

BETWEEN FORCE OF REASON AND REASON FOR FORCE: LEGACY OF CHUKWUEMEKA ODUMEGWU- OJUKWU¹

By

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1. Introduction

I come to this responsibility with a sense of both gratitude and profound ambivalence. The decision of the Government of Anambra State to name this institution in honour of Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu is a considered and thoughtful one for which it deserves gratitude. In doing so, it honours history and memory in a way that makes them the focus of continuing and informed inquiry. Emeka Ojukwu graduated from Oxford University with degrees in history, an enterprise, which exists “so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds... may not be without their glory.”³ There is also another reason besides glory for which we must study history and recover memories that harbor it because an interest in history should enable future generations to glean the right lessons from the past. Doing

¹ Text of Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu Memorial Lecture, Chief Ben Nwazojie (SAN) Auditorium, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Monday, 5 November 2018.

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³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book 1,(Aubrey de Sélincourt, trans), London, Penguin, p. 3 (1954).

so requires a measure of both rigour and detachment. In turn, this asks that we be both critical and pursue objectivity.⁴

These are not easy pursuits when the subject matter is Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu. Ojukwu's life was characterized by extraordinary polarity and contradiction. He was, in his own words "born on 4th November, 1933, in Zungeru in the North, of eastern Nigerian extraction and brought up in Lagos, which is quasi-west".⁵ He was a polyglot, fluent in English, French, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, who became a secessionist leader and icon of an ethnic nationality. He was a cosmopolitan about whom one of his closest friends, Sam Aluko, a native Yoruba speaker, testified: "he spoke better Yoruba than I."⁶ He could count the late *Sarkin* Kano, Ado Bayero, among his life-long friends. Yet, it would be said of him that "he had an ambiguous relationship with Nigeria."⁷ He was a Republican who was a Chief; a self-confessed, "elitist" Brahmin with a popular touch;⁸ a voluble humanist whose ambition was "to be able to speak for the disadvantaged and the underprivileged people of Nigeria and possibly advance their cause".⁹ Yet, he fought a war in which many of these under-privileged perished.

Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was a war leader for whom war was nevertheless "a regrettable incident, because nobody liked blood-letting."¹⁰ He confessed a commitment "to discourage and prevent the emergence of a personality cult at all levels of authority"¹¹ but, in life and in death, has become the ultimate focus of personality cults. He was both bull-dog and under-dog, a man who lived a life of both considerable brilliance and catastrophic errors. He is celebrated as the inspiration for Igbo exceptionalism and yet is on record as having argued that it is "constitutionally invalid to seek to found an Igbo political party. Politically, it is lunacy to do so."¹² He was an

⁴ Raymond Martin, "Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Analytic View", 32:1 History and Theory, p. 25.

⁵ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, Ibadan, Spectrum Publishers, p. 174 (1989)

⁶ Sam Aluko, "What Ojukwu Told Me Before, During and After the War", *The Sun*, 3 Dec, 2011, reprinted in Chuks Iloegbunam, *General of the Peoples' Army*, Lagos, Press Alliance Network, 91 at p. 92 (2012)

⁷ Is'haq Modibbo Kawu, "Odumegwu-Ojukwu and the Truths We Owe the Dead", *Vanguard*, 1 December 2011

⁸ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 152

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 181

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 178

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 102

inveterate romantic who has nevertheless been accused of having had “no dreams for the Igbo.”¹³ Above all, he was the father of daughter with a mother from Northern Nigeria “brought up by a prominent Muslim family in Kaduna”,¹⁴ who led a war in which his principal adversary, Yakubu Gowon, was himself the father of a son from an Igbo woman born in the heart of the war (in 1968).¹⁵ This is not the only coincidence between the biographies of Ojukwu and Gowon. A mere five years after Ojukwu went into exile bringing the Nigerian Civil War to an end, his war-time adversary, Gowon, would himself be exiled, ironically by factors very much redolent of those that triggered the armed conflict in which they were implacable antagonists.

Despite these contradictions and coincidences or, perhaps, because of them, Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was the face of a lethal struggle over the future of a country and the coexistence of its peoples and remains the subject of bitter and passionate disagreements. Over seven years after his death in 2011, he remains the subject of passionate adoration and equally committed disagreement around which considerable memory remains to be recovered.

Amidst these passionate disagreements, the pursuit of understanding as to Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu’s legacy is a calling “to say what happened in the past and what it means that it happened.”¹⁶ This part of the undertaking invites us to articulate the force of reason. Yet, the issues over which such an inquiry must take place are for the most part associated with the reasons of historical force that have so often been at the heart of Nigeria’s turbulent narratives of leadership transition, inter-group identity, equity, and coexistence. It is an investigation of history and recovery of memory often deployed in the service of brutal identity politics. Investigating active memory is a delicate responsibility. This is why it is indeed a difficult responsibility to be asked to lead the first Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu memorial lecture. Located at the

¹³ Odiá Ofeimun, “The Mistakes Ojukwu Made”, *The News*, 5 December 2011

¹⁴ Abdullahi Tasiu Abubakar *et al*, “Nigeria: Ojukwu’s Secret Daughter Traced – She Lives in Kaduna”, *Daily Trust*, 9 December 2012, available at <https://allafrica.com/stories/201212101558.html>, accessed, 16 Oct, 2018

¹⁵ Ola’ Audu, “Ex-Nigerian Head Of State, Gowon, Accepts 48-Year-Old Son After DNA Test”, *Premium Times*, 10 March 2016, available at <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/199874-ex-nigerian-head-state-gowon-accepts-48-year-old-son-dna-test.html>

¹⁶ Raymond Martin, “Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Towards a Post Analytic View”, 32:1 *History and Theory*, p. 25 (1993)

intersection of “the unresolved relationship between history and memory”,¹⁷ it is that kind of assignment to which it is impossible to respond in the negative and for which an affirmative response must be garlanded with considerable reluctance.

About this pursuit, therefore, different points of view must be permitted. This lecture is not intended to arbitrate these differences of interpretation or points of view about a life whose fullest implications will remain the subject of considerable argument long after our years. Rather, in this location, at this time and for this generation, my aim must be modest: it is “I hope, to contribute in some manner towards preparing you to participate meaningfully in the debate when it explodes”,¹⁸ as explode, it surely must. Even more, it is to prepare you to lead such a debate as legatees of the man and a generation after whom and in perpetuity, the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu University has been endowed. This lecture series must, therefore, find space to celebrate the intellectual mission that Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu himself consecrated, thus: “to convince.... not to cajole; to debate not to decry, and to persuade rather than to pervert.”¹⁹

2. Prefatory Clarifications:

Before I set out, I wish to lay out my case for mitigation over my ambivalence and to declare my interests. As the first in the lecture series endowed in memory of the man after whom this institution is named, it would probably have been best to have the series begun by one of his living contemporaries from that stellar generation to which I must shortly pay homage in this lecture or perhaps from adjacent generation that knew him or worked closely with him. I am neither. I come to this undertaking armed with very poor, possibly even disqualifying credentials. Unlike many people in this auditorium, I have no memories of the Nigerian Civil War in which Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was a leading actor. I was born during the course of the war. My earliest memories begin from well after the end of the war. At my birth at Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, Ihiala, the attending Gynaecologist was Dr. Edwin Onwudiwe, whom many here will remember as the man who ran against Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu in that memorably controversial

¹⁷ Lasse Heerten, *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.12 (2017)

¹⁸ Adiele Afigbo, *The National Question in Nigerian History, Politics and Public Affairs*, Abia State University Press, p. 3 (2000).

¹⁹ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 85

Senatorial election in the old Anambra State in 1983; that election about which he would later lament: "I won. I knew I won, but I was declared loser by my own party."²⁰ Of course, I was merely an early teenager when all that happened, and, as such not in a position to take sides or cast a vote.

This lecture, therefore, must be seen as a mission of mutual discovery. Just as in 1983, I come still with no votes to cast. Unlike Mark Antony at Julius Caesar's eulogy, I'm here neither to bury Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu nor to praise him. On 2 March 2012, he was buried in style with Nigeria's then President and many other leaders from different parts and walks of life in attendance. Before and thereafter, he was and has been eulogized with greater eloquence and authority than I could ever muster on this occasion. Nigeria's then President, Goodluck Jonathan, no less, eulogized Ojukwu's life as "most worthy and memorable", with a "record of notable contributions to the evolution of modern Nigeria."²¹ With the benefit of those rites, Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu now quite fittingly belongs among the pantheon of an honoured ancestor.

