PART I

Essays

Post-War Reintegration, Reconstruction and Reconciliation Among the Anioma People of Nigeria

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Abstract

Much has been written on the Nigerian Civil War. However, its impact on some minority groups has been largely neglected. This oversight has affected scholarly treatment of how forces emanating from the war impacted the Anioma people. Though predominantly Igbo-speaking, the Anioma were geographically on the Nigerian side during the war. The dynamics of the war as an ethnic conflict ensured that Aniomaland was a major battlefront. At the end of the war, the Anioma were a distressed group. Houses, homes, careers, dreams, aspirations and individuals lay in ruins. This left the people and their territory in need of major rehabilitation. This article focuses on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the Anioma into the society. It attempts this against the background of the Nigerian government's policy of rehabilitation and the trumpeted principle of "no victor, no vanquished," which dominates discourses on the war. Employing primary and secondary sources, the work probes how the Anioma people fared under the post-war rehabilitation program at different levels. It argues that it was difficult for the Nigerian government and society to completely forget the bitterness of the war even while implementing the rehabilitation program. This left the program struggling to manage two diametrically opposed principles, resulting in its merely scratching the surface after promising much.

The Anioma occupy a unique place in the history of the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), a conflict that pitched the Igbo group of the former Eastern Region against Nigeria. Aniomaland was geographically on the Nigerian side of the divide but became a major theater of fighting. Aniomaland lies in the middle reaches of the lower Niger River's western bank in Nigeria's Delta State.

Along the western bank of the Niger, it stretches from Onyaa axis in the south to Ebu in the north. Further upland away from the Niger bank, the territory goes as far as the Odiani clan. Here, the territory has a common boundary with Esanland in Edo State just like it does on the Ebu axis on the Niger Valley. In geographical terms, Aniomaland is bounded in the east by the River Niger, with Anambra and Imo states located at the eastern bank of the river. The territory has a huge stretch of boundary with Edo state on its western axis. In the southwest, it is bounded by Bomadi, Isoko-South, Isoko-North and Ughelli North local government areas of Delta State. The area has been referred to as Western Igboland, a descriptive term that seeks to differentiate them from the other Igbo groups across the River Niger's eastern bank. The term also takes cognizance of the location of Aniomaland on the western side of the River Niger.

Most Anioma are regarded as ethnically Igbo. During the war, this ethnic affiliation made victims of them. They were treated with suspicion by the Nigerian side, which caused many challenging circumstances for them. The war battered them physically, drained them emotionally and even robbed them of their dignity.[1] The end of the war represented a respite from their travails and an opportunity to pick up the pieces of their broken lives. This need for rehabilitation was important if the future was not to be permanently bleak. This necessity coincided with the federal government's twin declarations: the principle of "no victor, no vanquished" as well as the policy of reintegration, reconstruction and reconciliation (the 3Rs). The promises presented by these canons meant a new dawn for the Anioma. This study shows that though the federal government promised to reconstruct areas devastated by the war and rehabilitate victims of the war, the program did very little to heal the gaping physical and social wounds left behind by the war in Aniomaland. It highlights how the Anioma people were largely ignored by the federal program of reconstruction and forced to lick the wounds inflicted on them by the war. This study brings to light some rather hidden aspects of post-war developments in Aniomaland and among the Anioma people. It attempts a deepening of the larger meaning of the war and its particular consequences for a section of the Nigerian community.

The story of post-war reconstruction among the Anioma has not been sufficiently interrogated. Daniel Olisa Iweze's work on

the rehabilitation program among the Anioma focused on how the Ogbemudia Mid-West regional regime reconstructed economic and social infrastructure, but it excluded the federal effort in that regard.[2] Iweze has also written on how post-war inter-ethnic challenges affected the Anioma in Mid-Western Nigeria, which highlighted how the war affected inter-group relations between the Anioma and other ethnic groups in the Mid-West.[3] Emma Okocha's book also dealt with aspects of the rehabilitation program among the Anioma but it limited itself to the efforts of the Mid-West State government and the Catholic Church in collaboration with Quaker Service in the old Asaba Division.[4] Stanley I. Okafor commented briefly on the efforts made by the Asaba community in Aniomaland to drag itself up from the wounds of war. The work showed how the Asaba Development Union helped in the development of Asaba, particularly at the end of the Nigerian Civil War.[5] This study builds on these various works on aspects of the impact of the war on sections of Aniomaland and some post-war efforts aimed at ameliorating them. The present study is an attempt to expand the scope and articulate the overall phenomenon of post-war resettlement and rehabilitation in Aniomaland. While acknowledging the seminal and pivotal role of existing works in the field, the present study attempts a more holistic approach through a consideration of the role of non-governmental groups as well as governments in rehabilitating the Anioma people. In discussing these two broad headings, the study presents a background to the phenomenon. It also looks at the role of nongovernmental organizations, including the Catholic Church, the Quaker Service of the United States of America, and the Anioma people in the process of post-civil war rehabilitation. The role played by the Mid-West State Government is also highlighted. The study also examines the fate that befell Anioma civil servants in the Mid-West as well as officers in the Nigerian armed forces within the context of the 3Rs.

