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IRELAND AND BIAFRA COMPARED: HISTORICAL HATRED FOR EMPIRES AND VENERATION OF NATION-STATES IN THE 1900S

KINGSLEY C. EZEUWA

Abstract

The inherent violence, exploitative nature, and unscrupulous expansionism of empires accounted for their remarkable global chastisement in the 20th century. Diplomatic architects of the fall of empires perceived the nation-state as incorruptible and the direct opposite of empire. Such a romanticized view and the search for a new world order informed the formation of the League of Nations, which was replaced in 1945 with the United Nations. Article 2(7) of the UN Charter upholds the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of States, while the Trusteeship Council, a successor to the League of Nations Mandate system, supported decolonization, the dissolution of empires, and the emergence of more independent nations. In comparison of Igbo-ness and Irishness, as well as Patrick Pearse's proclamation of 1916 and Chukwuemeka Ojukwu's declaration of 1967, this intellectual essay demonstrates that cultural consciousness, political aspirations, and experiences of subjugation were similar for both Irish and Biafran nationals in the twentieth century. However, a growing hatred of the British Empire, predominantly rationalized the Irish struggle globally, boosting hope at home. At the same time, the vision of a Biafran Republic in West Africa was undermined by the State System's emergency primacy in the aftermath of World War II. The significance of the study lies in demonstrating how similar experiences with nationalism and appeals employed across different eras in the 1900s produced divergent outcomes on the international stage.

Keywords: Biafra, Irishness, Nationalism, Empire, Nation-state, twentieth century

INTRODUCTION

Reconsidering the history of the Rising in Modern Ireland, with Marquette professor Timothy G. McMahon, in the spring semester of 2024, opened a vista into the macro-level understanding of the reasons behind the success and failure of certain independence struggles in the twentieth century. The inherent violence, exploitative hard-wiring, and unscrupulous expansionism of empires accounted for their global chastisement throughout history, while many engineers of the fall of empires continued to perceive the nation-state as almost incorruptible and the direct opposite of a malign empire. Such romanticized views and the search for a new world order following Germany's first defeat underscored the formation of the League of Nations, which was replaced in 1945 by the United Nations. Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter upholds the principle of non-

interference in the 'internal affairs' of States, while the Trusteeship Council, a successor of the League of Nations Mandate system, supported decolonization, dissolution of empires, and the emergence of more independent nations. In comparison of Igboness and Irishness, as well as Patrick Pearse's proclamation of 1916 and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu's declaration of 1967, this paper demonstrates that cultural consciousness, political aspirations, and experiences of subjugation were similar for both Irish and Biafran nationals in the twentieth century. Yet a growing hatred for global imperialism rationalized the Irish struggle at the global scale, boosting optimism at home, while the vision of a Biafran republic in West Africa was undermined by an emergent primacy of the State in the aftermath of World War II. The significance of the paper lies in demonstrating how similar experiences and methods of appeal across different epochs of the twentieth century ultimately produced divergent outcomes on the international stage.

The imperative for theorizing both Irish victory and the decline of Biafra becomes plausible when scholars cast their prismatic compass across the Atlantic to understand why most similar attempts at statehood in postcolonial Africa were frustrated by a pro-state global order, enunciated since the end of the First World War in 1918. This approach of research was inspired not only by the philosophical debates emanating from "The Principles of the Biafran Revolution," but also Eoin Flannery's seminal article on Irish Cultural Studies, in which he declared postcolonial studies as manifestly concerned with foregrounding exigent historical and contemporary experiences to fuller assessment of the legacies of all forms of imperial and anti-imperial struggles across borders and within a protracted historical continuum.¹

The question this paper addresses is how the global chastisement of empire and the concomitant veneration of the nation-state determined the success of Irish independence on the one hand and the collapse of the Biafran Republic on the other during the twentieth century. I tackle this puzzle with the understanding that although modern imperialism promised progress, its susceptibility to violence, economic extractive measures, and territorial conquest seemed to justify the apparent criminalization of empire-building in the postmodern world.² Although state-sponsored violence, as in the cases of Rwanda's Tutsi genocide and anti-Igbo pogrom in

¹ Eoin Flannery, "Irish Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Theory," *Postcolonial Text* Vol 3 No 3 (2007): 1. The need to understand Ireland's nationalism and victory through contemporary comparative lens is also implied in Shakir Mustapha, "Revisionism and Revival: A Postcolonial Approach to Irish Cultural Nationalism," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 36-53.

