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REVIEWS

Biafra: A Military History by Roy Doron. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2025. Pp 276. ISBN: 9780253073877. Paper.

Roy Doron's *Biafra: A Military History* is a coherent story of all those—military and civilian—who fought, suffered, or died in the Nigeria-Biafra War, especially from the end of May 1967 to January 15, 1970. Aside from the fascinating "Introduction" and burden-evoking "Epilogue," Doron presents the military narratives in nine interwoven chapters. In an order that resonates with the author's chronological choice of analysis, these segments include: The Formation of Nigeria; Coup, Countercoup, and Secession; The War Begins; The Midwest Offensive and the Transformation of the War; The World Reacts; Genocide; Biafra and Nigeria's Second Military Collapse and Peace Talks; Biafra's Collapse and Rebirth; and The End (?) of Biafra. In chapter one, Doron affirms that Nigeria, "Like many African states," was a product of violence. "The violence of the British conquest became the violence of colonialism and colonial resistance, which turned into the violence of the postcolonial state" (10). On one hand, this alliterative assertion encapsulates the inherent brutality of European imperial expansion. But on the other hand, that view presents the indigenous Nigerian groups (including those who practiced human cannibalism) as people who knew no wars, and therefore, no intergroup violence before sustained contacts with the British from the 1800s. The first chapter also recognizes that Sir Frederick Lugard was the pioneering colonial governor-general, who, in January 1914, unified the two separately administered British protectorates of northern and southern Nigeria to form the Colony of Nigeria (11). Henceforth, most efforts—colonial and post-independence alike—seemed to be channeled toward a seemingly compromised nation-building project. Such efforts, including the unity-embedded writings of Nigeria's literary icons, foundered on the morning of January 15, 1966, when Nigerians woke to the first bloody coup in the country (34).

The fact that over four Igbos comprised the short list of the coup plotters was further complicated by the assassination of mostly leaders of Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani extractions. The putsch, therefore, came to be interpreted as an Igbo agenda to dominate in Nigeria. But in chapter two, Doron provides alternative clarifications that could have been better grounded in primary sources rather than in Max Siollun's *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture* (2009). Unlike the northern premier, Ahmadu Bello, and Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun of the Kaduna garrison, who were obviously killed by Chukwuma Nzeogwu and Timothy Onwuatuegwu, respectively, the fate of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa remained unknown until his dead body was discovered on January 23, 1966. *Biafra* shows that the highest-ranking officer, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, was apparently vindicated at the meeting of the ministers held on the morning of January 15. "[Ironsi's] genuine concern for the fate of the missing prime minister, notes the author, "as well as his anger and sorrow over the death of Ahmadu Bello, convinced the politicians [of the First Republic] that he had no part in the coup" (45). On January 16, when Balewa could not be found for restoration, the transport minister Zanna Bukar Dipcharima, along with Minister of Trade Kingsley Mbadiwe, "voluntarily" transferred the government to the Ironsi-led armed forces of the republic, wishing them success "to bring about peace and stability in Nigeria," and hoping that the welfare of Nigerians should be "their paramount task" (45). Citing Ntieyong Akpan, Professor Doron further illustrates that a Nigerian inter-army civil war was averted shortly after Ironsi's takeover in Lagos. The miracle happened when Nzeogwu agreed to surrender his parallel government that was based in Kaduna (46). Likewise, Doron quotes Olusegun Obasanjo's *Nzeogwu* (1987) to showcase that long before Nzeogwu was arrested alongside the several other coup plotters, the Igbo-born revolutionary had expressed his unwillingness to pursue power grabbing at all costs: "Our purpose was to change the country and make it a place we could be proud to call our home, not to wage [a selfish] war" (46). Nevertheless, the Igbo-born Ironsi, on May 24, 1966, ostensibly deepened the palpable fear of ethnic dominance with the promulgation of Decree 34, which abolished the regional structure and created a unified military administration headquartered in Lagos (48). His actions, including the immediate failure to try the arrested coupists, triggered overt recrimination. The countercoup of late July 1966 by a group of predominantly northern officers not only terminated Ironsi's life but installed Yakubu "Jack" Gowon as the new leader of the Federal Military Government. All these incidents and associated misgivings set in motion a chain of events culminating in Biafra's declaration of independence on May 30, 1967.