It is noteworthy that a blueprint released by the federal military government in 1968 was premised on the need to help heal the wounds of war, which promised to care for victims of the war; rehabilitate soldiers who fought on both sides; compensate all who lost property in the war; resettle all who fled normal places of residence or business: and reconstruct all destroyed roads, bridges and public buildings. When details of the rehabilitation programme

are examined closely, it becomes doubtful if the laudable principles outlined in the blueprint were extended to the Anioma. Mid-West civil servants and armed forces personnel of Anioma extraction were discriminated against by the Mid-West and federal governments, respectively, at the end of the war. With that, it is questionable whether the blueprint's general principles were formulated with the Anioma people in mind.

Due to the nature of the work, this study utilizes oral data alongside other sources, including interviews focused on the various facets of the post-war reconstruction program in Aniomaland. Oral data was obtained from interviews with 15 informants between 2005 and 2012. At the time of interview, they were aged between 56 and 86. At the end of the war in 1970, the youngest informant was 16, while the oldest was 45. Only one informant lacked primary education. With the exception of four, all had post-secondary education. One was a retired top civil servant, four were teachers, three were retired academy-trained military officers, one a catholic priest, and one a retired nurse. Others were a politician, a community leader, two retired public servants, and a farmer. Three of them were women. Only two of the informants were not residing in Aniomaland during and immediately after the war. All have their ancestral roots in Aniomaland. Interviews were conducted in the indigenous Igbo language and English, recorded and later transcribed.

Background to Post-Civil War Rehabilitation in Aniomaland

The war occurred between July 6, 1967 and January 12, 1970, after the former Eastern Region seceded from Nigeria and created the new state of Biafra on May 30, 1967. Its leaders cited acts of injustices and cruelty against people of the Eastern Region as reason for opting out of Nigeria.[6] The Igbo of the Eastern Region dominated Biafra. Intrinsically, the war was between the Igbo group, the majority of whom were in the Eastern Region, and the Nigerian state.

The ethnic underpinning of the conflict brought the peripheral Anioma Igbo group of the Mid-West Region into the picture. The war reached them when Biafran forces invaded the former Mid-West Region on August 9, 1967, through Asaba

in Aniomaland. Anioma officers in the Fourth Area Command of the Nigerian Army stationed in the Mid-West were accused of complicity in the invasion.[7] The Anioma-born Lt.Col. Conrad Nwawo, 4th Area Command Commander, has dismissed this charge as untrue, pointing out that the command lacked requirements for military resistance.[8] Further, because many Anioma-born officers of the command eventually fought on the Biafran side, a top federal commander in the war suspected the Anioma of harboring pro-Biafran sympathies.[9] Other Mid-Western ethnic groups suspected their Anioma neighbors of being used as surrogates to establish a Biafran government headed by the Igbo over the Mid-West. Thus, the ethnic affiliation of the Anioma with the Igbo of Biafra shaped the character of the war in Aniomaland.

Militarily, the last batch of Biafran forces retreated across the Niger Bridge on October 4, 1967, but Biafran military maneuvers continued in Aniomaland until the official end of the war on January 15, 1970.[10] The war in Aniomaland, particularly in the immediate vicinities of the Niger River, was thus brutal and bloody. The consequences included the deaths of about 2,000 non-combatant civilians, extensive loss of personal property, homelessness, destitution, and starvation. It also resulted in losses of government jobs by many Anioma people. At the end of the war, the Anioma were in need of rehabilitation and reintegration into Nigerian society.

In the Beginning

The process of national revival took off in the heat of the war in 1968 in areas conquered from Biafra, which started shrinking almost immediately. By the fourth day of fighting, Nigerian troops had taken Ogoja and the university town of Nsukka in the north of the territory. Despite these losses, Biafran forces halted the federal advance around Obollo-Eke, Obollo-Afor and Eha-Amufu. However, they remained under intense pressure in the only flank of the war as of July 20, 1967.[11] On July 25, 1967, the federal side opened a second flank with an amphibious landing at Bonny by the 3rd Marine Command under Lt.Col. Benjamin Adekunle. Perhaps to relieve itself of some military pressure, Biafra opened to invade the Mid-West on August 9, 1966. Enugu, the capital city

of Biafra, fell to federal forces on October 4, 1967, the same day Biafran troops retreated into Biafra through the Niger Bridge at Asaba. By March 1968, Biafra had lost much territory, including the commercial city of Onitsha that bordered Asaba across the Niger River. To cater to the needs of people living in liberated parts of Biafra and those in areas expected to fall into the federal column, the federal government launched the rehabilitation scheme while the war continued. It was initiated in anticipation of eventual victory in the war.

The rehabilitation project aimed to house internally displaced persons (IDPs), shelter the homeless, feed the hungry, re-absorb public servants and effect genuine national reconciliation. The Federal Ministry of Finance produced a document containing the directive principles of a post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction program in Nigeria. Among other items, it listed the following as its guiding tenets:

1. The surviving victims of past disturbances and present military operations shall be cared for with utmost compassion.
2. All soldiers, no matter on which side they had fought shall be rehabilitated and faithfully employed at the end of military operations. It must be noted that one good thing about the present emergency is that it has helped to reduce unemployment throughout the country. It would be a mistaken policy of the worst kind to allow federal troops and rebel soldiers to go unemployed.
3. Those whose property has been destroyed or damaged as a result of civil disturbances shall be reasonably compensated.
4. All those who had fled from their normal places of residence or business shall be resettled and, if possible, helped to make a new start.
5. All roads, bridges, and public buildings destroyed shall be reconstructed.[12]

The document was a promise and a hope that seemed to have sat quite well with the wishes and aspirations of war-ravaged Nigerians, particularly the Anioma.