There is a tendency to elevate the memory of our ancestors beyond reach, sanctifying them beyond investigation in a manner that does damage to the true weight of their legacies. It bears re-stating that Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu "was a human being; he was not a deity. He also was a hero; and not a heavenly saint. The world over, saints are fallible. They have their fair amount of failings and shortcomings. This accounts for why men and heroes are judged – not necessarily by one singular act – but by the totality of their works and the impact of their existence on their people and their nation."²² It is indeed the case that much of "what we now have in the public space are the memories of a myth and not the man."²³ Unraveling the diverse dimensions of the complex figure that he was must be the mission of this lecture series and of the University now dedicated to his memory. We can only scratch the surface in this inaugural edition.

It is fitting that this event takes place in a university. Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was a public figure who was actively involved all his life in the sometimes brutal contact sport that is politics. He was also a soldier and the first indigenous Quartermaster-

²⁰ Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, Abuja-Ibadan-Lagos, Spectrum Books, p. 81 (1989)

²¹ Reprinted in Chuks Iloegbunam, *General of the Peoples' Army*, Lagos, Press Alliance Network, p.9 (2012)

²² Sabella Abidde, "Unravelling the Ojukwu Mystique", *The Punch*, 30 Nov, 2011

²³ Olusegun Adeniyi, "Because He Was Involved", *Thisday*, Backpage, 1 Dec. 2011

General of the Nigerian Army, that position held by the staff officer responsible for supplies in the army. As he characteristically put it: "politics is a duty and I had to do my duty."²⁴ He remains a major issue in politics in Nigeria, especially in south-east Nigeria and in the relationship between south-east Nigeria and the rest of the country. I not unmindful of the fact that we are also in a febrile political season on the foothills of the campaign season for Nigeria's 2019 general elections. It is important to clarify for the sake of the students of this great university and their faculty, that this is an intellectual event not a political spectacle. Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was himself a substantial intellect, described by *Thisday* in its editorial on his death as "a bold man of artless candour."²⁵ This occasion surely warrants more candour and less artlessness. The day after his death, Chuks Iloegbunam, writing the *Sunday Vanguard* of 27 November 2011, speculated that "if he saw through to earth from the back of beyond, he would be mournful if his passing didn't throw us all in unmitigated contention."²⁶ Emeka Ojukwu's was a life lived in controversy about which it remains impossible for most to be agnostic. The man himself argued that "controversy performs a useful function in society and should be encouraged."²⁷ This event demands intellectual honesty, honour for memories that belong to us all and mutual respect for points of view or recalls that may seem to diverge but which are more likely to complement one another, always safe in the knowledge that those issues that we are unable to resolve at this sitting should hopefully get another hearing at the next convening of this lecture in 2019.

3. Legacy as A Full Retrospective

This lecture is instituted in memory of Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu in a university named to honour his legacy and that of his generation. My mission is not to define that legacy but to call attention to the need to do so. In preparing for this lecture, I undertook an unstructured straw poll across generations and different identity groups in Nigeria in which I posed one question: "so what is the legacy of Ojukwu?" Nearly every

²⁴ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p.115

²⁵ "The Exit of Ijele Ndigbo", *Thisday* Editorial, 4 Dec, 2011, available at <https://allafrica.com/stories/201112040002.html>, visited 15 Oct. 2018.

²⁶ Chuks Iloegbunam, "The Meaning of Emeka", *Sunday Vanguard*, 27 November 2011, Reprinted in Chuks Iloegbunam, *General of the Peoples' Army*, Lagos, Press Alliance Network, p.xiv (2012)

²⁷ Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p.85

respondent pointed to the Nigerian Civil War, very few could say what it was about the civil war that represented his legacy. None of my respondents could recall how Civil War began or how the shooting war started. For the record, as Philip Effiong recalls in his memoirs, "on 6 July 1967,.... war broke out in earnest on two fronts. At the Ogoja Sector, the Nigerian Army attacked Gakem and Obudu.... At Ukutu in Nsukka came the second front."²⁸

A legacy, however, is the product of a life in totality not just of a chapter or some of it. Born on 4 November 1933, Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was merely 32 when he became military Governor of Eastern Region; 33 when he declared the Biafran Secession, and 36 when he went into exile on 9 January 1970. After the end of the war, he lived for more than another 41 years, before his passing on 26 November 2011. His counterpart and contemporary on the Nigerian side of the Civil War, Yakubu Gowon, was even a little younger, born in October 1934. It is fair to claim that "the civil war was certainly not the book of Ojukwu's life. It was only a chapter in his book of life",²⁹ an important one, it must be conceded. Many of the dispositive military actors in the war were not much older. By comparison, the acts for which today we are called upon to judge the generation of Ojukwu and Gowon are the deeds of men who, if they had lived in today's Nigeria, would have been celebrating the benefits of the Not-Too-Young-To-Run Act. Obaro Ikime touches upon a germane issue when he says that "in a sense, it can be argued that the Civil War was born out of political inexperience."³⁰ Simon Kolawole is more pointed in saying that "we went to war in 1967 because our leaders were too young, too immature to manage the crises that followed the failed coup of 1966."³¹ On the Biafran side, Mbazulike Amaechi lamented that "while the politicians in the North and West were active in influencing decisions in Lagos, Ojukwu kept front-line politicians who had good contacts in the North and West in the cooler."³²

²⁸ Phillip Effiong, *Nigeria and Biafra: My Story*, Princeton, New Jersey, Sungai Books, pp 181-182 (2003)

²⁹ Charles Ofoji, "What Nigeria Owes Ojukwu", *Sahara Reporters*, 8 December 2011, available at <http://saharareporters.com/2011/12/08/what-nigeria-owes-ujukwu-charles-ofoji>, visited, 15 Oct. 2018.

³⁰ Obaro Ikime, "The Nigerian Civil war and the National Question: A Historical Analysis", in in Eghosa Osaghae, Ebere Onwudiwe & Rotimi Suberu, *The Nigerian Civil War and its Aftermath*, Ibadan, John Archers Ltd, 52 at p.65, (2002)

³¹ Simon Kolawole, "We Loved Him, We Hated Him", *Thisday*, 29 Nov. 2011 (Backpage)

³² Cited in Jerome Udoji, *Under Three Masters, Under Three Masters: Memoirs of an African Administrator*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, p. 100 (1995)

It is important, therefore, in setting out, to clarify the scope of our undertaking. An inquiry into his life and legacy could cover his early life up to the end of his studies in Oxford University; his public service career in Nigeria both in the colonial public service and in the Nigerian Army; his political career as a military Governor; his political career in the secession; his years of exile; his return from exile and careers in politics under the 2nd Republic; his relationships with the military regimes between 1984 and 1999; and his role in post-military Nigeria. Two clarifications are important at this point.

First, quite clearly, some form retrospective on the civil war is inescapable but this is not necessarily a lecture about the Nigerian civil war. There is a considerable body of literature on the War.³³ Akinjide Osuntokun, who undertook an early review of some of the early literature on the War concluded that “writing on the Nigerian Civil War has become a thriving industry and has attracted a motley array of writers with various motives.”³⁴ This is not a place to review them as such or to determine which is more credible. The quality of that literature is clearly uneven and much of it has been dominated by memoirs and recalls of active participants in the conflict. Some of them could arguably have written in anticipation of their own legacies *post-mortem*, in genuflection before Sir Winston Churchill who is credited with the claim that “History will be kind to me for I intend to write it.”