² Insights from Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History* (Cambridge: The Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2020), 3.

Nigeria, hardly suffered global condemnation as much, the empire, as a political unit designed to comprise as many territories and kingdoms as possible, received steady backlashes from both organized national bodies and the dominated principalities. However, as Robert Gildea observed, the system of empire remained protean, taking many forms that differed not drastically from Africa's postcolonial state models since 1960.³

THE UNITED NATIONS, ANTI-IMPERIALISM, AND THE SUPREMACY OF NATION-STATES

The end of the Second World War witnessed the replacement of the League of Nations with the United Nations in June 1945. Henceforth, global imperialism and associated nostalgia became increasingly subsumed under the rigid entrenchment and pursuit of state supremacy by the comity of nations as a panacea for large-scale imperial violence, impoverishment, and cultural and territorial dispossession.⁴ Critical-minded scholars like Mark Mazower had attempted to exorcise the UN. As the self-critical comments of British diplomat Charles Webster suggested, the UN itself was "an Alliance of the Great Powers, embedded in a universal organization."⁵ International history is an essential aspect of Professor Mazower's specialty, and his reflections on the imperial origins of the UN revealed the ambiguities of the era in which Britain fought in the First World War, seeking America's active support while imperial self-interest was grafted onto Wilsonian rhetoric. Jan Smuts, the South African British statesman, became a leading wartime theorist of international order, playing no small role in shaping the League of Nations and brokering accords between America's Woodrow Wilson and Whitehall (the center of the

³ Robert Gildea, *Empires of the Mind: The Colonial Past and the Politics of the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 2.

⁴ Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence: A History of the British Empire* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022). She had revealed the hidden story of Britain's brutal suppression of the Mau Mau nationalist rebellion in Kenya in the 1950s. Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005). Perhaps, the German empire was worse in the application of violence to achieve colonial objectives. You may read Marie Muschalek, *Violence as Usual: Policing and the Colonial State in German Southwest Africa* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2019), and Matthias Häußler, *The Herero Genocide: War, Emotion, and Extreme Violence in Colonial Namibia, translated from the German by Elizabeth Janik* (New York: berghahn, 2021); for the French empire, Michael G. Vann, "Of Pirates, Postcards, and Public Beheadings: The Pedagogic Execution in French Colonial Indochina," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (2010): 39-58.

⁵ Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 63.

Government of the United Kingdom). Despite supporting the idea of an international union, Smut remained apologetic to white racial superiority, with the hope that in the event of eventual obliteration of the British empire, international organizations such as the UN should ensure continuity of white leadership of the world.⁶

Nevertheless, Article 2, paragraph 7, of the Charter of the United Nations upholds the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states. In the same vein, the Trusteeship Council, successor to the League of Nations Mandate system, supported anticolonialism, the dissolution of empires, and the emergence of more independent nations, particularly in Asia and Africa. Determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, the UN warned all Members “to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity, political independence of any state, or in any other manner, inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”⁷ The so-called principle of “non-intervention” in domestic affairs acted as international legal immunity to punitive state actors who either sponsored or ignored massive intergroup extermination programs within their jurisdiction.⁸ American journalist David L. Bosco omitted what Chima J. Korieh described as the Biafran *genocide* in the author’s long list of voices ignored by the UN.⁹ Yet Bosco’s review substantially supported Mazower’s claim that the UN’s founding ideals, the projection of state actors, were concealed in imperialism and marred by partiality and rhetorical inconsistency. The “UN’s Military Staff Committee,” began Professor Bosco, was created to coordinate the international response to acts of aggression and breaches of the peace:

Instead, it has become a meaningless bureaucratic appendage that meets only so that it can say met. Article 43 of the UN Charter asked all member states to pledge in advance troops and resources for UN operations; not a single country has made such a pledge. These failures have had real consequences: UN peacekeeping missions in plac-

⁶ Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace*, 20.