Nongovernmental Post-War Rehabilitation of the Anioma People

Essentially, the post-war rehabilitation of the Anioma people took place at two levels: governmental and non-governmental. At the non-governmental level, the rehabilitation of the Anioma people kicked-off in 1968. The Rev. Fr. John Kunirum Osia relocated Ibusa's elderly, infirm, and some women and children to the St. Patrick's College internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Asaba. At the camp he ministered to the spiritual and physical needs of the IDPs. He also interacted with the international observer team that visited under the leadership of General W.A. Milroy of Canada. According to Osia himself, he told them "the truth about the brutal massacres in Asaba and the general sufferings of the Anioma people as a result of the activities of federal troops."[13] Federal authorities were uncomfortable with his comments. He was reprimanded for his outspokenness and subsequently advised by a senior priest, the Rev. Fr. Pedro Martin, then Federal Army Chaplain, to leave the camp. Undaunted, he refused to abandon the camp and continued his services to the IDPs both within and outside the camp.

The process that brought Osia into the picture as a caregiver for a section of the Anioma in the war will help us understand his role in the crisis. Ordained in 1966, he spent his first ten months as a priest in Warri before he was transferred to Agenebode. Osia arrived in Agenebode on May 30, 1967: the day Biafran announced its secession. The parish priest was on vacation and as assistant parish priest, Osia was temporarily in charge. However, providence soon moved him to the theater of war after he replaced the Rev. Fr. Patrick Ekpu as parish priest at Ibusa's St. Augustine's Catholic Church. The Esan-born Ekpu felt unsafe with the ethnic tensions of the war and had been threatened by Biafran soldiers. The Catholic Church transferred him to Igueben in Esanland and replaced him with the Anioma-born Rev. Fr. John Kunirum Osia.

At Ibusa, Osia ploughed his energy and influence into the task of rehabilitating some Anioma IDPs and invited the American Quaker Service to assist. In early 1969, feeling that the war was winding down, Osia obtained the permission of Nigerian military authorities to move Ibusa's IDPs at St. Patrick's College, Asaba, back home. From February 7 to 9, 1969, he transferred them into

the camp at St. Thomas' College, Ibusa, from where they eventually returned to their homes. The good treatment they received from the church and the Quaker Service persuaded those still holding out in the bush to return to town. Between February and March 1969, it was estimated that over 2,000 people left their bush hide-outs for Ibusa on the encouragement of Osia.[14] 598 of them were documented as having been rescued from the bush.[15] They joined the earlier returnees from Asaba in camp where they were fed and cared for until they eventually left for their respective houses. In feeding them, the church received a lot of assistance from the Quaker Service of the United States of America.[16]

In Osia's search for help to surmount the monumental challenges of rehabilitating the Ibusa people, he contacted George Klein of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Klein in turn asked Osia to contact a certain Larry Archibald of the Quaker Service, who was carrying out some projects in Calabar at that time. Klein came to Ibusa, mapped the town, and marked locations to site development projects, particularly boreholes. Klein then brought in Professor Olu Aina, who was with the Quaker Service in Calabar. Together, they directed Quaker Service projects at Ibusa, where they established an office and a workshop. When they conducted survey needs of the surrounding communities around Ibusa at the behest of the Mid-West Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction, the Quaker Service expanded to Asaba, Okpanam, Achalla, Okwe, the Oko clan, Ogwashi-Uku and Isheagu in July 1970.

The activities of the Quaker Service among the Anioma people at that time shows how instrumental they were in helping the people wipe away their tears. The Quaker Service assisted in reconstructing some damaged sections of Sacred Heart Primary School, Ibusa, and St. John's Primary School, Achalla. They also helped renovate the Holy Trinity Primary School, Convent Girls' School, and St. Thomas' Primary School, All Saints Primary School, and St. Patrick's College, Asaba, all in Asaba, and the Local Authority Primary School in Ibusa.[17] By the end of 1969, although many damaged schools in Aniomaland still needed repairs, virtually all schools in the area had re-opened for classes.

The Quaker Service profoundly impacted the economic well-being of the Anioma people through initiatives that had layers of multiplying effects on affected communities. In Oko-Ogbele,

Oko-Anala, Oko-Amakom and Isheagu, they assisted fishermen with nearly two thousand fishing nets. This assistance included 4,700 fishing hooks and 7,600 floaters.[18] They gave Isheagu and Achalla a cassava grating machine each. The communities were made to manage the machines and the earnings. Additionally, they supplied an outboard engine boat to Oko-Ogbele for easy transportation of people and goods.[19]

The Quaker Service also got involved in the physical reconstruction of damaged infrastructure in Aniomaland to increase economic activity. For example, they actively participated in the free supply of building materials for the reconstruction of Asaba's Ogbeogonogo Market. The Asaba Urban District Council hired and paid for the skilled labor involved. The larger picture of the Quaker Service's involvement in reconstructing and re-floating the post-war Anioma society was its participation in the procurement and distribution of building materials. In this scheme, the Service established a workshop at Ibusa, and had its headquarters in the Anioma area. Additional workshops for the manufacture of school furniture were also established at Asaba and Okpanam. Employing about 80 carpenters, the two workshops operated for six months. To deepen its commitment to its self-appointed task of giving the Anioma people back their lives, the Quaker Service got into a business partnership with an indigenous firm. Based in Ibusa, KOMA Nigeria Limited manufactured doors, window frames, panels, and flush door shutters. The Quaker Service subsidized the venture heavily at two ends. It advanced a loan to KOMA of materials needed in the construction of these items. The finished products were then purchased by the Quaker Service and handed over to the Mid-West government's subsidized stores in Ogwashi-Uku and Asaba for sale.[20]