Second, we need to settle on an identity for our subject. In his life, Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was different things to different people. He was a soldier, an exile, a man of faith (Catholic), a titled man. On his return from exile, many communities lavished him generously with titles – Ikemba Nnewi, Dikedioramma Nd’Igbo, Ezeigbo *Gburugburu*. Despite his impressive collection of chieftaincy titles, Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu would reportedly respond to an interviewer who sometimes addressed him as a Chief, “I am not a Chief; it rhymes with thief.”³⁵ These Chieftaincy titles were mostly or all

³³ For a review of some of this literature, see Brian McNeil, “The Nigerian Civil War in History and Historiography”, in Toyin Falola & Emily Brownell, (eds), *Africa, Empire and Globalisation: Essays in Honour of AG Hopkins*, Durham, NC, 546-547 (2011); Osarhieme Benson Osadolor, “The Historiography of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970”, in Eghosa Osaghae, Ebere Onwudiwe & Rotimi Suberu, *The Nigerian Civil War and its Aftermath*, Ibadan, John Archers Ltd, 75 (2002)

³⁴ Akinjide Osuntokun, “Review of Literature on the Nigerian Civil War”, in Tekena Tamuno & Samson Ukpabi, eds., *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty-Five Years – The Civil War Years*, Vol. VI, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd., 85 at p. 86 (1989)

³⁵ Dada Aladelokun, “Rebel, Soldier, Leader” *The Nation*, 27 Nov, 2011

conferred on him after his return from exile in 1982, at the age of 48. By this time, his identity was secure. The people who gave him these titles were probably more honoured by his accepting them than he was by their giving it to him. In the event, he appeared very much to treasure his name, Emeka, itself also the title of his biography,³⁶ and the name under which he most preferred to be addressed. It seems rather sensible to stick with his name rather than with acquired or conferred titles.³⁷ That is how we address him in this text.

4. Re-Litigating the Life-And-Death Battles of a Generation of Outstanding Achievers

This lecture series is also about the legacy of a generation of outstanding people. Anambra State has been unusually blessed with a pantheon of extraordinarily talented people who have excelled in many walks of life who were born in or around the first 33 years of the last century. Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was part of this extraordinary generation. They include Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) who was born in 1904 and Ojukwu's father, Sir Louis Phillip (LP), born in 1908. Jerome Udoji, who became the first indigenous District Officer in the colonial civil service, makes a point of pointing out that the date of his birth was not recorded; that "the date in my records could not be correct and that a more probable date was around 1914."³⁸ Kenneth Dike, Chike Obi and Pius Okigbo followed in 1917, 1921 and 1924 respectively. There followed a peer group from the 1930s led by Chinualumogu Achebe, who was born in November 1930; Christopher Okigbo, born August 1932; and Ifeanyichukwu Alex Ekwueme, who (like, former Lagos State Governor, Lateef Jakande) was Emeka Ojukwu's contemporary at King's College in Lagos, born October 1932, all of whom, like Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, are now of blessed memory.

A Senior Advocate of Nigeria, (SAN) and distinguished public servant, Chief Ben Nwazojie, after whom the venue of this lecture is named was a distinguished member of this stellar generation, who retired from public service as Federal Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). Also among this generation but still alive are Ben Obi Nwabueze,

³⁶ Frederick Forsyth, *Emeka*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 1982.

³⁷ See Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*.

³⁸ Jerome Udoji, *Under Three Masters: Memoirs of an African Administrator*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, p. 7 (1995)

born in December 1931, and Emeka Anyaoku, born January 1933. They were all great men, after each of whom this great institution could easily have been memorialized. In its current identity, this university honours a man and his generation and challenges its current generation of students to a wrestling match with legends.

A considerable body of literature, iconography, memoirs, diaries and historiography has been generated by the accomplishments and differences among the leading members of this generation of *Umu-Anambra*, a segment in time of *Ndi-Anambra*, of *Nd'Igbo* and of Nigerians.³⁹ Their writings have enriched our understandings of the age in which they lived and led.⁴⁰ Naturally, they also had disagreements, which are evident from their recollections. Zik and LP, for instance, were associates and friends whose relationship suffered an irretrievable rupture on the eve of the Civil War.⁴¹ Jerome Udoji, another great friend of LP, served with distinction in the public service where he was first Emeka's boss, only later to have his career ended by Emeka as the Military Governor of the Eastern Region.⁴² He lived most of the Civil War years in exile, convinced that "to blindly and imprudently go to a war of secession in the realities of the situation at the time amounted to willful suicide."⁴³ Pius Okigbo was Ojukwu's sometimes reluctant Economic Adviser during the war.⁴⁴ Unlike Udoji, Achebe was very convinced and vocal about Ojukwu's leadership of the war and scathing in his criticism of Zik.⁴⁵ Alex Ekwueme was, of course, elected Vice-President to President Shehu Shagari of the NPN, who eventually granted Emeka safe passage back to Nigeria in 1982.

³⁹ Achebe, Azikiwe, Dike, Nwabueze, and Okigbo are the subjects of separate chapters in Gloria Chuku, Ed., *The Igbo Intellectual Tradition: Creative Conflict in African and African Diasporic Thought*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan (2013)

⁴⁰ See Remy Oriaku, "Continuing the Civil War by Other Means: Points of View in Selected Nigerian Civil War Memoirs", in Eghosa Osagahe, Ebere Onwudiwe & Rotimi Suberu, *The Nigerian Civil War and its Aftermath*, Ibadan, John Archers Ltd, 39 (2002).

⁴¹ See Chudi Offodile, *The Politics of Biafra and the Future of Nigeria*, Ibadan, Safari Books, pp 107-119 (2016)

⁴² Jerome Udoji, *Under Three Masters*, pp. 92-95

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 95

⁴⁴ See PNC Okigbo, The Economics of the Civil War: The Biafran Experience, in Tekena Tamuno & Samson Ukpabi, eds., *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty-Five Years – The Civil War Years*, Vol. VI, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd., 201 (1989)

⁴⁵ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, pp. 74-75 (1983). See also Chudi Offodile, *The Politics of Biafra and the Future of Nigeria*, pp. 121 *et seq*

It may indeed be the case that far from settling the issues, “the fighting has continued in an informal, less dramatic, less apparent form – in narratives” of their lives.⁴⁶ In this enterprise, we suffer the limitation of not having the published memoirs as such of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu himself. In 1982, he complained: “much has been written about me over the past 15 years, and a great deal has been, alas, quite inaccurate.... At certain times, friends have suggested that I should write my autobiography, telling the story of my life in my own words. But I felt that the moment was not yet right.”⁴⁷ Seven years later, in 1989, he again pleaded, “the time is not yet ripe”.⁴⁸ 14 years later, in an interview with *Vanguard* Newspaper’s Chuks Iloegbunam, he promised that “the facts of my life that will be necessary for future generations to ponder upon.... will be clearly available to that generation.”⁴⁹ None has yet been released or published but he did provide some tantalizing nuggets in his 1989 book, *Because I am Involved*. Nor do we have any memoirs yet from Ojukwu’s great adversary and peer, Yakubu Gowon. However, again, Gowon does draw considerably from his experience in his 794-page thesis submitted in 1984 for the award of a Ph.D. degree in politics at the Warwick University in Coventry, England.⁵⁰

It is not our place in this lecture to resolve the contest of history with memory and their interpretations but Milan Kundera reminds us that “the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”⁵¹ Memory is contested territory and political memory is even more viciously contested by the powerful. Precisely because of this, however, it is too important to be abandoned to the self-interested alone. Many of the participants in that struggle of memory over forgetting remain alive and may indeed be participating in this lecture. It is important that we honour this memory while also continuing to dialogue, investigate and recover it. This

⁴⁶ Remy Oriaku, *supra*, p. 43 (2002).

⁴⁷ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Foreword in Frederick Forsyth, *Emeka*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 1982

⁴⁸ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p.144.

⁴⁹ “Ojukwu to 35 Govs” You’re Sitting on a Keg of Gunpowder”, *Sunday Vanguard*, 10 Aug. 2003, available at <https://allafrica.com/stories/200308110309.html> ; Reprinted in Chuks Iloegbunam, *General of the Peoples’ Army*, Lagos, Press Alliance Network, p.120 at 132 (2012)

⁵⁰ Yakubu Gowon, *The Economic Community of West African State: A Study in Political and Economic Integration*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Warwick, February, 1984. Chapter 5 of Gowon’s Thesis is titled “Temporary Setbacks to Cooperation in West Africa, 1966-1970” describes regional dimensions of the Nigerian Civil War. *Ibid.*, pp 135-176

⁵¹ Milan Kundera, *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, London, New York, Harper Collins, p.5 (1999)

lecture series should make a lasting contribution to that undertaking. In my opinion, this lecture series is a poor venue to arbitrate the dispute between the admirers and detractors of Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu and of his generation.

