iwhuruooha people to war efforts in the survival and stability of Rivers State, there seems to be no meaningful appreciation by Rivers people. However, some of the Iwhuruooha challenges have become their strengths in that in a determined resolve other sections of Rivers State have now began to acknowledge their obvious contributions and their history is being placed in proper perspectives.*

Key words: *Ethnic, nationality, education, economy, migration*

Introduction

The experiences of Iwhuruooha people have continued to be very difficult an issue to be stated as they were grossly ignored by writers of history. The Nigerian nation was torn apart by an ugly civil war between 1967-1970 which under-scores the overriding relevance and importance of ensuring adequate and consummate study of Iwhuruooha side of the realities of the civil war plight during the period. In fact, there are many sides to the civil war story. For the minorities in the East, it was a period of self-determination and independence from the oppressions of the majority ethnic nationalities. For some others, it signaled woe and suffering. Iwhuruooha falls under this category for it was during the period of civil war that the unity and stability of Rivers people were somewhat tested.

Yet, there were others who lost all means of economic livelihood, their properties and lives. There was loss of family members as women were raped while others were held captive for sexual gratification. The men went to war during the war time with one thing in mind and that is to safeguard the interests of the minorities of the Niger Delta. Since after the civil war, no one has talked about justice and equity to right the wrongs against ethnic minorities of the East such as Iwhuruooha, Etche, Ekpeye and Ogba. For, if Nigeria must be continuously united, then

Madiebo (1980:15) was right when he averred that justice has been aptly said to be the bond of the society, corner stone of human togetherness. On the other hand, if Nigerian unity would stay, then of course, the suffering of Iwhuruoha people during the civil war time must be mitigated and the issues therefore properly addressed.

There are many authors of the Nigerian civil war era but none has touched on the sensitive side of the atrocities against the Iwhuruoha minority and their contributions towards the growth of Rivers State. The neglect may be intentional or unintentional but it just goes to show the extent of the biasness against Iwhuruoha minorities by most authors who have produced a lot of literatures on the civil war and other writers of history. More especially, it also goes to depict the level of ignorance on the activities of Iwhuruoha towards the up-liftment of Rivers people which sometimes are glossed over, under-analyzed and at times absent in most cases because of hate and ethnic chauvinism which trivialized Iwhuruoha roles for too long in the annals of Nigerian history.

On a general note, however, even though literatures on the Nigerian state are profuse, they are Iwhuruoha insensitive, the Iwhuruoha ethnic nationality's activities marginalized and various historical discourses had remained one sided favouring other nationalities or their kit and kin. Even the other ethnic counterparts have not helped the issue, their accounts are usually based on their own perspectives. The imbalance on the account of the plight of Iwhuruoha people has created a lacuna. Iwhuruoha men and women collectively put up active participation during the war in order to alleviate Rivers people. But one can have solace in the works of Njoku (1985:20) where the author centered her observations mainly on the women involvement in the Igbo war and explained how women were marginalized and made to suffer the brunt of the civil war.

Iwhuruoha people and Environment

The name, Iwhuruoha is both ethnic and linguistic. It refers to an ethnic group and at the same time a people's language. Iwhuruoha is the most populous of all ethnic nationalities in Rivers State with approximately four million people by the last population census estimates. It occupies four local government areas namely Obio/Akpor, Emohua, Port Harcourt and Ikwerre. According to Achinehu (1994:4) it is geographically situated within the coordinates of 4⁰:50N, 5⁰:15N, 6⁰: 30E and 7⁰:15E. The whole area occupies the central parts of Rivers state and encompassed by the equatorial tropical rain forest of the Guinea coast (Ikunga 2006:41).

The Iwhuruoha ethnic nationality, according to Obah (1997:7), predates the advent of the whiteman and the Nigerian Nation (1914). It has many major groupings in line with the citing of colonial native courts within seven communities that were hitherto referred to as Iwhuruoha Asa or Esa that is, seven Iwhuruoha or Iwhereoha. Out of the seven Iwhuruoha came such political groupings as Elele or Ishimbam group, Esila or Ishaila group, REO or Risimini group and OPA group. Iwhuruoha, under the aegis of Ogbakor Ikwerre rotate their Ogbakor or general assembly meetings across the various Iwhuruoha groups.