Osia confessed to being shocked at the commitment of the Quaker Service and how beneficial its activities were for the Anioma within a short period of time. The Mid-West State government soon embraced the organization's efforts and signed agreements to deepen its rehabilitation work. The Quaker Service and USAID did a survey plan of Ibusa in October 1969, and of Asaba and other communities in 1970. This initiative formed the basis of the partnership between it and the Mid-West State government. Both the Mid-West Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction and the Ministry of Education were

critical partners in the collaboration. As part of this agreement, USAID volunteered 315,000 Nigerian pounds principally for a housing project and some public works in Ibusa and Asaba.[21] Later, the Mid-West State Water Board got involved in the Quaker Service's rehabilitation and expansion of the Ibusa water scheme. The Quaker Service spent about15,000 Nigerian pounds on equipment.

The Anioma people were just as involved as others in finding solutions to the challenges of post-war life. They ensured that every family head had livelihoods and settled into normal life as quickly as possible. They enacted this plan at two levels. Being predominantly farmers, many Anioma lost their crops, particularly their principal crop, yam. Because they could not access their farms during the war, the bush grew over unharvested yams and choked them. Almost everywhere in Aniomaland, the response was the same: Individuals who had seed yams shared with those that had none.[22] This gave families the opportunity to start farming afresh and enabled them to subsequently feed their households. At the level of constructing new houses for the homeless, the Anioma people resurrected their time-tested cooperative culture of being their brothers' keepers. Interviews in affected segments of Aniomaland show that individuals who rebuilt their mud houses paid nothing for the labor of erecting their walls. They entertained those who gave their labor freely with food and drinks, and spent monies on roofing sheets, doors, and windows.[23]

This communal spirit was not restricted to helping individuals reconstruct their abodes. It extended to the level of communities coming together to build infrastructure that served the entire community. For instance, the Asaba community collectively built its Township Stadium as a way of giving the town facilities capable of helping to reduce post-war distress. The project was eventually taken over from the Asaba community by the state government and expanded into the modern Stephen Keshi Stadium.[24] The Okpanam Community Development Union was instrumental in the town's electricity, water, and post office projects at the end of the war.[25] In addition, the Ibusa community not only donated the land but also cleared the bush at the site of the town's General Hospital.[26]

Government Efforts in Rehabilitating the Anioma People

The Mid-West State government was also involved in the work of rehabilitating the Anioma people even if it was limited by a paucity of funds. This became the issue because, as we shall see, Aniomaland was excluded from the areas that needed rehabilitation at the end of the war. Before outlining the activities of the Mid-West State government in the rehabilitation of the Anioma, information on the larger picture will be beneficial in clarifying certain questions.

Certain government actions, including the promulgation of Decree 41 of 1968 by the Federal Military Government, constrained the activities of the Mid-West State government in its post-war efforts of rehabilitating the Anioma. For the Anioma people, this decree ensured that the whole scheme took off under some avoidable disadvantages. In 1968, acting on a faulty premise that no part of the Mid-West witnessed damage in the war, the federal government rolled out Decree 41. In establishing the National Rehabilitation Commission for Emergency Relief Operation and Post-War Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation, the decree excluded the Mid-West from its area of operation by only concentrating on the former Eastern Region that seceded to form Biafra. The Commission's mandate included the collection and distribution of relief materials from international agencies to war-ravaged communities. Given that the war had ravaged sections of Aniomaland in the Mid-West, the formal exclusion of the Mid-West, including Aniomaland, was a fundamental flaw. The exclusion meant that the Mid-West State government and the Anioma people navigated the challenge almost alone. Both started with the odds stacked against them. Given its limited resources, however, the Mid-West government put up a courageous performance and did relatively well. It is noteworthy that despite being outside the National Rehabilitation Commission's core area of interest, the Mid-West State rehabilitation program eventually received some assistance from the commission. This occurred when the Military Governor of the Mid-West successfully appealed to the Commission for assistance.[27] However, the Commission did not officially operate in the Mid-West.

The Mid-West took its own initiative by converting a committee that had seen the state through many crises into the Mid-West

Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Committee. The old committee was established in 1963 in the wake of the excision of the new Mid-West Region from the old Western Region. In 1966, it helped rehabilitate displaced Mid-Westerners in the aftermath of the killings in the North and in Lagos. Originally named the Mid-West Rehabilitation Committee, in its third incarnation to take care of war-ravaged Mid-Westerners in 1968, it got a new name: the Mid-West Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Committee.

Overall, the Mid-West government took a three-pronged approach to rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. First, it created a Ministry of Community Development and Rehabilitation. Second, committees headed by local traditional rulers were established in every community to oversee the job of rehabilitation, reconstruction, and reconciliation. Third, the state's Military Governor made it clear to all traditional rulers that the success or failure of the scheme depended on them while urging them to tour their communities and ask their people to eschew bitterness and discrimination of any kind.