5. The Field of Contest Over Ojukwu's Legacy

Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was many things in a very complex way an intersected being, "too complex to command everybody's affection."⁵² He was a soldier, an Igbo, "a Christian and a catholic and every inch a Nigerian."⁵³ His legacy is contested among disparate groups. For present purposes, it is possible to isolate three for some attention.

First, there is an ethnic nationality and identity movement which is invested in his legacy largely as a memorial to the mass atrocities that preceded and are widely seen, at least on one side, as the *causus belli* for the Nigerian Civil War. For this community of thought, Biafra remains alive not as a location or an immutable identity as such but as a historical symbolism, a totem to injustice. In support for this point of view and as inspiration for it, Odumegwu-Ojukwu argued that "Biafra was not a separatist movement as propaganda made it appear; it was a reflex for self-preservation."⁵⁴

Second, there is a "resurgent Biafran secessionism"⁵⁵ that "spawns a steady output of historical accounts of the conflict"⁵⁶ and also appeals to the iconography of Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu in its advocacy for both Igbo ethnic exceptionalism and Igbo separatism and covers the gamut from the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). For this body of thought, invocations of Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu and Biafra are justifications for a claim to territory. A majority of this community of advocacy arguably comprises young persons born after the end of the Nigerian Civil war. In his lifetime, Emeka

⁵² Okey Ndibe, "A Titan Who Won't Die", *Sahara Reporters*, 28 Nov 2011, <http://saharareporters.com/2011/11/28/ojukwu-titan-who-won%E2%80%99t-die-okey-ndibe>, accessed 16 October, 2018.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p155

⁵⁴ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 177

⁵⁵ Lasse Heerten, *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p.12 (2017)

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Odumegwu-Ojukwu had argued that "separatism founded on a siege mentality that erupts in confrontation with everything non-Igbo is no road. It will lead to isolation, political arthritis, and hence defeat."⁵⁷ He reaffirmed this many times with the assertion that "isolationism and wallowing in an orgy of self-pity or indeed carrying the banner of protest is counter-productive."⁵⁸ It surely is in the nature of legacy studies that the subject cannot exclusively dispose of or appropriate the subject-matter. Thus Jerome Udoji, whose public service career ended as Chief Secretary to the Government of the Eastern Region led by Lt-Col Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, has suggested that it is a fitting issue for investigation whether these entreaties were "motivated by personal ambition or corporate Igbo interests."⁵⁹ It is as impossible to discountenance the advocacy of the resurgent separatists as it is necessary to investigate its moorings, origins and trajectories.

Third, there is a community of politicians invested in appropriating the iconography and memories of Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu for the entirely narrow purposes of acquiring access to temporal power in contemporary Nigeria. This contest for political benefits from his legacy began well in the prime of his life-time, before his return from exile. In the 1979 elections, the Great Nigerian Peoples' Party (GNPP) initially sought to field Ojukwu as a candidate for the House of Representatives for the Nnewi Federal Constituency but had a change of mind after "the Federal Military Government reacted sharply to this development."⁶⁰ Ahead of his return between 1981-1982, all three leading political parties in the Nigerian Peoples' Party (NPP), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and the then ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN), sought to make political mileage of some form of association with Ojukwu.⁶¹ NPN ultimately won the prize of his adherence and fielded him as their candidate in the infamous contest for the Anambra South Senatorial seat in 1983. Today, many of these are to be found in the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), canvassing under the campaign slogan *Nkea bu Nk'anyi* (this is our own). Many of these people today have made good from politics,

⁵⁷ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 105

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 145

⁵⁹ Jerome Udoji, *Under Three Masters: Memoirs of an African Administrator*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, p. 95 (1995)

⁶⁰ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 114

⁶¹ See, Okion Ojigbo, *Shehu Shagari: The Biography of Nigeria's First Executive President*, Lagos, pp. 399-406 (1982)

becoming stupendously wealthy. Yet, the man whom they claim to follow, the scion of the richest Nigerian in his day, could say of himself: "The Ikemba of Nnewi is a very poor man. I am poor. I am proud of my poverty. I do not begrudge the rich their wealth."⁶² And it has been said of him that "In a Nigeria where relative paupers shoot or rig their ways into office and loot their way out to obscene wealth, here was a man who went in as a leader wealthy and left (relatively) materially wretched."⁶³ Many of his latter-day acolytes, it seems, cannot bear to abide this kind of virtue.

The *Billie* Movement, it may be argued, straddles all three categories in some form. There is, of course, a considerable body of opinion beyond south-east Nigeria that demonises him. Mahmud Jega recalled this body of opinion well and traces its various origins and manifestations mostly in oral literature and history in an article he published in December 2011.⁶⁴

6. Framing an Approach to Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu's Legacy

A legacy is an after-life. As an inheritance, it can be an asset or a liability and can often be the subject of life-and-death contests. Herein lies the reason for my ambivalence. In the study of leadership and historical figures, a legacy distils judgement and interpretation over a lifetime and its impact. Legacies are the distillation of active inquiry. As such, they are liable to evolve and often change with time. For instance, Harry Truman, 33rd President of the United States, left office in 1953 as a very unpopular President. However, with closer examination of his record, President Truman is now accepted as undisputedly one of the greatest occupants of the Oval Office.⁶⁵ By contrast, the United Kingdom's National Trust in 2016 launched a campaign for the legacy of its war-time Prime-Minister, Winston Churchill, fearing that "there is a real risk

⁶² Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 63

⁶³ Okey Ndibe, "A Titan Who Won't Die", *Sahara Reporters*, 28 Nov 2011, <http://saharareporters.com/2011/11/28/ojukwu-titan-who-won%E2%80%99t-die-okey-ndibe>, accessed 16 October, 2018.

⁶⁴ Mahmud Jega, Four Decades Since Ojukwu's 'Death'", *Daily Trust*, December 7 2011 (Backpage).

⁶⁵ CBS News ranks him 6th in the all-time list of presidential greats behind Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Franklin Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight Eisenhower. Visit: <https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/presidents-ranked-from-worst-to-best-presidential-historians-survey-2017/39/> visited 15 October 2018.

of Churchill's legacy being consigned to the records of history unless we find new ways to excite and inspire the public's interest and understanding of this man."⁶⁶

The kind of legacies that leaders leave behind is itself a product of the times in which they lived and led. Michael Okpara, Ojukwu's predecessor in the leadership of the now defunct Eastern Region, who would later become Ojukwu's detainee before being appointed his political adviser and traveling with him into exile on 9 January 1970, is widely remembered as an extraordinary administrator and leader who left a legacy of incredible investments in human assets, infrastructure and food security. Although he left government over 52 years ago in January 1966, many of these investments have survived him, becoming monuments to his memory and testaments to his legacy.

Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu was a leader in turbulent times. His memory or legacy is not defined as such by tangible monuments but by yearnings of what could have been or of opportunities taken or lost. This perhaps explains some of the controversy with which he is associated. To his most ardent admirers, he represents an argument for equity and justice in addressing the primordial contests that have defined Nigerian politics. To his detractors, his methods and perhaps his motives were and remain open to question and his ends were unattainable. In this way, the contest over Ojukwu's legacy now as in his lifetime is an asymmetrical one. His admirers are invested in an advocacy over intangible foundations of political society, such justice and equity. His detractors, for the most part seek to advance the territorial integrity of Nigeria irrespective of these questions of equity and justice. This mirrors the asymmetries in the *jus as bellum* of the Nigerian Civil War: while the Biafran side appeared to fight over an intangible sense of justice and self-preservation, the Federal side clearly went to war over the very tangible notion of indivisibility of Nigeria and access to its oil revenues. In some sense(s), given the reasons for which their versions of the shooting war ensued, each side could justifiably claim to have come out of the war with their goals somewhat attained. Yet, over half a century after the onset of the war, the issues that were at the cause of the war remain unresolved in contemporary Nigeria, thus assuring that the argument over Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu's legacy remains a continuing one. Put

⁶⁶ Patrick Foster, "National Trust: 'Real Risk' future generations will forget Sir Winston Churchill's legacy", available at Daily Telegraph, 16 Sept. 2016, available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/04/national-trust-real-risk-future-generations-will-forget-sir-wins/>, retrieved 15 Sept, 2018.