In chapter three, Doron narrates that as the Nigerian government vowed to squash the rebellious Biafrans under Chukwuemeka Ojukwu's command, prominent easterners such as Dick Tiger and Chinua Achebe flocked to the Biafran cause (78). Though without citing any source, Doron acknowledges that Nigeria's first president, Nnamdi Azikiwe, equally declared his allegiance to Biafra, acted as advisor to Ojukwu, and even penned the Biafran anthem (78). As a matter of fact, Obiwu, a fine U.S.-based writer, had excavated Azikiwe's *Civil War Soliloquies: More Collections of Poems* (1977) to illustrate that Zik's poem, "Land of the Rising Sun," was truly composed in 1968, as "a moral boost to the fighting officers, troops, and populace of nascent Biafra."[1] There is no data to prove Doron's estimate that "the Nigerian army numbered roughly 7000 men," "after the events of July 1966 that killed many and drove the rest of the eastern officers out of the army ranks" (79). This quote is significant because it lies at the core of the author's military approach and underscores the critical point that "The Nigerian army was little more prepared than the Biafrans for a prolonged war…" (79). In this third chapter as well, lie the details of the first large-scale Nigerian invasion of Biafra (amidst controversies over oil royalties) on July 7, 1967. Throughout the early battles, "those over the towns of Nsukka in the north, Ogoja near the Cameroonian border, and Bonny in the Niger Delta…Biafran soldiers, determined yet woefully equipped, faced a Nigerian army comprising largely ill-trained but better-equipped green recruits" (84). Now, I feel better acquainted with the personalities of the early Civil War commanders and warriors on both sides of the conflict, particularly for Enugu. Whereas Mohammed Shuwa, James Oluleye, Capt. Isa Bukar and Abdullahi Shelleng were front-burner green leaders. Alexander Madiebo, Christopher Okigbo, Ben Gbulie, Chukwuma Nzeogwu, and Patrick Amadi dominated the earliest Biafran warfront. Before the fall of Obollo Afor, Obollo Eke, and the entire Nsukka to the Nigerians, the Biafrans had continuously harassed "their enemies with artillery, mortars, and air support from the Zumbach-smuggled B-26 and Alouette helicopters" (87). Doron remarks that "The relative success in defending Enugu masked a fatal flaw in Biafra's ability to wage war" (89). The book shows that, before the Midwest Offensive that began on August 9, 1967, the author's observation about Biafra's military incapacity applied to the entire area from Ogoja to Abakaliki, which was swiftly secured by the Nigerians "within forty-eight hours" (89-90).

Chapter four narrates the chilling story of a bloody internal conflict in the Biafran bloc shortly after the assault across the Niger River. Through the eventual publication of what transpired by Nelson Ottah in 1981, Doron reflects on Ojukwu's trial and execution of his former confidants—Victor Banjo, Emmanuel Ifeajuna, and Alele. These victims had attempted to convince the Biafran warlord to "either renounce secession or at least recognize the mistakes he had made early in the war" (104). Although the Midwest Offensive proved chaotic for all parties, the decline of the Biafran might, as aided by internal subversion, after the declaration of the independent Republic of Benin, forced Igbo communities like Issele Ukwu between Agbor and Asaba to charitably submit to the advancing federal troops. This fourth chapter brings to the fore a different set of warriors and managers. On the side of Nigeria were Murtala Mohammed, Godwin Alabi-Isama, Capt. Joseph Isichei, Olusegun Obasanjo, Benjamin Adekunle, Muhammadu Buhari, and Ken Saro-Wiwa. Whereas actors such as Joe

Achuzia, Adewale Ademoyega, Hilary Njoku, and Albert Okonkwo worked out the Biafran results. The book Biafra provides evidence that most of these actors left memoirs, which constitute Doron's major sources for historical judgment, and his critical engagement with them is refreshingly commendable. The author undertakes the painstaking task of tracking the causes and courses of wartime activities almost daily. Doron's use of Emma Okocha's *Blood on the Niger* (1994) points to the distasteful way the Midwest Offensive was sealed with the Asaba Massacre. The rest of the book, chapters five, six, seven, eight, and nine, highlight pockets of decisive assaults throughout 1968-9, the question of genocide, women as smugglers, dimensions of propaganda, and the dynamics of international support, betrayals, and resurgence of secessionist agitation.