As part of its rehabilitation project, the Mid-West government got involved in the distribution of food items to IDP camps and to former IDPs now settled back in their homes. Such food items included corned beef, canned ground chicken, cornmeal, oatmeal, potato flakes, powdered milk, salted fish, assorted vitamin-fortified canned drinks, and brown rice, which was popularly called "alikama."[28] An informant who was in charge of relief materials in the Ukwuani and Ndosimili areas said that "food items were in such abundance that people got new rations before exhausting previous stocks."[29] This statement has been confirmed by some other sources at Ibusa, who still remember how refuse dumps were filled with various food items.[30] The Mid-West government obviously provided lavishly for the feeding of Anioma IDPs. At the Asaba temporary IDP camp at the United Africa Company (UAC) House and other locations in the town, over five cows were slaughtered daily to meet their protein requirements.[31] Generally, the government of the Mid-West demonstrated a high level of goodwill with the provision of food in the rehabilitation program, which was confirmed by informants at Ibusa[32], Iselegu[33], and Kwale.[34]

This goodwill was extended to the provision of public infrastructure in Aniomaland. One of the high points of the post-civil

war rehabilitation among the Anioma was the construction of four new hospitals in Aniomaland by the Mid-West State government: two general hospitals at Ibusa and Isheagu and two cottage hospitals at Akwukwu-Igbo and Obiarukwu.[35] On May 16, 1970, Major-General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's Head of State, officially opened the new Ibusa General Hospital built by the Mid-West State government. He planted an Indian almond tree christened the "Tree of Unity" at the hospital grounds on that day.[36]

Another major step taken by the government of the Mid-West in rehabilitating the Anioma people was revamping the Mid-West State-owned Asaba Textile Mills. Before the civil war, the textile mill was one of the Mid-West's three major industries and employed over 200 people. It was damaged by artillery shellings during the war and abandoned as a result, leaving these people unemployed, idle, and penniless. In rehabilitating the Asaba Textile Mills, the Mid-West government helped to cure some of the challenges confronting the Anioma. Not only were old workers recalled; new workers were recruited. As a huge industry, its reconstruction caused a major economic impact. Directly or indirectly, virtually every family around Asaba, Okwe, Ibusa, Okpanam, and Ogwashi-Uku felt the impact of the company's re-opening in the post-war years. By the mid-1970s, the mill had produced numerous jobs and clothed many. The company was revamped amid the poverty visited on the Anioma people by the civil war. The company's return to production contributed immensely to healing the wounds inflicted by the war. In the words of one its former workers, "the Asaba Textile Mills was one of the best things to happen to the Anioma people after the pains of the war."[37] Its reconstruction demonstrated the Mid-West State government's goodwill toward the Anioma people.

This level of goodwill cannot be said for other forms of rehabilitation in the Mid-West, particularly in the area of human relations and the treatment of public and civil servants of Anioma extraction during and after the war. The general atmosphere appears to have been poisoned by some persons with special interests and hidden agendas who used the Anioma as scapegoats. For example, the Anioma people experienced outright discrimination when they tried to reabsorb into their former positions in public service (at both the state and federal levels). The majority of them had left Benin in a haze of hatred directed toward them from

different quarters during the war because they were suspected of aiding Biafra. They deserted their offices for fear of being killed.[38] On coming back at the end of the war to reclaim their jobs or even to resign properly, many Anioma were treated with crass disrespect. While some were dismissed, others recovered their jobs after losing seniority to former subordinates. Yet some others were placed in limbo.

The case of F. C. Esedebe, a former Permanent Secretary in pre-war Mid-West and Secretary to Government/Head of Service in wartime Mid-West, is instructive. At the end of the war, he applied for re-absorption into the Mid-West Civil Service. He was turned down. And since he was not retired, he continued to be paid as a Permanent Secretary. Becoming frustrated by being forced to go to Benin City from Ibusa every month to cash unearned government money, he wrote to the State Military Governor asking for voluntary retirement in 1971. He was rebuffed and could not legally secure other employment. He stopped cashing the money, sent a letter to that effect to the Military Governor, and requested to see him. The governor refused to see him. Then in 1978, Navy Commander Huseni Abdulahi became Mid-West Military Administrator. Esedebe met with Abdulahi and was finally allowed to retire formally.[39]

The case of Chief Patrick Onyeobi of Asaba, who later became Head of Service and Secretary to Government in Bendel (former Mid-West) State, is also enlightening. He fled Benin City for Asaba in the wake of acute anti-Igbo feelings that accompanied the entry of federal troops into Benin City in September 1967. In the heat of the war in 1968, he applied for re-absorption into the Mid-West State civil service. He was summoned back to Benin after attending a re-absorption screening that resembled an inquest on his activities in the Mid-West under Biafran occupation. He was subsequently detained for twenty-seven months in Benin City, Kaduna, and Bauchi between 1968 and March 18, 1970. He applied again to get his job back and resumed in December 1970 after a long wait and the loss of his seniority.[40]

The experiences of Onyeobi and Esedebe could not have been intended to reconcile them with anyone or rehabilitate them. In another example, the wartime Asagba of Asaba, Obi Onyetenu, escaped to Biafra before the mayhem in Asaba. He was treated with reckless abandon on his return to the Mid-West after the war.

Before the war, he was the Vice Chairman of the Mid-West Traditional Rulers Council as a First-Class Chief. On his return after the war, he was demoted to the rank of a Third-Class Chief.[41] As his experience demonstrates, the Anioma elites were not treated with respect after the war.