differently, irrespective of which side claims to have won or lost the war, and whether or not the doctrine of “no victor, no vanquished” is believed, it is arguably the case that all sides lost the peace. The title of the memoirs of one of the major actors in the war is, unsurprisingly, *The Tragedy of Victory*.⁶⁷

In a world polarized by dogma and doctrinaire identity politics, navigating these competing interpretations can be a hazardous pursuit. It is part detective work and part deduction; part intuition, and part interpretation. It admits of few givens and all issues must be open to interrogation. By way only of an illustration, the popular story about Emeka’s decision to join the Army after returning with a Master’s degree in history from Oxford University, was that it was part of a streak of rebellion that went against his father’s desire for him to join the family business. Jerome Udoji, who was a good friend and contemporary of Ojukwu’s father tells a totally different story about this:

The father sought my views on Emeka’s desire to join his business. I told him that it was a good idea, for the Administrative Service is a good training ground in the management of men and resources. He then asked how long it would take a person to acquire such experience. I replied that it depended on the individual but that in my opinion, three years should be adequate. He then said that he would demand more years for without experience, Emeka would destroy both the organization and the staff he had built up over the years. I later learnt that the father’s delay in acceding to his sons request for immediate participation in his business was one of the reasons for Emeka’s decision to join the Army.⁶⁸

This version puts a substantially different coloration on this quite pivotal event in Emeka’s biography. It is difficult to proceed to an assessment of legacy if we are unable or unwilling to sift fact from myth or fiction. We are reminded herethat:

The overwhelming central epistemological complication that arises in the attempt to say what happened in the past and what it means that it happened is that there are always competing ways to interpret evidence. The problem is to

⁶⁷Godwin Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy of Victory: On-The-Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra War in the Atlantic Sector*, Ibadan-Lagos, Spectrum Books, (2013)

⁶⁸Jerome Udoji, *Under Three Masters*, pp 88-89

discover which among these competing interpretations is best, which involves, among other things, discovering which among them is most likely to be true.⁶⁹

Legacy is a contest over versions and interpretations of history and memory. In this case, we speak in substantial part about traumatic history and memory that are still both active and in evolution. Interpretations are not only contested; they are bound to evolve with time. When he published his *Documentary Sourcebook* on the Nigerian Civil War in 1971, the recently deceased Anthony Kirk-Greene pleaded that "evaluation, summary and interpretation can wait" but argued that "the systematic retrieval of the raw data on which alone these must be based cannot."⁷⁰ Nearly half a century later, it is arguable that we are in only a marginally better position to begin to attempt evaluations and interpretations. Many of the records on which such can be based lie in different parts of the world and are the subject of different regimes of classification and access. Some have been released alright but many more remain to be released for public investigation. Thus, the complaint is sometimes heard that while "much has been written on the Nigerian Civil war (much more than most other conflicts in postcolonial Africa)... sound scholarship on the war remains scarce."⁷¹

7. Illustrating Some Dimensions of the Emeka-Odumegwu Ojukwu Legacy

From the life and work of Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, many different elements and dimension compete for attention. His public service years, first as an Administrative Officer in the colonial civil service from his return from Oxford in 1956 until his enlistment in the Army in 1957 before leaving to become the first graduate recruit into the Army, suggest the trappings of youthful idealism. These years do not appear, however, to have been well enough investigated. For the moment, I propose to highlight only five aspects of his life and areas of legacy from among many.

⁶⁹ Raymond Martin, "Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Analytic View", 32:1 History and Theory, p. 25.

⁷⁰ AHM Kirke-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook, 1966-1970*, Vol. 1, London, OUP, p. ix (1971)

⁷¹ Lasse Heerten, *The Biafran War and Postcolonial Humanitarianism: Spectacles of Suffering*, *supra*, p. 11

(a) Patriotism, Leadership and the Politicisation of the Nigerian Military

Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu's career military career has offers lots of red meat for investigators of his legacy. Among its highpoints of his military career, there is inadequate information available in the public domain about his tour of duty in the Nigerian Battalion in the *Opération des nations unies au Congo*, (ONUC), commanded by Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi, where he served with many of the leading figures against whom he would lead the Civil War, including Yakubu Gowon, Zakariya Maimalari, Murtala Mohammed, Kaduna Nzeogwu, and Olusegun Obasanjo. In hindsight, it seems sensible to conclude that "the Nigerian military deployment in the Congo may have proved more fateful than is readily acknowledged. Almost certainly, it played a significant role in the political evolution of the Nigerian military."⁷² This phase of his career clearly deserves more attention than it has received. As Brigade Commander in Kano in January, Ojukwu was "the most senior officer" active in the Northern Region on 16 January 1966.⁷³ He was ultimately instrumental in foiling the coup of 15 January 1966, first by his arrest of Captain Ude, the sub-altern whom Nzeogwu sent for the operations in Kano and, later, in detaining Olusegun Obasanjo Nzeogwu's close friend who flew into Kano reportedly to mediate between Nzeogwu and Ironsi.⁷⁴ On assumption of power in January 1966, Ironsi initially appointed Lt-Col. David Ejoor as the Governor of the Eastern Region. It is open to speculation what would have happened if Ironsi had not later posted Governors to their regions of origin.

Yakubu Gowon, who was nearly one year younger than Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, received his Commission into the Army in October 1956, some 18 months earlier than Emeka, who was commissioned in March 1958, after completing the Mons Officer Cadet programme in Aldershot in 1958, having joined the military initially as a graduate, non-commissioned officer (NCO) in 1957. Other famous Nigerians soldiers who would subsequently follow him to the Mons programme include Olusegun Obasanjo, Muhammadu Buhari, Joseph Garba and Sani Abacha. However, Ojukwu became Gowon's senior in the Army because of what was known as "antedate of seniority." Oluwole Rotimi, who would later serve as Ojukwu's deputy as Quartermaster-

⁷² Chidi Odinkalu & Ayisha Osori, *Too Good to Die: Third Term and the Myth of the Indispensable Man in Africa*, Lagos, Prestige Books, p. 21(2018)

⁷³ Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, p. 162

⁷⁴ Chidi Odinkalu & Ayisha Osori, *Too God to Die*, p. 64

General of the Army explained this as follows: "Those of us who were graduates were given antedate of seniority of two or three years compensating for the time we spent in the university."⁷⁵ It seems clear that there was an intense personal rivalry between Gowon and Ojukwu that pre-dated the onset of the Nigerian Civil War. Again, Oluwole Rotimi recalls:

At the Army HQ, Gowon was the Adjutant-General while Odumegwu-Ojukwu was the Quartermaster-General. But because of the rivalry between them, those of us junior officers working for them were affected. We would not greet ourselves when we met at the corridor. We would put our face up. It was that bad.... The rivalry and personality clash between Gowon and Odumegwu-Ojukwu was certainly part of the problem.⁷⁶

Three days after the coup of 29 July 1966, with Ironsi confirmed killed, Gowon, eventually emerged as the new Head of State "with the consent of the majority of the Armed Forces."⁷⁷ This sounded odd because it amounted to a co-optation of the language of elective democracy in a military command structure. The "majority", whose consent was needed for this purpose was also defined along narrow identities of origin. At this time, Gowon was junior officer to several officers, including Babafemi Ogundipe, a one-star General, as well as to Hillary Njoku, David Ejoor and Emeka Ojukwu but they did not count among the "majority", who selected Gowon nor were they eligible for consideration, again because they did not come from the right part of the country. Ojukwu, quite clearly, took objection to Gowon emerging as Commander-In-Chief over a cohort of officers who were senior to him and declined to recognise him as such. In regimental terms, he was correct but the regimental doctrine had suffered the original sin of political corruption from which the Nigerian military has never recovered. The Army had been irretrievably politicised.