The area is generally bounded by other ethnic groupings in Rivers State such as Ogba/Egbema to the North and West, Ekpeye and Abua to the south West, Eleme is by the East Etche and Oyigbo too. The Igbo of Imo state are by the North-east. However, the location of Iwhuruoha could depend on where the locator is standing. Iwhuruoha is linguistically linked with the languages of Ekpeye, Ogba, Etche and Ndoni. According to Williamson (1989:45-46) they all belong to what she referred to as Igboid language group or lower Niger language group.

The Tradition of Origin

On Iwhuruoha traditions of origin, opinions differ marginally. For sometime now, the origin of Iwhuruoha has been shrewd in mystery. Till today, Iwhuruoha has no central history and for that reason each Ikwerre ethnic group tends to reconstruct its own history of origin and migration in its own way. Since not all *Iwhuruoha* clans migrated at the same time and from the same source, their origins are variously discussed by their separate group historians. It therefore could be said to be a heterogenous society.

There are six hypothesis on the origin of Iwhuruoha. The first has to do with Benin factor relating to one Ochichi as the progenitor of the people. However, the Ochichi story is only common among Northern and Southern people of Elele and Obio. The story begins with the reign of Oba Ewuare of Benin who was said to be a tyrant and an intolerant ruler. According to Egharevba (1960), Oba Ewuare was formerly known as Ogun before being crowned with the title of Oba Ewuare or Owuruare, meaning it is cool or the trouble has ceased after the death of the incumbent Oba Owaifiokun whom it was claimed he overthrew through a palace coup. Having ascended the throne in about 1410 A.D, Oba Ewuare caused a great conflagration in Benin which lasted two days and two nights as a revenge for his previous banishment. Egharevba explained further that Oba Ewuare was a magician, physician, Warrior and traveler having travelled to such countries as Ghana, Guinea and Congo. And because he was powerful, courageous and sagacious, he exerted much influence in the area. Ewuare fought and captured two hundred and one (201) towns and villages in Ekiti, Ikare, Eka, Kukuruku and parts of Igbo land. In fact, Ewuare took his petty rulers captive and caused many to pay tribute to him. The first ruler to make contacts with Europeans in this part of the world, he became so ruthless with his subjects that several of them went into self exile in order to escape torture. It was in the midst of this crisis in Benin that the founders of Iwhuruoha clans such as Ochichi, Odegu, Ndele, Emohua, Rumuekpe, Uvuawhu, among others left to settle in other safer lands.

It was claimed that when Ochichi settled at present day Elele, he begat four sons who founded such communities as Elele, Egbeda, Omerelu and Mini. The other communities in Northern Iwhuruoha, according to the assumption are stranger elements. This may just be an assumption without any historical facts since during the period of migration waves of migration took people to different locations. But oral tradition in Isiokpo itself from the Ochichi claim, Odegu too does not accept this assumption because of the distinctiveness of its migration history from other claims in the history of Iwhuruoha.

The second hypothesis relate to the claim of Isiokpo to one Okpo Wagidi as being their progenitor and the descendants being founders of other Iwhuruoha communities. Oral tradition in Isiokpo claims that Okpo Wagidi, a war Lord migrated from Arochukwu to a place called Alimini and settled there. It was based on this claim that some argued to the contrary that the founder of Isiokpo is Mini and not Okpo Wagidi. The Ochichi story by northern Iwhuruoha writers to the fact that Isiokpo is one of the sons of Ochichi deviates remarkable from the assumptions of oral tradition in Isiokpo itself concerning Okpo Wagidi. Controversy has raged on between Isiokpo and Elele concerning supremacy of one over the other and it has not ended. However, oral tradition in Rundele attests to the Okpo Wagidi story as the progenitor of Isiokpo people. Therefore, there may be some elements of historical truth here.