It is important to survey the background of the hostility of some groups in the Mid-West to Anioma elite in the Mid-West public sphere. On October 26, 1967, the Mid-West State government announced the appointment of the Justice Omo-Ebo Tribunal of Enquiry. Better known as the "Rebel Atrocities Tribunal of Enquiry", it was to, among other things:

1. inquire into the role played by public officers and other civilians with respect to secessionists' activities before and during secessionist troops' occupation of the state, and
2. to find out in what respect (if any) the part played by a public officer and any member of the public fell short of or departed from standard conduct of propriety that can reasonably be expected to be shown or adhered to by persons in their positions.[42]

Everything around the tribunal made it appear like an inquisition into all the Anioma people. All Anioma traditional rulers within reach were invited to answer questions about their alleged roles in the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West and maltreatment of non-Anioma Mid-Westerners.[43] Essentially, the aim was to discredit the Anioma and entrap them within the Mid-West. Senior Mid-West civil servants of Anioma origin were grilled about their alleged complicity in the Biafran plot against the Mid-West.[44] At the tribunal sittings, the deep state of poisoned intergroup and interpersonal relations was clear. All sorts of allegations of pro-Biafran activities were heaped on Mid-Westerners of Anioma extraction. They were pointedly accused of aiding the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West and participating in the Biafran administration of the Mid-West.[45]

A secret memo signed by all Mid-West permanent secretaries a day after the announcement of the Atrocities Tribunal captured the poisoned state of affairs in the Mid-West. The memo advised the Mid-West State Governor not to allow the Anioma section of the Mid-West back into the post-war Mid-West. It highlighted the dirty and bitter struggle for power among the Mid-West's top civil servants in the absence of senior civil servants of Anioma origin.

Before the war, nine of the twelve permanent secretaries in the Mid-West were Anioma. They were displaced by the crisis and their positions were taken over by civil servants from other sections of the Mid-West. These same people, perhaps in order to retain their positions, warned through a confidential memo about the dire consequences of allowing the Anioma back into the Mid-West. In its content and general direction, the memo spoke volumes about how some non-Anioma Mid-West civil servants felt about their distressed and absent Anioma compatriots. Their recommendations regarding the Anioma in a future Nigeria read in part:

> . . . as a result of the event of the 9th of August 1967 and subsequent events when the Mid-West was occupied by rebel troops, there was no longer any basis for mutual trust, confidence and peaceful co-existence between the Mid-Western Ibos and the rest of the Edo-speaking Mid-West and the general feeling was that they no more wanted to have anything to do with them: if they were brought back His Excellency might have a terrible crisis in his hands.[46]

To meet the challenge presented by the Anioma, they suggested three possible solutions:

a. That his Excellency should consult with the Head of the Federal Government to merge to the East Central State the areas which now constitute the Igbo-speaking parts of the state;
b. That they should be constituted into a separate state;
c. That they should be declared a special area i.e. a Government by itself like the Union State in India with special relationship with either the Federal Government or the Midwest State.[47]

Governor Ogbemudia rejected outright the suggestions by the permanent secretaries. We may never know how far the mindset that produced the memo influenced the treatment meted out to Anioma people in the Mid-West public service. The secret memo spoke volumes about some deep-seated chauvinism against the Anioma people in the Mid-West.

Mid-West top civil servants attempted to treat their Anioma colleagues as second-class Mid-Westerners and unwanted on account of ethnic prejudice. A similar pattern extended to the

treatment of Anioma officers in the Nigerian Army after the war can be described as callous and intended to dismiss them as inconsequential expendables. As a group, Anioma army officers were not treated with equity. Even if the federal government's pronouncement had not been "no victor, no vanquished," it still would have been true to say they were treated unfairly.

The "no victor, no vanquished" mantra was not extended to most Anioma army officers that crossed over to Biafra in the Nigerian Civil War. No matter from what prism one views it, the treatment extended to them was intended to continue the experiences that drove them to Biafra. How else do we interprete the following facts? In 1970, the federal government promulgated Decree No. 46. A part of it expressed its intention to prevent Igbo civil servants and corporate officials from reintegrating in the federal and state public services, including the armed forces and other security agencies. It also barred the Igbo from establishments in which any of the governments in the federation had controlling or substantial interest.[48] According to Paul Obi-Ani, the decree

> . . . was enacted to prevent Igbo top civil servants and corporation officials from being re-engaged in (a) the public service of the federation; (b) the public service of any state of the federation; (c) the service of a body corporate or incorporate established under a Federal or State law; (d) a company in which any of the governments of the Federation has controlling or substantial interest.[49]

In its broad sweep of what it intended for the Igbo, the Anioma included, the decree imposed punishment on the Igbo community. Its ethos eventually influenced the Federal Military Government's Commission of Equity, headed by Brigadier Adeyinka Adebayo, which investigated the pre-war and wartime activities of Anioma officers. It returned a guilty verdict on virtually all of them. They were tagged with having aided the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West and dismissed from the army. Among those so dismissed were Lt. Cols. C. D. Nwawo, S. B. Nwajei and B. O. Ochei; Maj. A. O. Okonkwo; and Capt. J. W. Isichei.[50] Moreover, most pre-war Anioma military officers were thrown in jail until 1975.[51] The exercise appeared to be punishment for the Anioma officers for their roles in Biafra; at the same time, there was no such punishment of their counterparts from the East for the same offense.