In all, very few studies have clearly outlined challenging research goals and achieved them, as Roy Dorn's Biafra does. Perhaps, sources from the National Archives of Nigeria in Kaduna would have further enriched our understanding of the reception of the coups and the impact of the civil war in Northern Nigeria. I could not find notes from Ojukwu's Because I am Involved (1989), a memoir in which the man of the civil war stated that his vision for the country since 1960 had always been a conscious diffusion of ethnicity in post-independence Nigeria.[2] Doron prefers to address the conflict not as the Biafran War or the Nigeria-Biafra War, but as the Nigerian Civil War. This is "for the sole reason that it was not a successful secession" (1). He argues that in most secessionist wars, such as the American Civil War and the Sri Lankan Civil War, the losing side was usually reabsorbed into the country from which it attempted to secede. Yet Doron's outcome-based approach to naming the war might collapse when the historian considers the significance of time and space, as well as eyewitnesses' belief that "There Was a Country." In any case, the scholar's thoughts are crucial for the fresh military perspective which the book adds to the debates on a deservedly widely researched topic like the Nigerian Civil War. In fact, *Biafra* is distinguished by Doron's wealth of research experience in Nigeria, his devotion to assessing and dissecting diverse sources and perspectives, and his meticulous attention to the nitty-gritty of the coups, the weapons of the civil war, and the personalities of little-known actors in the history of modern Nigeria.

[1] Obiwu, "The Pan-African-Brotherhood of Langston Houghes and Nnamdi Azikiwe," *Dialectical Anthropology* (2007), 162.

[2] Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1989), ix.

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Ogoni Women's Activism: The Transnational Struggle for Justice Against Big Oil and the State by Domale Dube. University of Illinois Press, 2025. Pp. 175. ISBN: 978-0-252-04654-4. Cloth.

It is rare to read a work that is both startling and true, but *Ogoni Women's Activism* is both. Domale Dube advances a clear thesis: Ogoni women have been central architects of a transnational, nonviolent struggle that reframes environmental devastation as gendered harm and converts cultural practice into political power. At the nucleus of this activism was the Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations (FOWA). Combining official reports, testimonies, theory and narrative history, she uses her vast knowledge of Ogoniland to craft an engaging and illuminating synthesis of collaboration and resistance. Four main features characterized her findings as she revises our understanding of women's participation in activism: resistance, survival, recreation and memory.

She contends that women's activism in Ogoni land cannot be understood merely as an appendage to the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). It was a distinct political and moral force shaped by indigenous experiences of violence that transcended into transnational solidarities. Through FOWA and women within MOSOP, identities, spaces, and repertoires of contention are transformed at home and abroad. She scaffolds this with Critical Race and Environmental Criticism Theory (CRECT), foregrounding parallels between this theory and women's organizations and resistance to multinational companies that perpetuate environmental destruction, human rights abuses, and corporate-state power.

As Dube discusses one situation after another, she assesses the women's greatest success: exposure and the exchange of strategies. For instance, the members, such as Charity, had trips to Ethiopia, Kenya, Geneva (United Nations Environmental Program UNEP talks), and Abuja as part of the FOWA/MOSOP delegations (78). These strategies resulted in marches, petitions, and international action (61). Her interpretations suggest that travel served as a political pedagogy, enabling women to meet with heads of state and speak in international forums to address their substantive needs. This was a particular node in reframing the Ogoni grievance, not as isolated but within the broader context of global environmental justice.