This, however, draws some parallels with the hypothesis of Igbo origin. According to Ikunga (2006:53) the greatest Iwhuruoha undoing is the lack of indigenous historians who could have put the history in proper perspective. The influence of Igbo historians on the proper history

of Ikwerre origin has cast doubts to the objectivity of historical reconstruction. He went further to state that Talbot (1926), Afigbo (1981), Echeruo (1982) and Jones (1963) have been the greatest offenders in obscuring the origin of Iwhuruoha people. They grouped Ikwerre among the sub-tribes of Igbo. It must be noted that Talbot and Jones, the two British colonial writers made conclusions from what Igbo interpreters informed them about the people of Eastern Nigeria and not what they actually knew about the area. At the time, Igbo in eastern Nigeria had monopoly of education and an upper hand in the British colonial government. They indeed succeeded in putting the records according to their imagination and perception in order to humiliate the minorities in the then East. For Afigbo and Echeruo, they espoused the theory of Igbo origin based on assumptions and linguistic similarities. Assumptions are not acceptable in historical reconstruction neither can linguistic affinity alone be sufficient enough to trace the origin of a people. To properly argue that Iwhuruoha migrated from Igbo, there must be studies on both sides based on oral tradition, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, ethnology, cultural and linguistic similarities. It has been the Igbo dream to perpetually undermine the existence of Iwhuruoha people and put them under their domination and control. This, however, succeeded for sometime. Efforts are today being made such as this, to come out of that internal colonialism and assert some levels of independence. This hypothesis may not pass the test of historical truth until it has been established how the people traced the route to the present settlement in the Niger Delta.

Again, Nkutura Mandah (2003) has also in his hamitic hypothesis espoused the theory that Iwhuruoha people migrated from the Middle East possibly a native of Edom on Mt. Seir. The Edomites are descendants of Esau and Iwhuruoha left there in a boat called Ogbo-oru through the Mediterranean seas to the Atlantic and finally Niger Delta.

There is yet another hypothesis based on Ijo tradition. This hypothesis claims that there was a movement Northwards from the Niger Delta region. Alagoa and Kiebel (1989) contended that even Obio, the ancestor of Evo and Apará communities migrated from Ukwuani in Aboh division to their present abode. They state further that a language affinity exists between Obio in Iwhuruoha and Ukwuani in Delta State. Even though there was a Northward movement from the Niger Delta, the Ijo tradition seems not to be so plausible as no oral tradition exists among the Iwhuruoha people on this theory. What probably brought Ijo in close affinity with Iwhuruoha may be commercial and trade contacts. Ukwuani people are not Ijo proper rather they seem to establish closer affinity with the Ibos.

Finally, there is the claim of autochthony among the Akpor people of Iwhuruoha. They claim that they have been there from time in their present location. Their existence has nothing to do with any kind of migration from outside their present settlement. This claim is only common to Akpor and no where else in Iwhuruoha land. It could also be reasoned that the people lost sight of their source of migration or that it must have disappeared from their memory and therefore the claim of autochthony.

From the above analysis of the various hypothesis, it can be seen that Iwhuruoha is distinct and unique both in language, culture and traditions of origin. There is no doubt that in inter migrations several Igbo elements emptied into Iwhuruoha and inter-mingled with them especially during the slave trade when Aros of Igbo land made Iwhuruoha land their area of trade and a gate way to the waters of Bonny from where the slaves were transported to other lands. On the other hand, Iwhuruoha people migrated to Igbo land during the same period of migration. For instance, traces of some Iwhuruoha people inhabit sections of Umuapu, Umuagwo,

Ohaji/Egbema and Awara axis all in Imo state. They speak Iwhuruoha language mixed with some elements of Igbo and possess the same customs and traditions of Iwhuruoha. It is no wonder, therefore, that a good number of those Iwhuruoha people in Imo state showed some sympathy to Iwhuruoha people during the civil war when it was glaring that they were not welcome in Igbo land by the men folk of Igbo origin. During the same period of migration, several Iwhuruoha people also migrated to Igbo land such as Ikwerre people of Rumuigbo who are found in parts of Ngwa land of Abia State. On the whole, there are no evidences of archaeological excavations in Ikwerre land to determine their initial place of early settlement. The origin of the people and the date of early settlement remain a subject of further investigation. Oral tradition alone cannot provide full answer.

The Economic Activities of Iwhuruoha People

Iwhuruoha land is usually referred to as the food basket of Rivers State because of abundance of arable land and conducive environment which allow for several economic activities for which the people engage themselves with. However, one cannot talk about the status of Iwhuruoha people in Rivers State sufficiently enough without looking into the economic activities of the people before and after the civil war and until they are stated, the true picture of the activities of the people during the war cannot be understood.