Decades after the war, Brigadier Adebayo, who had chaired the post-war Equity Commission that probed the activities of ex-Biafran soldiers and also served on the Supreme Military Council as Military Governor of the Western Region in the Gowon regime, said that having lost the war, the Igbo "would not be permitted to win the peace."[52] This statement seemed particularly apt in the policies toward Anioma officers, who suffered far more post-war discrimination than their Igbo counterparts in the East. The methods of post-war reabsorption and dismissals of Anioma officers show that this treatment was influenced by considerations outside the alleged collaboration with Biafra. Some officers who were active in Biafra but had connections in Lagos retired with benefits, while some others in the same category were dismissed.[53] Only three army officers of Anioma extraction of that era rose to significant heights in the Nigerian army between the end of the war in 1970 and 1999.[54] This incomplete reabsorption exercise into the Nigerian Army raises question about the targeting of Anioma officers for special bad treatment. Although they were dismissed from the army and detained for between four and five years after the war for alleged collusion in the Mid-West invasion, Biafran officers of Eastern Igbo origin were not subsequently imprisoned for their roles in the invasion. That was punishment without equity.

It will appear that Anioma officers were told the brutal and frank truth: that their minority people lost a war, and nobody could defend them. In the post-war era, the world saw Gowon match his "no victor, no vanquished" pledge with action, his eyes riveted on the former Biafra. The area became a forbidden ground for vengeance, and the government needed to vent its spleen. It therefore fell on the Anioma group to be the scapegoat that must pay for all that was odious about Biafra.

It was, however, not all gloom for Anioma workers in the Mid-West, as those with private (nongovernmental) employment before the war found it relatively easy to get back their jobs. This was particularly so for teachers in primary and secondary schools that were run by Christian missions or owned by private individuals. Since these schools were religious or private and not government-owned, they did not share in the tenets that informed the discrimination against Anioma workers' reintegration into governmental organizations.

Conclusion

As the above evidence suggests, the federal government's rehabilitation program did not include the Anioma people. Decree 41 of 1968 excluded them from the National Rehabilitation Commission that worked to implement the so-called 3Rs. Indeed, it ran against the beautiful proposals and promises of the federal blueprint on rehabilitation released earlier in 1968. When the Mid-West Government attempted to implement the rehabilitation program, it saw varying degrees of success. The physical aspects of the reconstruction and rehabilitation program were a measured success, but, at the same time, the witch-hunting and inquisitions of the atrocities panel were an unofficial condemnation of the Anioma. It placed the onus on the Anioma to *prove* their innocence rather than merely declaring it. The unflattering secret document that emanated from Mid-West permanent secretaries in October 1967 was a symptom of antagonism toward the Anioma. It set the tone for the ill treatment meted out to Mid-West civil servants of Anioma origin after the war. It spoke in a million decibels about inter-group rivalry and heightened ethnic tensions in the Mid-West.

Perhaps because the federal government decided that the Anioma should be used as scapegoats and excluded them from the 3Rs, its handling of the reabsorption of Anioma officers into the armed forces was catastrophic. The principle of "no victor, no vanquished" and the fabled program of the 3Rs excluded Anioma officers in the Nigerian armed forces. It is possible that the alleged role of Anioma officers in the Biafran invasion of the Mid-West was partially responsible for the post-war unannounced hostility toward them.

For the Anioma, both the state and federal governments constituted major stumbling blocks to true reconciliation in the post-war years. It is unclear whether it was the attitude of the general populace that pushed the government into action or if it was the other way around. However, the mental reservation about accepting the Anioma as equal compatriots negatively influenced efforts at post-war rehabilitation and reconciliation. Though the program tried to assuage the fears of the Anioma, it failed because while it gave with the left hand in a physical sense, it psychologically took away with the right hand. It succeeded in scratching the surface. The fissures occasioned by wartime injuries have

remained long after the war and have caused major issues with which the Anioma continue to grapple.

Notes

[1] Emma Okocha, *Blood on the Niger: First Black-on-Black Genocide* (New York: Gomslam Books, 2012), 47-179; Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 2007), 71-208. See also Odigwe A. Nwaokocha "Remembering the Massacre of Civilians in Aniomaland During the Nigerian Civil War," *Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, 4, 7, 2019, 189-208. Over 2,000 civilians are believed to have died in the war in Aniomaland. Many houses belonging to elite were damaged. The war also created about 5,000 internally displaced persons. Most Anioma public servants, including senior military officers and top civil servants, also lost their jobs and social standing within the Nigerian setting. Above all, the general treatment meted out to them by federal fighting troops was humiliating.

[2] Daniel Olisa Iweze, "Ogbemudia's Regime and Post-Civil War Reconstruction of Economic and Social Infrastructure in Western Igboland, 1970-1975," *Igbo Studies Review* 3, (2015): 101-119.

[3] Daniel Olisa Iweze, "Post-Civil War Inter-Group Relations: The Midwestern Igbo and Non-Igbo Groups in the Midwest State," in *Remembering Biafra: Narrative, History, and Memory of the Nigerian Civil War*, eds. Chima J. Korieh and Ifeanyi Ezeonu (Glassboro, New Jersey: Goldline and Jacobs, 2011), 170-184.

[4] Okocha, *Blood on the Niger,* 185-188.

[5] Stanley I. Okafor, "Community Mobilization and Development: The Asaba Development Association," in *Hometown Associations: Indigenous Knowledge and Development in Nigeria*, eds. Alex Honey and Stanley Okafor, (Ibadan: Sam Bookman Publishers, 1999), 59.

[6] Republic of Biafra, Proclamation *of the Republic of Biafra* (Enugu: Government Printer, 1967).