⁷ Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice, San Francisco, 1945. [uncharter.pdf](#)

⁸ Michael Wood, “Non-Intervention (Non-Interference in domestic affairs), *Encyclopedia Princetoniensis*, [Non-Intervention \(Non-interference in domestic affairs\) | The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination](#)

⁹ Read ‘Introduction: History and the Politics of Memory,’ Chima Korieh, editor, *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Cambria, 2012), the systematized nature of the killing of civilians, including women and children, has compelled some scholars to argue that Nigeria’s Federal Military troops committed a yet-to-be acknowledged genocide against the Igbo, one of the three dominant ethnic groups in the country (the two others are Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani. In total Nigeria has about 200 known ethnic groups).

es like Rwanda, Bosnia, Sudan, and Congo, have lacked effective military planning and are frequently starved of resources. The case that the United Nations has fallen short might be even stronger in the realm of human rights. The Charter's lofty language, and additional instruments like the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the Genocide Convention, did nothing to prevent either massive atrocities, as in Cambodia and Rwanda, or the grinding repression that characterized the Soviet bloc during the Cold War and plenty of countries to this day.¹⁰

The point here is that the formation of the United Nations, being the consummation of worldwide aversion to empires, particularly the one built by the Britons from the second half of the 1800s, created great local problems with the escalating primacy of statehood. This new world order favored the efforts of Irish nationalists against the British Government in the 1920s, unlike West Africa's Biafrans, who lost the struggle despite their common resentment for the union of 'strange bedfellows.' Though on different continents—Europe and Africa—it may be relevant to compare the cultural and political ethos popularized by two remarkable leaders supported by their respective compatriots in both Ireland and Biafra.

PEARSE, OJUKWU, AND COMPARATIVE NATIONALISM

The Act of Anglo-Irish Union of January 1, 1801, abolished the Irish parliament in honor of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, the same way that the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates in January 1914 would give birth to the political union called Nigeria. As one event culminated in another in Western Europe, especially the Gaelic Revival, there emerged in Ireland, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, reinvigorated demands for Home Rule, which sought to gain control of Irish public opinion. In the early 1900s, as the movement came to insist on outright political independence, Patrick Henry Pearse emerged as one of the strongest proponents of the Irish language as a bedrock of Ireland's national identity. Several decades later, and with no recorded inspiration from both sides of the struggle, Pearse's Biafran counterpart, Emeka Ojukwu, would share the same sentiment about the Igbo language, culture, and political autonomy. Born on November 10, 1879, Patrick Pearse, like many other republicans, was a devout Irish Catholic and an indigene of Dublin, where he first lived with his father.¹¹ Historian

¹⁰ David Bosco, "Exorcising the United Nations," a review of *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* by Mark Mazower, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 35, No. 5 (November 2011): 921.

¹¹ James Pearse, an originally Protestant English sculptor.

Diarmada, his contemporary, was five years younger and from County Leitrim, in the western province of Connacht. In the first full account of the life of this enigmatic revolutionary, Gerald MacAtasney described the depth of MacDiarmada's impact on Sinn Féin, the IRB, and then the Irish Volunteers.¹⁷ A plaque constructed by his friends in Dublin suggests that before MacDiarmada was executed by firing squad on May 12, 1916, the republican activist had served as Secretary Supreme of the IRB Military Council.¹⁸ The position earned MacDiarmada some public recognition as one of the managers of the newspapers, *Irish Freedom* and *Nationality*. A summary of Brian Feeny's work showed that MacDiarmada practically "moved in the shadows, ultra-cautious about what he committed to paper, aware that his letters could be intercepted by the police."¹⁹ Such secretiveness would make it difficult for scholars to access the details of his substantial role in planning the Rising. Yet among them all, Pearse appears to have occupied the highest place in the revolutionary ladder. Louis Le Roux, Pearse's 1930s French biographer, had argued that "[he] was more than a patriot; [Pearse] was a virtuous man. He possessed all the qualities which go to the making of a saint . . . it would not be astonishing if Pearse were canonized someday."²⁰ Had the Republic of Ireland infinitely failed to exist, Le Roux would probably have sounded different. In any case, Pearse became a recognizable figure for his contributions to learning, but also for rising to political stardom against his father's Protestant English background.²¹ Joost Augusteijn's rigorous study of Pearse firmly established his tedious journey from cultural nationalism to republican violence.²² His childhood was ruled by "an exceptionally vivid imagination" and protective love for his younger brother, Willie.²³ By always "riding his wooden horse into battle, or in search of the Holy Grail," Pearse unknowingly turned the living room into "his own ship or his own kingdom."²⁴ When Pearse read the declaration of "the rights of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland," he echoed the reality, demonstrat-