Indeed, Iwhuruoha land is said to cover about 21, 400 KM which is claimed to be about 20% of the cultivable land in Rivers State. Wahua (1993:20) has made extensive description of them all. There is a favourable rainfall precipitation all year round which creates a rain forest vegetation supporting positively the production of adequate food. Again, the presence of fertile soil and adequate rainfall support large scale farming thereby making the people to be predominantly farmers. There are major crops produced in the area which include yam, cassava, cocoyam, maize and vegetables.

Apart from farming, the people practice, hunting, fishing and the domestication of such animals as goat, sheep, dogs, fowls, ducks, among others. In the area, can be found indigenous local industries which include pottery, basket and mat weaving, gin production and fish nets or traps. Further still, another economic activity is trading as internal and long distance markets existed with the people of Ibaa, Ndele, Emohua, Elele-Alimini and the New Calabar.

Palm Produce

The most important agricultural cash crop grown in the land is palm. It yields palm oil and palm kernel. The people depend on the wild groves for the supply of palm produce. To harvest it, produce and refine involve very difficult activity since crude implements are usually employed. Palm oil constitutes the main cooking oil or vegetable fat for the people and rich in vitamin A. In the remote past it was the main fuel used in the night. The fronds are used for fencing and roofing of mud houses whereas the mid ribs of the leaves are used as broom.

Raffia Palm

Raffia palm grows in fresh water swamps in very large quantities around the various communities in the land. Its products include raffia fiber, piassava fiber, bamboo poles and thatches used for roofing of houses. Another one is raffia palm wine. The potential yield of its alcoholic beverages averages 150 million hectoliters. It is distilled also to produce local gin called Kaikai an equivalent of the imported London dry gin.

Trade and Commerce

There are both local and long distance markets around Iwhuruoha Ikwerre communities where sellers and buyers meet to exchange their goods and services. Goods were exchanged for money while buyers went in for goods in place of their cash. Where cash was not available barter system became the ready option. Excess farm produce are sold in the various markets. While markets existed in village squares, others were situated along water fronts or creeks. Items include yam, cocoyam, garri, cassava, vegetables, okro, pea, oranges, paw-paw etc.

Long distance markets were established with the coastal people of the New Calabar such as Kalabari, Okrika, Bonny and Oyigbo. There also existed long distance markets with Etche, Ekpere, Eleme, Igbo etc. Some of the traders from those areas brought fish, pepper, stainless plates, clothes, shoes etc to be exchanged with other traders who brought in food items. Markets served as an important center not only for economic activities but also for communication and social interaction.

The economy of Iwhuruoha people was basically at subsistence level during the time and women also contributed to the sustenance of kin groups thereby participating effectively in the local economy. They took charge of the domestic sector and contributed substantially to the production, processing and distribution of goods and services. Iwhuruoha women farmed along side their husbands and children and took part in the production of palm oil and palm kernel. They also participated in local and long distance trade and were fully involved in procurement and sales of various food items and related commodities.

Several Iwhuruoha people, in addition to other activities provided health care services. In areas such as Odegu, Ibaa, Emohua and Ubima a good number of them were local midwives and birth attendants. Traditional healing using herbs also formed part of the services of the people. Since women did not own lands, they procured same during farming season from family heads deriving benefits there from. In spiritual matters, Iwhuruoha people were not left out. Some of them served several goddesses as priestesses, diviners, healers etc.

During the period, education was functional. It was then possible for both men and women to obtain a skill in order to earn a living. This goes in line with the observations of Aliyu (1982:20) when he stated that a woman who was without a craft or trade or who was totally dependent on her husband was very rare and was regarded with contempt. Therefore, apart from farming, some women became skillful in palm kernel cracking, fishing nets, canoe carving with their husbands. These activities helped them in financing most family needs. For instance, one Madam Ovihiere of Ewekwu-Odegu assisted her husband, Emenyonu on tax collection for the colonial office in both Odegu Town of Rumuji and Ahoada. She worked so hard with her husband to protect Ewekwu from District officer's harassment thereby ensuring peaceful atmosphere in the organization of Ewekwu community during the indirect rule system.

Iwhuruoha economy was dynamic. Both men and women were active in various economic activities to ensure that there was gainful employment for the younger generation.