A significant part of the book shows instances of government and development programs that approached Ogoni women with race- and gender-neutral training templates. She details a peaceful demonstration by Ogoni women in response to the Nigerian government's failure to act on the United Nations Environment Programme report, which highlighted extensive pollution from oil extraction and recommended cleanup and compensation (58). Women's decision to block a major road as a nonviolent protest, employing cars, palm fronds, and their bodies, symbolizes resistance and conveys their refusal to be disregarded. She explains how the demonstration explicitly aligns with the philosophy of Ken Saro-Wiwa. The women view their actions as a commitment to Saro-Wiwa's teachings, even in moments of repression. The cultural aspects of the protest, as analyzed by Dube, merge performance with political advocacy, with songs articulating demands, fostering solidarity, and evoking historical memory. The women's dances contrasted their energetic defiance with the immobility of armed soldiers, transforming the blockade into a spectacle that drew public attention and support while simultaneously infusing their resistance with joy.

One of the book's most compelling achievements lies in its gendered reading of environmental activism. Dube weaves empirical evidence to reveal how women's daily struggles, such as fetching water, farming on contaminated land, and nurturing families amid ecological collapse, shape their lives. These struggles became the embodied grounds of political resistance in local, national, and transnational spheres. Dube demonstrates how diasporic networks and alliances translated local suffering into the language of human rights and corporate responsibility. The recreation of lives, dignity, and a new beginning after destruction was critical to transforming decades of environmental ruin, exile, and oppression into purpose and displacement into renewal (155-156).

Dube's conclusions are not especially surprising, but the wealth of documentation and broad range of academic literature, along with theoretical-perspective analysis, make the book a valuable addition to the scholarly literature on gender and environmental politics. The constraint lies in its glossing over of internal class, generational, and ideological differences within FOWA and the broader Ogoni movement. A deeper engagement with how class or education shapes participation would deepen the analysis of women's activism as a unified category. While the book critiques the state as complicit with Big Oil, a more direct engagement could consider other state or non-state actors who were also internally divided or strategically allied with the activists.

An area for further study could consider comparative insights since the book emphasizes transnationalism. This could be with other African or Global South environmental struggles. Additionally, balancing the narrative with photographs could complement the songs and oral testimonies. *Ogoni Women's Activism* is a powerful intervention into the historiography of environmental justice and gendered resistance in Africa. It compels us to rethink justice as lived and practiced in the everyday survival of marginalized communities.

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***Leadership and Economic Development Challenges in Post-Colonial Africa: Creating Inclusive Economic Growth.* By Chukwuemeka Ezenwa Osuigwe, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. xxiii-168. ISBN: 978-3-031-45662-6.**

The relationship between leadership and economic development is among the most studied aspects of African affairs. Chukwuemeka E. Osuigwe's book is yet another contribution distinguished by the visibility of the author's own perspectives throughout the twelve brief chapters. His overarching aim was to reveal the decline in inclusive growth among the precolonial peoples of sub-Saharan Africa and to raise awareness of the texture and consequences of fragile leadership, with recommendations for improvement.

Chapter one began by stating that there is no straightforward answer to the question of whether Africa is worse than it was five decades ago. As a matter of fact, there exists greater access to roads, telecommunications, electricity, health facilities, education, and water. But Dr Osuigwe, echoing the views of other African development scholars, insisted that countries south of the Sahara have generally recorded abysmal progress due to the persistent absence of good, exemplary leadership. Relying largely on the global assessment metric for "insights into the African underdevelopment," Osuigwe rehearsed that Burundi, Niger, the Central African Republic, Malawi, Mozambique, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, Madagascar, and Comoros comprised "the first ten poorest countries in the world" as of 2019 (3).