¹⁷ Eoin Magennis, a review of *Sean MacDiarmada: The Mind of the Revolution* by Gerald MacAtasney (Manorhamilton: Drumlin Publications, 2004), *Seanchas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2005): 357-358.

¹⁸ Plaque outside offices in Dublin once used by Seán MacDiarmada https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/af/Se%C3%A1n_Mac_Diarmada_plaque.jpg

¹⁹ Brian Feeny, *Sean MacDiarmada: 16 Lives* (The O'Brien Press, 2014).

²⁰ David Thornley, "Patrick Pearse" *An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 55, No. 217 (Spring, 1966): 10-20.

²¹ Thornley, "Patrick Pearse," 10.

²² Joost Augusteijn, *Patrick Pearse: The Making of a Revolutionary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

²³ Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, 6 & 11

²⁴ Edwards, *Patrick Pearse*, 6.

ing utmost conviction that such rights, as granted to the people, must come with unfettered control of Irish destinies. The pronouncement strongly resonated with Irishness in ways that not even a totalizing destruction of the Irish people could nullify the solidarity and sovereignty embedded in the proclamation. Through the secessionist announcement, the religious people of Ireland invoked the protection of the Highest God, whose blessings were needed upon the arms and lives of the 'disciplined and valorous children' of the soil. Specifically, the religious language was chosen by Pearse and fellow author of the proclamation James Connolly to appeal to the people. Though they did not speak to the general population, they used that language in hopes that the people would accept their cause. In general, these nationalists demonstrated unfamiliar readiness to "sacrifice themselves for the common good."²⁵

Though he mercifully escaped execution into self-exile, Nigeria's Ojukwu as several other Biafrans, suffered a similar fate from the second half of the twentieth century.²⁶ By the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War on July 6, 1967, the land of Biafra, and indeed, the Nigerian federation, was the largest Christian environment in Africa. It was not surprising that Ojukwu equally sealed the Ahiara Declaration of 1st June 1969, with "Oh God, not my will, but Thine forever."²⁷ The Ahiara document was drafted by a group of intellectuals, including Chinua Achebe, and it became the blueprint for the mission and conduct of Biafrans throughout the Nigerian Civil War.²⁸

Born to a wealthy Igbo entrepreneur on November 4, 1933, Emeka Ojukwu graduated with a bachelor's degree in History from Oxford University in 1955, and shortly afterwards, joined the Nigerian army.²⁹ When he burnt his British passport in 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence, Ojukwu's aim was to turn permanently against "colonialism and neo-colonialism."³⁰ However, Ojukwu's faith in 'the nascent polity called Nigeria' would begin to decline when divisive sentiments and actions continually outflanked the calls for national unity.

²⁵The Easter Proclamation document.

²⁶See Kingsley C. Ezeuwa, *Remembering 1982: Willful Forgetting, Reconciliation and Partitioned Memory in Post-Civil War Nigeria* (M.A. Essay, Department of History, Marquette University, 2023).

²⁷ Emeka Ojukwu, *Ahiara Declaration: The Principles of the Biafran Revolution*, with an introduction by Chima J. Korieh (Glassboro: Goldline and Jacobs Publishers, 2021), 131.

²⁸ July 1967, to January 15, 1970. See Arua Oko Omaka, "Through Imperial lens: The Role of Portugal in the Nigeria-Biafra War," *Journal of Global South Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (Spring 2019): 187.

²⁹International Past Leaders' Profiles, "Odumegwu Ojukwu, Chukwuemeka (Nigeria)" [doi: 10.1057/978-1-349-95839-9_1](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-349-95839-9_1) ++ ([springer.com](https://www.springer.com))

³⁰Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1989), x.