The role of Iwhuruoha People in the stability of Rivers State

One of the major interrogating roles of Iwhuruoha people during the civil war was when the men went to war on the side of Biafra in defence of the territorial integrity of the region. Most of them lost their lives in the battle field. Some women therefore became heads of families. There were young people also who joined the army in order to defend Rivers State and to assist the men at the battle field. Contrary to the arguments of some scholars concerning the role the

people played which they said did not make any impression in their minds, yet it is on note that the people offered humanitarian support to frontline brave soldiers who fought on the side of Biafra during the war. There were again others who were on the side of Federal troops assisting in the determined efforts of the government to return to the status quo.

Recently, Chief Gibson Emenyonu a frontline traditional ruler in Ewekwu-Odegu in Emohua local government Area of Rivers State who was a Biafran soldier had stated that Iwhuruoha people during the war organized themselves to provide relief for fighting troops. He went on to explain that such relief services included Medicines, food, water, soap, cigarettes and intelligence gathering. Some of the women were also organized into various groups such as the women's voluntary services. They were mainly responsible for providing comfort to the soldiers.

Again, those people who joined the army were recruited in such Ikwerre towns as Rumuji, Choba, Igwuruta, Rumuokwurushi, Emohua, Elele, Isiokpo, among others, to serve in the army without adequate training and motivation whereas others served on service delivery. Furthermore, they were also used for propaganda as some of them were employed in the propaganda unit. It is important to note that Iwhuruoha people contributed immensely to the sustenance of the local economy. Their efforts at local and frontline trade kept the economy from total collapse. Narrating her ordeal during the war, Mrs. Alice Wori Ikunga, explained that some young people were engaged in illegal trade called Ahia attack. This involved across enemy lines. Meanwhile, other parts of Rivers State were either sleeping, hiding or running away to Lagos through the sea. Some ran to the Biafran enclave for safety and protection.

This situation emerged during the war because the Federal Government of Nigeria placed embargo on trade between Biafran territories which included Rivers State and her neighbours blockading both land and sea routes. Some of the men who could not join the army became spies to Biafra as they traded across enemy lines. The spies helped Biafra get information which led to some initial victories within the city of Port Harcourt. According to Ogunseye (1991:15), the traders accumulated wealth which helped them to maintain their various families some of which had lost the head of their families in the ensuing crisis. This called for the reason why several women in Diobu axis of Rivers State became family Heads playing the role of men in many respects.

Noteworthy is the fact that the war revived the dynamism in the palm produce business. As the population of Iwhuruoha men depleted, women took up on a large scale the processing of palm oil which was sold at the local markets. A local pomade known as ilo Oku was produced by women from the cooking of palm kernels and this was also sold at illegal bush markets located in the bush and covered by trees. Before the colonial times, palm wine and local gin known as kai-kai were produced or distilled by the men. But during the war, women joined their men folk to distill kai-kai because it had very high economic value as they made money selling them in internal or local markets. Besides this, the people also took up the production of local salt as the economic embargo by the federal government had caused scarcity of the imported common salt. They produced local salt by boiling salt water and allowed it to dry. The salt trade became lucrative as it was then a scarce commodity.

The trade in staple foods also flourished during the period. Those who had farms close to the village went to farm during the war to cultivate cassava, yam, cocoyam, vegetables and fruits. These staple food items were sold in local and bush markets which yielded good revenue not only to the people but also to the government. There were also trading activities in other communities within Rivers State.

The people themselves engaged in other services which included bank treasuries. They kept money, exchanged some and made profits therefrom. In fact they were like banks and treasury units. Many of them who had the heart and fearless got jobs and worked as clerks and secretaries in the various departments in Port Harcourt, Isiokpo and Rumuobiakani where Biafran directorates had offices. Their people can be acknowledged as achievers of sorts during the war time. Again some were tailors, cleaners, labourers and food vendors in their various Directorates. Thus, the people responded positively to war efforts and contributed immensely to the needs of the people which other Rivers State themselves have refused to acknowledge. The indigenous inhabitants of Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt local government area of Rivers State though they are not Igbo but supported whole heartedly Biafran effort and bravery. Therefore Ikwerre people and their women also needed to be commended for the roles they played to make Biafra a reality. On the other hand, Odegu people of Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State were said to have assembled their local warriors to liberate themselves from any occupation of their area by Biafra. Till date, the bravery of the people in this regard needs to be applauded by all and sundry.