One delicious situational irony is that because of the increase in population, the percentage of poverty decreases, but the number of poor people continues to expand in Africa. Under "The African Pre-colonial Social, Political, and Economic Development," chapter two delved into the instances of "Precolonial Struggles Against European Invasion and Warfare," "The Socioeconomic Model of Precolonial Africa," as well as "Precolonial Politics and Governance." Osuigwe also highlighted *Ubuntu*, *Nwanne*, and *Ofo na Ogu*, as widely practiced African ideologies that expressed humanity in the case of the first two, and sincerity of commitment to duties for the Igbo principle of "Ofo na Ogu." This second chapter contended that the erosion of these traditional foundations of morals and values by Western civilization skewed the African way of life, leading to "high corruption, conflicts, and many other social ills that affect Africa socially and economically" (23). Chapter three faulted the implied definition of independence since the 1960s by African leaders, who saw the gap created by the ouster of European colonizers not as a basis for autochthonous innovation, but as an opportunity to wield absolute power, subvert freedom, and hinder national development. I found it historically perplexing that Ethiopia and Liberia were included in Table 3.1, "African countries' independence year and age in 2023." Like Russia and Britain, both African countries fought and successfully retained their independence (28). That said, Osuigwe was on point that unlike African countries, "It did not take South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, and India more than 40 years after independence to become technologically developed" (28). What African "pseudo-leaders" rather cultivated was a legacy of despotism and running government affairs to suit the whims of their selfish family interests.

At the core of chapter four is 'deindustrialization,' the loss or deprivation of industrial capacity in Africa. The author recalled his upbringing in the village of Ihitteafoukwu, Mbaise, in Imo State, Nigeria, where he once believed that "white men invented everything on earth" (45). However, that perception changed when Osuigwe learned about local Nigerian inventors such as Damian Anyanwu, who developed a short-wave radio powered by herbs, and Engineer Ezekiel Izuogu, who in 1997 launched the Z-600, the first known indigenous African car (45-46). Hence, part of the author's argument was that the Africans, from precolonial era, as documented by Chirikure (2018), had distinguished themselves in technological innovation, creativity and profundity in carrying out development research. Unfortunately, the prevalence of weak leadership often pushed the best brains to the United States and other Western countries. The tradition of deindustrialization in Africa became evident in Nigeria from the 1980s, when both the Peugeot and Volkswagen car assembly plants declined and NNPC's crude oil refineries shut down. In chapter five, Osuigwe demonstrated that if sub-Saharan Africa is to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), greater efforts must be made to ensure access to education. If the information in Table 5.2 from the Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2011, were completely accurate, the level of illiteracy in post-independence African states would have been staggering. Striking the nexus between education and labor, Osuigwe illustrated that "In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, half of the population has not attended primary school," while in Senegal, the percentage was 41.81 (52). Without a practical, education-based approach, not even the harnessing of the natural and agricultural resources discussed in chapter six could be sustainable in Africa. The same narrative of what is lacking ran through chapter seven, which denounced Africa's "pitiable infrastructure development" (83). In chapter eight, the link between corruption and chronic underdevelopment is emphasized. It is regrettable that, although Africa's biggest economies, such as Nigeria and South Africa, have attempted to curb corruption, many anti-graft organizations have themselves become corrupt, highlighting how a lack of integrity has crippled African societies and thrown them into perpetual cycles of marginalization. Indeed, many of the "African conflicts" examined in chapter nine were either ethnically motivated or driven by political ideologies, religious beliefs, and struggles over control of natural resources. Whereas chapter eleven provided overviews of the most recent political disturbances in African countries, the tenth chapter addressed the fate of women, youth, and children in Africa.

Strolling through the precolonial, colonial, and post-independence eras, Osuigwe rekindled reflections on the roles of women such as Amina of Zaria, Hangbe of Dahomey, Amanirenas of Kush, Nzinga Mbanda, and Asentewa of Ghana in the economic and political development of the African continent. There was no mention of King Ahebi Ugbabe, the only warrant chief from Enugu-Ezike, Nigeria, as uncovered by Nwando Achebe in 2011. The author equally seemed to uncritically accept that "Women grow 70% of Africa's food but have few rights over the land they tend" (111).

Nevertheless, the book is deeply original, refreshingly readable, and, above all, a thought-provoking piece on the new condition of African societies in the twenty-first century. Dr Osuigwe's seventeen elaborate recommendations may not be realizable at once. But what remains clear is that confronting Africa's economic and development challenges must be based on a reorientation of value and reward systems. Such an approach can curb nepotism, encourage hard work, and strengthen governance institutions across the continent.

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