Henceforth, much of Ojukwu's life was dedicated to the consolidation of Biafran independence as proclaimed on May 30, 1967.³¹ His strongest words of sober and encouragement went to the 'proud and courageous Biafrans,'³² who must intensify war against the 'enemies of the East.'³³ Like the signatories of the Irish Provisional Government who acknowledged the possibility of a violent imperial pushback from the United Kingdom, Ojukwu forewarned his Biafran compatriots about the impending suffering. In the notes that followed in 1967, "if we [Biafrans] are compelled to [go to war] we must be prepared for a period of real sacrifice, hardship, and inconvenience."³⁴ Indeed, the Igbo were denounced by many other ethnic groups during the war, even as federal military hostilities climaxed with suffocating economic difficulties, disabled external communications, and stringent immigration measures.

Much like the Biafrans, Irish republicans, inspired mightily by the American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century, guaranteed "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens." In other words, both the Irish people and Biafrans believed in the pursuit of happiness of the whole nation, cherishing all the children of its parts equally, oblivious of any differences carefully fostered by an alien government.³⁵

Adom Getachew was correct that the Biafran revolutionaries presented their demands as "an extension and expansion of African decolonization."³⁶ This internationalist perspective was in line with Ojukwu's claim that Biafra would never betray the Black race; "no matter the odds, we will fight with all our might until Black men everywhere can point with pride to this Republic, standing dignified and defiant, an example of African nationalism triumphant over its many and age-long enemies."³⁷ As Chima Korie observed, the Ahiara Declaration shared many similarities with Ujamaa, a socialist system of village cooperatives based on equal opportunity and self-help in Tanzania, during the administration of Julius Kambarage Nyerere in the 1960s.³⁸ Indeed, the socialist appeal of both Ujamaa and the Ahiara Declaration was not well received by the Western

³¹ The Ahiara Declaration that followed was simply a consolidation document.

³²Ojukwu, *Ahiara Declaration*, 131.

³³Ojukwu, *Biafra; selected speeches and random thoughts of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 146.

³⁴Ojukwu, *Biafra; selected speeches and random thoughts*, 174.

³⁵ Easter Proclamation document.

³⁶ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 32019), 126, digital copy.

³⁷ Ojukwu, *Ahiara Declaration*, 133-134.

³⁸ See 'introduction' in Ojukwu, *Ahiara Declaration*, 2; Julius K. Nyerere's original draft available as "Ujamaa – The Basis of African Socialism," www.jpanafrican.org/edocs/e-DocUjamaa3.5.pdf

Capitalist Powers, including Britain and the United States, during the Cold War. On “Property and the Community,” the secessionists declared thus against the tenets of Western capitalism:

In the New Biafra, all property belongs to the Community. Every individual must consider all he has, whether in talent or material wealth, as belonging to the community for which he holds it in trust. This principle does not mean the abolition of personal property, but it implies that the State, acting on behalf of the community, can intervene in the dispossession of property to the greater advantage of all. Over-acquisitiveness or inordinate desire to amass wealth is a factor liable to threaten social stability, especially in an underdeveloped society in which there are not enough material goods to go round.³⁹

Here, Ojukwu considered that the attachment of “undue value to money and prosperity” if unchecked by the New Biafra Government would come from the accumulation of large private fortunes by some citizens.⁴⁰ This very socio-economic framework negated the principle of a free market economy, which sees money and prosperity as essential and inevitable consequences of hard work and productivity. Irish republicans such as James Connolly had equally believed in socialism as representing the dominant and conquering force of freedom in their age.⁴¹ But the entrenchment of socialism without sustained efforts to attract the support of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the 1960s left the final nail on the coffin of the Biafran republic. Yet in its own merit, the Ahiara manifesto at Mbaise in present-day Imo State, stood as one of the most important articulations of political philosophy to emerge from Africa in the post-colonial period. This is because the declaration drew extensively from the conditions of the easterners during the Nigeria-Biafra War.⁴² The republic of Biafra collapsed by the end of the secessionist crisis in January 1970, but the principles of the revolution have continued to address fundamental issues facing humanity in recent times – including the sanctity of human life, dignity of the human person, social justice, stance against genocide, and the core strength of democratic leadership which defined indigenous Igbo political philosophy and institutions.⁴³ At the macro level of assessing the dynamics of historical causation, the greatest obstacle to the dream of Biafra was neither poor ammunition nor the blockade-

³⁹ Ojukwu, *Ahiara Declaration*, 104.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁴¹ Shaun Harkins, ed., *The James Connolly Reader* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018).