The code-name for the coup itself was a give-away - Operation Araba" ("Araba" means secession in Hausa). The immediate backdrop, of course, was the killing of the

⁷⁵ Tunde Fagbenle, "Odumegwu-Ojukwu in General Rotimi's Eyes", *The Punch*, 7 Dec 2011

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Olufemi Ogunsanwo, *General Yakubu Gowon: The Supreme Commander*, Oxford, African Books Collective, p. 2 (2009)

leading political and military leaders of Northern extraction in the coup of January 1966. The July coup was in effect a reprisal, resulting in the killing of most of the officers from then Eastern Region. The cascade had begun with the controversial 1962 Census and the crisis in the Western Region, including the imprisonment of Obafemi Awolowo for alleged treasonable felony, through the 1964 elections to the 1965 regional elections in Western Region through which, effectively "(SLA) Akintola was imposed on the people of Western Nigeria."⁷⁸In the aftermath of the 1964 elections, both the President, Zik and Prime Minister, Tafawa-Balewa, contacted the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the Army, seeking his support in the ensuing political melee. As a result, "the army was made aware (much like in the Congo crisis) of the political role it can play in the nation."⁷⁹

Much of the analysis of the tumult that would follow these events in Nigeria has pursued a single narrative, focusing on the factor of ethnic identity in Nigerian politics. Evidently, this is very important. In the aftermath of that tumult, the military, itself not immune from Nigeria's wider identity politics, has emerged as the dominant factor in Nigerian politics, with a cohort of actors bound together by shared regimental identities, traditions and memories. Two other issues have been poorly investigated and analysed. One is the role of the personality factor, especially, the personal conflict and rivalry between Gowon and Ojukwu, which predated the war. The other is the influence of the Nigerian deployment in the Congo, where it is now recorded, there were clear tensions within the Nigerian contingent, which led the Battalion Commander, Ironsi, to de-board and send home one of his senior Sector Commanders, Zakariya Maimalari.

(b) Coexistence and Territorialisation in Nigeria

Among the issues that have defined Nigeria's existence since the Amalgamation, few have been as intractable as the question of "political equity dictated by Nigeria's complex ethnic and faith mosaic and by the need to distribute power and its benefits fairly among its components."⁸⁰ With over 389 ethnic and national groups and over

⁷⁸ Jerome Udoji, *Under Three Masters*, p. 84

⁷⁹ Obaro Ikime, "The Nigerian Civil War and the National Question", p. 58

⁸⁰ Chidi Odinkalu & Ayisha Osori, *Too Good to Die*, p. 22

4,000 dialects,⁸¹ ethnicity is too difficult a basis for settling competing claims to public good or of political equity. Formally Introduced in 1954, regionalisation was supposed to help with managing this issue. In reality, regionalisation shot it up with Steroids, as the minorities in the three regions launched more ambitious claims for more equitable internal territorialisation. From the 1957 Constitution Conference in London, an agreement was reached that 'a Commission of Enquiry should be appointed to ascertain the facts about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and to propose means of allaying these fears whether well or ill-founded. The Commission would be empowered as a last resort to make detailed recommendation for the creation of one or more new States, specifying the areas to be included and the governmental and administrative structure most appropriate.'⁸²The result was the Willink Commission, named after Sir Henry Willink, who chaired it. In its 1958 report, the Commission felt unable to recommend any (new states), cautioning instead that "there remained a body of genuine fears and that the future was regarded with genuine apprehension."⁸³

Far from going away, these apprehensions would survive Independence and prosper thereafter. In 1961, intent on clipping the wings of Chief Awolowo's Western Region, the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) coalition agreed to with the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) decided to create the Mid-West Region. As Obaro Ikime points out:

On the face of it, the creation of the Mid-West Region can be seen as a response to the yearnings of the minorities in the old Western Region. We know, however, that it was in fact a calculated action designed to weaken the Action Group and reduce its sphere of influence. It was an action taken by the NPC-NCNC coalition government at the Centre and approved by a federally-appointed administrator of the Western Region (a state of emergency having been earlier declared over the region by the federal government). This was politics of conspiracy at its best!⁸⁴

⁸¹ Onigu Otite, *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria*, 2nd Ed, Ibadan, Shaneson C.I. Ltd., p. 35 (2000).

⁸²See Cmnd. 207 (1958), p. 13

⁸³*Ibid.* p.88

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 55

This history of state creation in Nigeria is important for what would happen at the outset of the Nigerian. One way of seeing the war is as an argument over the terms of coexistence and political equity. Following his accession to power, as the crisis between him and Ojukwu began to gather pace, Gowon constituted an Ad-Hoc Constitutional Conference comprising delegations from all four regions. Among the four options for coexistence before it, the conference was to consider a federation (with a weak or a strong centre), a confederation, or uniquely new political arrangement. Going into the conference, it appeared that all the regions had coalesced around the idea of a confederation or a commonwealth as the Western Region delegation called it. Emerging from the Conference, however, all but the Eastern Region delegation "rejected secession and a confederal arrangement which appeared so attractive at the beginning."⁸⁵ The story about how this was triggered again is told by Obaro Ikime who was at the Ad-Hoc Conference as an adviser to the Mid-West delegation:

An incident occurred on the day (Joseph) Tarka presented the Northern position (to the Ad-Hoc Conference). As he returned from the conference, Middle Belt soldiers who were guarding the delegation held him up at the gate and menacingly demanded from him why he did not ask for the creation of a Middle Belt region. Tarka had to plead with them, with a promise to do something about it. That night, he climbed over the wall that separated the Northern and Mid-West delegations and told (Anthony) Enahoro (leader of the Mid-West delegation) about his predicament, urging that the Mid-West should do something to save the nation. We, on our part, had already reached the conclusion that our memorandum had to be radically revised.... Enahoro woke up his delegation thereafter, briefed them, and secured their approval for the new memorandum.⁸⁶

That new memorandum introduced the idea of state creation around which all the regional delegations, except the Eastern Region, coalesced. When he announced the creation of 12 States on 27 May 1967, Gowon was reading from a script around which

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 64

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, p. 64

there already existed both precedent (from 1964) and elite political consensus from the other regions excluding Ojukwu's.

Some issues emerge from this narrative. First, although articulated in terms of equity, internal territorialisation has almost always been used as an instrument of political warfare and therefore in order to in fact undermine equity. When, in 1996, for instance, General Abacha as Head of State dismantled the then Sokoto Caliphate into three States, of Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara, it was an ultimate act of martial pique in a contest of wiles between him and the Sultanate, whose leader, Sultan Dasuki, he also had deposed and sent into internal banishment. Second, to the extent that the military objectives were clear and publicly articulated, the Nigerian Civil War was fought along asymmetric lines. For the Nigerian side, it was a fight over territory and resources; for the Biafran side, it was over dignity and survival. One was tangible, the other was intangible. In the aftermath, these issues may well have become both conflated into one and then diffused across much of the rest of the country.

(c) Political and Military Strategy

The fateful cascade that would eventually lead to a shooting war arguably began on 27 May 1967 with the announcement of the creation of 12 states, three of which were created from the former Eastern Region. With that act, three things happened. In doctrinal terms, Gowon made clear he would not voluntarily allow the East to leave Nigeria. Second, in creating Rivers and South Eastern States respectively, he simultaneously sought to deny Ojukwu access to maritime territories as well as access to hydrocarbons economy or independent resources. Effectively, in strategic terms, Nigeria took the first step in framing the conflict as one over territory and resources. Third, in identity terms, he bifurcated the East between the Igbo majority of the Eastern Region and their neighbouring minority communities. Even before its birth, Ojukwu's putative rebellion was going to be fought on Gowon's terms and so it proved.