[7] S.O. Ogbemudia, *Years of Challenge* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1991), 86-110; Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-70*, 29-30; Rex Niven, *The War of Nigerian Unity* (Ibadan: Evans, 1970), 115; John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 153-161; Fredrick Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafran Story* (London: Penguin Books, 1977 edn.), 118.

[8] Conrad Nwawo, interviewed by the author in Onicha-Olona, Nigeria, December 28, 2009.

[9] Obasanjo, *My Command,* 39.

[10] Fighting in the war ended on January 12, 1967. However, the official instruments of surrender were received from Biafrans at a ceremony in Lagos on January 15, 1979. Today, it is officially taken that the war ended on that date.

[11] See Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 123-144.
[12] Federal Ministry of Information, *Blueprint for Post-War Reconstruction* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1968), 4-5.
[13] John Kunirum Osia, interviewed by the author in Lagos, Nigeria, March 22, 2012.
[14] Clementina Igboba, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria, January 3, 2005.
[15] Okocha, *Blood on the Niger,* 190-207.
[16] Osia, interview, March 22, 2012.
[17] Okocha, *Blood on the Niger,* 185.
[18] Ibid., 187.
[19] Ibid., 187.
[20] F.C. Esedebe, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria, December 29, 2010.
[21] Okocha, *Blood on the Niger,* 184.
[22] Gbonu Ajumeze, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria, April 6, 2008; Enebeli Olise, interviewed by the author in Iselegu, Nigeria, October 30, 2010; Pius Unoshai, interviewed by the author in Isheagu, Nigeria, December 27, 2009.
[23] Okafor Udegbue, interviewed by author in Ogwashi-Uku, Nigeria, April 21, 2011; Unoshai, interview; Ajumeze, interview, April 6, 2008.
[24] Okafor, "Community Mobilization and Development: The Asaba Development Association," 59.
[25] Cyril Azubuogor, interviewed by the author in Okpanam, Nigeria, December 30, 2010.
[26] P. N. Ogbuze, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria, January 30, 2009.
[27] Mid-West State Ministry of Information, *Winning the Peace: An Address by the Military Governor of Midwest State to Traditional Rulers and People of the Midwest State at Benin City on Saturday, February 7, 1970* (Benin City: Government Printer, 1970), 2-4.
[28] Nwafulueze Agokei, interviewed by the author in Lagos, Nigeria, June 4, 2011.
[29] J. U. Dike, interviewed by the author in Utagba-Ogbe, Nigeria, August 4, 2008.
[30] Ngozi Aniedue, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria December 26, 2010.
[31] Osia, interview, March 22, 2012.
[32] Aniedue, interview, December 26, 2010.
[33] Enebeli, interview, October 30, 2010.
[34] Dike, interview, August 4, 2008.
[35] "Four New Hospitals Built in the Midwest", *Daily Times* (Nigeria), September 25, 1970, 25.
[36] P.N. Ogbuze, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria, January 30, 2009.
[37] Ifeanyi Onianwa, interviewed by the author in Asaba, Nigeria, February 25, 2007.
[38] The fate that befell the Anioma-born Lt. Col. Henry Igboba added to their fears. He had been locked up at the Benin prison by Lt. Col. Banjo, Commander

of the Biafran Army in the Mid-West. Left there while Biafran troops retreated toward the East, he was discovered and allegedly beheaded by federal troops. His body was never found.

[39] F. C. Esedebe, interviewed by the author in Ibusa, Nigeria, December 29, 2010.

[40] P. I. G. Onyeobi, "I Have Forgiven All," interview with *The Guardian on Sunday* (Nigeria), August 11, 2013, 22.

[41] Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War*, 188.

[42] Ogbemudia, *Years of Challenge*, 113.

[43] Esedebe, interview, December 29, 2010.

[44] Onyeobi, "I Have Forgiven All," 22-23.

[45] S.E. Orobator, *Political Conflicts and Crises in Africa: Origins, Development and Management, 1960-1995* (Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, 1996), 17-84.

[46] Quoted in Okocha, *Blood on the Niger*, 268-269.

[47] Ibid., 269.

[48] "Public Officers (Special Provisions) Decree No 46 of 1970," in Federal Military Government, *Annual Volume of Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1971), A 206-207.

[49] Paul Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War Social and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland, 1970-1983* (Enugu: Mikon Press, 1998), 65.

[50] "Dismissed Officers," *Daily Times* (Nigeria), November 11, 1971, 11.

[51] H.A. Asoya, interviewed by the author at Okpanam, Nigeria, December 30, 2010.

[52] "The Jerome Udoji Memoirs," *The Guardian* (Nigeria), November 12, 1995: B4.

[53] Asoya, interview, December 30, 2010.

[54] Maj. Gen. Onyekweli was a subaltern before the war and a junior staff officer to the then-Military Governor of the Mid-West, Lt. Col. David Ejoor. Together with his then fellow subaltern, the later Maj. Gen Ademokhai (a non-Anioma Mid-Westerner), and a junior staff officer to Ejoor, he crossed over to Biafra. They were pardoned and re-absorbed into the army allegedly for being special protégés of David Ejoor. Maj. Gen. Cyril Iweze, a second set (1968) graduate of the Nigerian Defence Academy in the heat of the war, fought on the Nigerian side. Brig. Godwin Alabi-Isama, a captain in 1967, has a Muslim mother from Northern Nigeria and bears a compound surname reflecting his mother's maiden name. He initially fought on the Biafran side in the Mid-West before defecting to the Nigerian side.