Impact of the War on Iwhuruoha People

The Nigerian civil war impacted on the people both negatively and positively. On the positive side, the people achieved some levels of economic success. Their young people learnt how to do business and take care of the homes in the absence of adult men who had gone to war. Others again learnt how to prepare food substitutes. In the area of education, the people had the opportunity of being trained in various skills such as mechanics, auto-electrician, brick laying etc. And they used the knowledge gained to full advantage after the war. The participation of women in the war efforts did little to change cultural or traditional roles on the society rather their status was enhanced and the previous perception about women greatly altered for good. The people were more patriotic during the war than many other people in Rivers State. This is because they remained committed and most helpful. Having been trained in several professions their aspiration to be trained in auxiliary nursing and soldiering increased. They learnt how to trade and how to engage in several economic activities. It was based on this that they allowed their lands to be used in establishing industries and business ventures by the Rivers State government after the war. Industries were established in Trans Amadi, Choba, Rumuolumeni, Diobu etc. They also assisted the Federal government to establish air and sea ports and construct roads across several farm lands.

On the negative side, the story is most appalling and the situation pathetic. The sufferings of Iwhuruoha people in the hands of Biafra and Nigerian soldiers are most regrettable and unprecedented. The suffering ranged from lack of food, risky business endeavours and lack of legitimate job to do. As a result, many were forced into immoral and unethical practices. For instance, many of them abandoned their homes in search of relief materials from the Red Cross and other humanitarian agencies. Many who could not fend for their children abandoned them to join the Red Cross if only they could succeed in getting access to the relief materials for their children and family members. In the circumstances, many died in cross fire shooting trying to save some Biafra soldiers and such families sometimes left untold hardship upon the children whose parents they were not sure of seeing again as many died in the battle field. This dislocated many homes which were looted by fleeing Biafran soldiers and invading federal forces.

Indeed, Iwhuruoha people suffered a lot of humiliation in the hands of both Biafran and

Federal troops in the form of rape and forced marriages, some of which collapsed shortly. Emezue (1999:1-2) therefore had lamented that modern warfare often leads to sexual violence against women and exploitation of women. However, during the war, this took various dimensions. First, some women were raped, while others were conscripted and transported across the border to work as prostitutes or forced into marriage with federal troops. For example, a certain Oteeri Wodo from Ewekwu-Odegu was forced into marriage with a federal soldier from the then Bendel State, now Edo state. Since the marriage was not her will and with absence of love, she later escaped and returned to her parents. A week later, the very soldier came with troops to the village of Ewekwu-Odegu in search of the “wife”. He threatened to arrest and shoot the parents if they refused to produce her. At that point, the parents had to look for the girl’s hideout and returned her to the soldier. Few years ago, Ote-eri died during pregnancy having had several children with the soldier before then.

Indeed, the excessive exploitation of the people led to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases by both Biafran and Nigerian soldiers. Even forced marriages were contracted which never lasted and the stigma has been there over the years. Biafran soldiers of Igbo origin saw Iwhuruoha people and other minorities in Rivers state as traitors and saboteurs because of the sudden fall of some towns such as Odegu, Bonny, Isiokpo and Port Harcourt to Federal Troops. And for this reason, Biafran soldiers persistently carried out indecent assault on Iwhuruoha people in retaliation for being saboteurs. In order to escape this assault, some families relocated to swampy areas of the deltaic region most inaccessible to the ferocious Biafran soldiers. The most worrisome was the method applied in some cases to get these women. It is on record that there was forced abduction of both married and unmarried women in order to satisfy their lust for sex. Road blocks were mounted by soldiers within communities of Ewekwu, Port Harcourt, Elelenwo and Rumuokwuta so that ladies could be captured and sent to senior army officers to be sexually entertained.

Lack of appreciation or applaud for what Iwhuruoha people did to salvage the situation created some discontent among the people. However, the condemnation of Iwhuruoha people for the roles played during the war stems from ethnic hate that has been shown by the Igbo against Iwhuruoha people over the years. The erroneous view that some of the women went to the men soldiers out of the lure of material things should be discarded. Objective historical reconstruction would help the society understand history in its correct perspective. It is important to understand that not being objective in looking at history became one of the weapons of Igbo scholars in undermining the role played by Iwhuruoha people and other people generally. If ethnic hate could determine what one writes then common sense could be sufficient to judge the past in our present.