The reaction of the East arguably played into the hands of Gowon. On the same day that Gowon announced the creation of States, 27 May 1967, Ojukwu had called a meeting of the regional Leaders of Thought in a Consultative Assembly. Joe Achuzia, who was in attendance at the meeting narrates:

I was there. And around 1pm, a news flash came: what we were hearing as rumour became a reality – Eastern Region was carved up. They carved out Rivers State and South East State. So we went into the afternoon recess and by the time we came out of recess and went into afternoon session, a decision was quickly reached that we couldn't sit back and see ourselves divided. So we decided that the best thing to do was that we must ask Ojukwu to declare the State of Biafra.... This meeting was being held within Hotel Presidential. So, by the time the decision was reached, this was carried to him. We were surprised, that he said no and that he would not do it. That would not declare the State of Biafra.... So message was sent back to him and an ultimatum was given him that if by eight O'clock that night, he didn't declare the State of Biafra, not only will we remove him, we will declare and decide who led us.⁸⁷

At this point, of course, there was a mass and justified feeling of ethnic insecurity and solidarity among the Igbo, from the mass killings of their kith and kin by death squads in the North. There was also, largely unknown to most of the participants in the political cascade, personal antipathy between Gowon and Ojukwu. It would be insensitive not to empathise with the sentiments of at population at the receiving end of what has become known as the Pogrom. It is also arguable that these were not the circumstances in which to take life-and-death decisions affecting millions. Phillip Effiong, under whose interim leadership Biafra negotiated an armistice and who knew Gowon quite well having worked as his deputy when Gowon was Adjutant-General of the Army, would later point out that "tempers were high on both sides and it was difficult for the leadership in Lagos and Enugu to be dispassionately objective when considering issues affecting the situation and the consequences of their decisions and actions."⁸⁸

However, the issue of strategy arises as eminently open to discussion. It is not entirely clear what options were examined by the Consultative Assembly before they settled on the ultimatum to the Governor to declare secession. It appears that the decision was mostly a reaction to the initial escalation by the federal side to announce the creation of states. If so, it is arguable in hindsight that it may have been a case of passion short-circuiting reason to create an inexorable logic of military confrontation.

⁸⁷ "Ojukwu's Death not End of Biafran Dream – Achuzia", *Daily Champion*, 12 December 2011.

⁸⁸ Phillip Effiong, *supra*, p. 331

Three days later, on 30 May 1967, "Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria" solemnly proclaimed the creation of Biafra. The new State, somewhat incongruously, retained the currency of Nigeria as well.

It is easy for a generation that did not live in those times to exercise hindsight on these facts. Several issues of both strategy and process naturally arise. One question is whether a different set of outcomes or options could have been exercised by the Consultative Assembly if they had slept over the creation of states on 27 May and returned the day after on the 28. Second, it seems profoundly incongruous that Ojukwu would have announced the State of Biafra as an act of taking orders from civilians while at the same time also retaining his rank in the Nigerian Army and in his military posting as Governor. The respectable and logical thing for him to have done before doing so was to resign his Commission and rank from the Nigerian Army. That did not happen. Third, in terms of strategy, with the Federal side having made its adverse claims to the region's land and maritime borders as well as petroleum resources, the onset of shooting was only going to be arrested by who blinked first. With no side willing to blink, it was only a matter of time. With military confrontation both logical and nigh on inevitable, it is inexplicable that Biafra went into a war without clear scenarios for alternative supply lines, including effective bases in a neighbouring country. All of this suggests that that the declaration of Biafra could have been more effectively processed as matters of both strategy and process. In the event, the Federal side didn't just control the narrative, they also controlled the process and strategy. The Biafran side, it appeared, was left only to react to the grand strategy of the Federal side at the level of tactics. From that point, it seemed the conflict was always a mis-match.

From the perspective of all sides, there would be three frameworks for assessing the conflict, its actors and their legacies. In terms of the *Jus ad bellum* or the justification for the conflict, the Biafran leadership arguably had justification for fearing for the people of the Eastern Region. With the experienced political leadership of the North, in particular, mostly killed by the events of January 1966, the political authority to stem the mass killings of Igbos in the North was lacking. With the military leadership from the East killed seven months later in July of the same year, the region was short of the kind of strategic assets it needed for those turbulent times. What was left appears to have been marginalised by Ojukwu. It is notable that having first rightly Objected to Gowon's

accession to the role of Supreme Commander by up-ending traditions of regimental seniority, Emeka Ojukwu would himself follow Gowon's example in the Eastern Region by usurping officers who were his seniors, such as Hillary Njoku. Thus, despite the existence of justification for conflict, there remain questions as to whether Biafra and its leadership dealt their people the best hand possible in the conduct of the war – *jus in bello*. There are also legitimate questions about apportionment of responsibility between Ojukwu as the military commander and the civilian leadership with whom he worked.

Arguably the most important issue that deserves attention is the question of *jus post-bellum* – the post-war settlement and how that was managed or mis-managed as the case may be. In Eastern Nigeria, this must extend to recurring questions of attention to political strategy generally as well as to questions about the relationship between Igbos among one another and with the rest of our neighbours in what is now called the South-South. In 2010, for instance, Abia State fired over 5,000 workers of Igbo origin from its public service, because their origins were not indigenous to the State. Is this really what Biafra was fought for? For all sides in the Nigerian Civil War, the sense remains strong that, irrespective of who may have won or lost the war, the country didn't just lose the peace, it also lost the plot thereafter. Phillip Effiong expresses the conviction in his memoirs "that it did not succeed in achieving the type of national unity that was envisaged or fought for."⁸⁹

(d) Regionalism, Regional Integration and Self-Determination in Africa

The Nigerian Civil War had decisive impact on the direction and evolution of regionalism and regional integration in Africa. At the Cairo Summit in 1964 the OAU addressed the status of post-colonial boundaries and adopted a decision which declared: "the borders of African States, on the day of their independence, constitute a tangible reality".⁹⁰ The Nigerian Civil War was the first major test of the resolve of the OAU around the matter of self-determination and colonial boundaries, ensuring that it would be a defining regional integration and foreign policy issue for the region. The war broke out shortly after the fourth anniversary of the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and at a time when the foundations of regional integration in Africa

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 331

⁹⁰. AHG/Res.16 (I), preamble(1964)

were still being laid. The OAU was founded on very strict doctrines of sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction which appeared to require African states to play Pontius Pilate in the face of regional atrocities.

As its diplomatic doctrine on the war, Nigeria took the position that “the cause of African integration would not be helped by the disintegration of its largest political unit.”⁹¹ This argument had significant emotive appeal in a war that blurred many lines, including the then dominant ideological ones in global relations, with both the United Kingdom and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics supporting the same side. Notably, none of Nigeria’s immediate neighbours supported Biafra’s secession. Nigeria’s Sahelian neighbours in Mali and Niger to the North were not likely to root for Biafra in a conflict that was often portrayed in sectarian terms as between Christians and Muslims. Mali’s President Modibo Keita argued that it would be “a very serious precedent for the political unity of every country. Mali’s position is clear: At a time when we are discussing African unity, a grouping of the African peoples it seems inconsistent to encourage secession on a tribal basis.”⁹² Cameroon, whose south-west region used to be part of Nigeria’s Eastern Region, had the best argument for supporting Biafra but President Ahmadou Ahidjo toed the same line with Niger and Mali. As Gowon narrates:

Where Moslem opinion in West Africa was overwhelmingly favorable to the cause of one Nigeria and to the Federal Military Government, the Christian populations of the coastal states were more ambivalent in their attitude, including many who were sympathetic to their co-religionists in Eastern Nigeria. Irrespective of the real issues at stake.⁹³

The Civil war dramatized the limitations of exceptionalism and isolationism as a policy. Among African countries, only Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Tanzania, and Zambia expressly recognised Biafra. Biafra also “were given a base in Sierra Leone and seem to have enjoyed exceptional rights of entry into and exit from the country.”⁹⁴ Benin Republic’s President Emile Zinsou only “made available facilities within his country for

⁹¹ Yakubu Gowon, *supra*, p. 131

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 141

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 146

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

relief supplies” to Biafra.⁹⁵With Benin Republic on Nigeria’s Western border rather than on the East, this was not nearly as useful to Biafra in strategic terms as such a facility from Cameroon could have been. Beyond Africa, Haiti was the only other country that explicitly recognised Biafra. France, Portugal and Apartheid South Africa offered some support short of recognition. The tactical leverage that Biafra had hoped for in using international sympathy to negotiate for an equitable end to hostilities did not materialise.

In the aftermath of the end of the war, the OAU’s attitudes to sovereignty and domestic jurisdiction thawed considerably, beginning with the adoption in 1981 of an African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, the establishment of the OAU Conflict Resolution Mechanism in 1993 and the adoption of the Constitutive Act of the African Union in 2000, embodying an obligation to intervene instead of a duty to refrain from doing so, in situations of mass atrocities in other African States. It is somewhat ironic that as these steps were taking place, the International Court of Justice would decide in 1986 in the case of *Frontier Dispute (Burkina Faso/Republic of Mali)*,⁹⁶that the maintenance of the colonial territorial arrangements by independent African States is “the wisest course, to preserve what has been achieved by peoples who have struggled for their independence, and to avoid a disruption which would deprive the continent of the gains achieved by much sacrifice.” New African States like Eritrea and South Sudan have, nevertheless, emerged since then from existing ones, in each case, on the basis of some form of regional support for internal self-determination. It still appears, however, that there is a certain cognitive threshold that must be reached in order to attain the point of crystallisation of claims of internal self-determination. Thus, although in many ways a full-fledged state, Somali-Land remains to be recognised as such.