After all Iwhuruoha people lost their lands to the Igbo colonialists and Okrika adventurers in such manner as to demean their self esteem. Not only that, the rampaging Biafran soldiers out of frustration and desperation brutalized several Iwhuruoha people. Among these people so treated were Ona Nna Igwe from Elioparanwo in Obio/Akpor LGA who was buried alive on the suspicion that he was a saboteur. His first son Iche Igwe is still alive. Again, the first Iwhuruoha journalist, a graduate of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, who wrote for Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe’s West African Pilot Newspaper. Honokwuru Obasiolu was at Aluu in Ikwerre Local Government Area tortured by Biafran soldiers and later buried alive on suspicion too that he was a Saboteur. Honokwuru Obasiolu hailed from Rumuigbo and had gone to Aluu to see the condition of his pregnant wife who had gone to the parents at Aluu to take cover in the midst of

sporadic shootings during the escalation of the war in 1967. When the wife came back from the farm to hear what has befallen the husband, she collapsed and dies with the pregnancy. His only daughter, Dr (Mrs) Ige is still alive. This may not be all but the Iwhuruoha war experiences are pathetic and calls for sympathy and compensation in terms of appointments in government and infrastructural developments.

Conclusion

Here in this work, it can be understood the prominent and invaluable roles Iwhuruoha people played during the Nigerian civil war notwithstanding their sufferings and hardship. As the war ended, it seems that memories of the achievements or participation of the people in the war efforts got disappeared, otherwise, their roles should have been the stepping stone to higher levels of achievements in the present times. Today, the people are trying to shore up some strength in executing valuable projects in all areas of human endeavour not from the experiences of the war but through innovative approaches as dictated by modern times.

Though there are negative consequences of their participation in the war, their ability and intelligence should have been highlighted and harnessed to full advantage in order to develop strong and influential male and female elite within the Iwhuruoha nation and Rivers State generally. Unfortunately the war experience did not last for too long. This, may apparently be for reasons of ethnic hate or discontentment in the miseries metted out to those termed as minority saboteurs whose so termed sabotage was nothing compared to the negative activities of starving Igbo who out of frustration assisted federal troops with intelligence information as to Biafran strength and military capabilities. Some soldiers engaged in these activities in order to receive relief materials in the form of food items to mitigate the problems of starvation that stared them on the face.

The socialization process during the war contrary to expectations gave great impetus to internal colonialism of the large ethnic majority group in Rivers State to oppress and subdue the yearnings and aspirations of the people for a higher stake in rebuilding the status of the people during the war. The bitter experiences of the war created the need in the minds of the people to be educated and be literate enough to compete in a challenging environment of today.

Again, the people's ability to mitigate conflicts has always been overlooked but it is hoped that emerging trends of the present civilization will lift Iwhuruoha people beyond the present situation. Analyzing and studying to enlighten the Iwhuruoha people and their contributions towards war efforts will make meaningful contributions towards historical reconstruction. And efforts of others outside Igbo ethnic nationality who have done well to execute the success of the Biafran heroes should be appreciated by all historians. Once this is done, then, of course, the efforts of Iwhuruoha people and the hardship they endured especially in the hands of opposing soldiers can be appreciated.

Economically and politically, the experiences of Iwhuruoha people can be considered worthwhile except that they soon forgot about them all in order to face the challenges ahead. Otherwise, those experiences were good enough to make the people stand the test of the times and the younger generation able to borrow from the experiences to match on to develop potentials necessary to influence decisions within the Nigerian State. Meanwhile, it was difficult on the other hand, to see Iwhuruoha women in leadership positions at both Federal and regional levels as a result of lack of enthusiasm in the things that today concern the Nigerian political equation. Not until Iwhuruoha people are able to come out of the doldrums can they be seen

within the ambit of the Nigerian political discourse. But times and date remain the variable factors that will determine the position of Iwhuruoha people in the scheme of things in Nigeria. It is believed that it will not be too long just as the men have quickly matured to positions of leadership and decision making both in the state and federal levels. Recently, Iwhuruoha women seems to have come out of age as many of them are now occupying leadership positions and playing significant roles in the scheme of things in Rivers State.

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