(e) Humanitarianism

Arguably, the most lasting contribution of Biafra in the international sphere was in the humanitarian sphere. It has been said that:

The Biafran War serves as a watershed event, marking the end of the first century of humanitarianism that began with the founding of the ICRC in 1863 and the

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 148
⁹⁶1986 *ICJ Rep*, 554

passing of the first Geneva Conventions one year later. The founding of MSF in the aftermath of the Biafran famine occurred roughly one century later, at the end of the classical era of humanitarianism. The Nigerian Civil War thus ushered in a new form of human rights politics, one that first emerged in the mission stations and hospitals of Biafra and took shape in the post-Cold War era, the apogee of humanitarian interventionism.⁹⁷

The most prominent of the humanitarian initiatives inspired by the Nigerian Civil War began as *Comité de lutte contre le génocide au Biafra* (Committee to Fight against/combat Genocide in Biafra). It was originally founded by “young French doctors who served in the French Red Cross in Biafra.”⁹⁸ Today, they are known as *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF). Some other humanitarian NGOs that have their origins in the Nigerian Civil War include the Irish NGO, Africa Concern, and the German one, *Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker* (Society for Threatened Peoples). These groups have firmly affected the doctrines and trajectory of humanitarian action, compelling the review of “the ‘bystander mentality’ of their predecessors”,⁹⁹ with a new doctrine of *sans-frontiérisme*, accompanied by “media campaigns that focus on the victims.”¹⁰⁰

Many legacy issues call for pursuit here. There is, for instance, a legitimate concern as to whether, having benefited from this organised humanitarianism, we are capable of evolving our own enlightened, indigenous, humanitarianism in this part of the world. Separately, in the context of international relations, there are suspicions that the Nigerian Civil War redefined otherwise high political problems of the developing world of Africa as essentially a basket humanitarian case for the rest of the world. A recent study on the subject concludes that “the Biafran War was nevertheless a crucial episode to understand the emergence of our contemporary postcolonial world order.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Lasse Heerten, *supra*, p. 3

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

8. Conclusion

The preceding text merely highlights and illustrates some areas in which the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu's life catalysed and left deep imprints in many areas of leadership, government, institutions, advocacy and public policy doctrine. Many more issues than those briefly addressed here would compete and call for attention from his life. For example, I have not touched on his encounter with the military government of Ibrahim Babangida over the abandoned property issue in the dispute over the estate of his late father, LP, resulting in the memorable decision of the Nigerian Supreme Court in *Military-Governor of Lagos State vs. Ojukwu*,¹⁰² which makes a lasting contribution to the jurisprudence of judicial oversight of arbitrary power in Nigeria. His flight into exile in Côte d'Ivoire and his return in 1982 call attention to another dimension of humanitarianism in the refugee principle and its evolution in Africa. His political career upon his return from exile, ending with his emergence as the unquestioned leader of the APGA, would in itself make the subject of fascinating examination. One area that may deserve examination for its long term impact is his role in the emergence of violent political militancy with the narrative of the 2nd Republic confrontations between the Ikemba Front on the one hand, and the Jim Nwobodo Vanguard on the other. Mahmud Jega, who did his Youth Service in Anambra State, recalls that:

Ojukwu.... had a personal militia called the Ikemba Front, while the NPP had the Nwobodo Vanguard. Several times on my way to Enugu from Nkpor Junction, I encountered the two groups on their way to political rallies. They rode dangerously in Kombi buses, with militiamen hanging on the doors and roofs, brandishing weapons, forcing all other vehicles off the road.... In May or June 1983, Ojukwu himself came to my station at Nnobi for a rally, and I went to see him. He arrived in a fleet of Mercedes Jeeps. When he alighted from the jeep and walked to the podium, the red-shirted Ikemba Front militiamen formed a guard of honour on both sides of the red carpet. As he walked slowly, the IF men shouted, "Ikemba! Ikemba! Ikemba!"¹⁰³

In the end, Emeka Ojukwu's was a life of impact that catalysed much in several spheres, some acknowledged and many much less so. The end of the Civil War, with his

¹⁰² (1986) 1 NWLR (Part 18) 621

¹⁰³ See Mahmud Jega, *supra*

flight into exile, brought considerable gloom upon the region. At the end of the war, the leadership class in Igbo land was in tatters and lacking in confidence. Many had died or been killed during the war or exiled by its aftermath. What was left in the country lacked confidence. Their livelihoods were gone, their stature diminished, and their self-belief and judgement in question. A new leadership cadre was desperately needed but it was difficult to know where to find it. Beside the slogan of “no victor, no vanquished” and the ineffectual programme of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reintegration (3-Rs), lives, communities and a region had to rise from the ruins of the war. What followed was an incredible miracle of rebuilding, reconstruction and resilience (3-Rs).

The biggest and most effective R, however, was not a slogan or a government programme but a legacy of un-intended consequence forged in a spirit that is perhaps his greatest legacy. The rebuilding of Igbo dignity and identity at the end of the ruin of the war was emblemized in the rise and story of Enugu Rangers International. In their rise to national immortality and continental dominance, Rangers embodied and represented the hopes of a people. An entire generation was raised on the back of the sporting exploits of Albert Onyeawuna, Christian Chukwu, Emmanuel Okala, Aloysius Atuegbu, Sylvanus Okpalla, and Stanley Okoronkwo. There was a huge symbolism in their rise to dominance of the Nigerian soccer scene from the ruins of the war. It represented the story of a people who could discover the will to win again.

Within three years of its formation, Rangers provided the core of the National football team that represented Nigeria at the All Africa Games in 1973. They dominated the national league and FA Cup competitions in the 1970s and would go on to win continental competitions in the same decade. Around their achievements, Igbos, returning to different parts of Nigeria from the traumas of the war re-discovered a sense of dignity and self-belief. They had something to cheer. Just one decade after the end of the war, the National Football Team that won the African Cup of Nations in 1980 was led by the captain of the Enugu Rangers International and had nine out of its 22-man squad from the old ECS (David Adiele, Aloysius Atuegbu, Christian Chukwu, Okey Isima, Henry Nwosu, Emmanuel Okala, Sylvanus Okpala, Frank Onwuachi, Ifeanyi Onyedika). They became the core of a national team that Nigerians of all tribes and tongues followed with devoted but enlightened fanaticism with the slogan, “Up Rangers –Never Say

Die!”¹⁰⁴ In terms of effect on recovery from the war, this was arguably of greater popular significance than the election of an Igbo as the Vice-President of Nigeria in 1979. Unknown to many, Rangers was the name of a Strike Force raised during the war to undertake dangerous operations behind enemy lines, under the command of Major Timothy Onwuatiegwu, who would himself be killed trying unsuccessfully to cross into Cameroon as the war was coming to a close in the second week of January 1970.¹⁰⁵ The core of the team at its foundation on 30 May 1970 came from discharged Biafran veterans.

In the end, it is important to recognize that both memory and legacies built on it are burdens of recollection, intellect and conscience. What they throw up may sometimes be unsettling and not always hew to a notional party line. Embarking on an inquiry into these requires us to respect those who have gone before us without sacrificing our responsibilities to those who will come after us. The memory of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu is secure and will always be held with some reverence in these parts. Retrieving and examining it the ambience of a university requires us to allow room for some irreverence. It may throw up some uncomfortable recall and could indeed or sometimes shatter views of the past that had been protected with romantic bodyguards of a single narrative. If this helps us forge pathways to a more sensible future, that would, hopefully be the greatest tribute to what was, after all, a most consequential life.

¹⁰⁴ Edwin Eze and Emma Okocha, *The Rangers International Football Club: History of a People – The Greatest African Clubside*, New York-Lagos, Gomslam International Ltd., pp 3-4 (2017)

¹⁰⁵ See Phillip Effiong, *supra*, p.322