⁴² See Korieh’s introduction to the redeemed version of the Ahiara Declaration, 3

⁴³ Ojukwu, *Ahiara Declaration*, 3.

engendered famine—not even the Western fear of communist infiltration in Nigeria—the strongest impediment was the enshrined non-negotiable sovereignty of the postcolonial state in the covenant of the United Nations of which the Federal Republic of Nigeria was and remains a supportive member country.

CONCLUSION AND POINTS WHICH DID NOT FIT

The Irish nationalists saw the United Kingdom as their biggest problem, while the Biafran apologists dismissed the Nigerian federation as an unsafe British neocolonial appendage. Both agitations sought the creation of completely independent republics. In the 1960s, radical anticolonialism designated the emergence of new African nations as an ultimate triumph over imperial oppressions. The foundations of vibrant decoloniality had been laid in the 1920s, during which Irish nationalists appropriated the idea of self-determination as contained in Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, European powers were addressed in specific terms: "We entered this war because violations of right had occurred," began the 28th U.S. President,

"What we demand...therefore, is nothing peculiar to ourselves. It is that the world be made fit and safe to live in; and particularly that it be made safe for every peace-loving nation which, like our own, wishes to live its own life, determine its own institutions, [and] be assured of justice and fair dealing by the other peoples of the world as against force and selfish aggression."⁴⁴

The fifth clause advocated an "absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining...questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the government whose title is to be determined."⁴⁵ A combination of factors, including the guerrilla warfare conducted by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) against Crown forces during the War of Independence, accounted for the denial of attention to Irish delegates to the Versailles Peace Conference of early January 1919. Yet, internationalism, the doctrine of seeking an appeal to the Wilsonian moment, was embodied in the Dáil Éireann's *Message to the Free Nations of the World*, which was published on January

⁴⁴ Woodrow Wilson's 'Fourteen Points,' January 8, 1918, as culled from Arthur S. Link et al., eds., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 45 (1984), 536 [Microsoft Word - Fourteen Points.doc \(purdue.edu\)](#)

⁴⁵ Wilson's 'Fourteen Points.'

21, 1919.⁴⁶ Wilson's Fourteen Points speech gave little thought to the application of national self-determination beyond Europe, but his framework of an international order of democratic states supplied

A new language that came to underpin revolutionary challenges to the old order. The belief that their cause could be placed before the international community undermined the legitimacy of empires, encouraging nationalists to reject their offers of limited reform in favor of full independence.⁴⁷

The claims of Irish revolutionaries to the motivations and influence of the *dead generations* were as legitimizing as the ensuing chastisement of empires. It may be instructive to note that the men who signed the Proclamation did not have a wide audience before 1916. Pearse was a nonviolent activist until about 1912-13, and he became radicalized in those years as an advocate of physical force. Tom Clark and Mac Diarmada were the central figures in the IRB, around whom Pearse, Mac Donagh, and others eventually coalesced. Like the socialist James Connolly, all the signatories of 1916 were executed by the British Army firing squad for their part in the Rising, so they would play no role in the events after.⁴⁸ Thus, their ideas would be taken up by other revolutionaries with potentially different agendas. Basically, the Irish War of Independence lasted from 1919-21,⁴⁹ and its major outcome was the establishment of the Republic of Ireland.

For the Biafrans, historian Roy Doron provided a detailed trajectory of their plight after the aborted revolution of January 15, 1966.⁵⁰ The coup d'état was expected to deliver Nigeria's first republic from manifold corruption and install leaders believed to possess greater potential for accountability, economic transformation, protection of human rights and tolerance for public criticism.⁵¹ Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, the incumbent Prime Minister, was assassinated by the revolutionaries under the leadership of Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, a brilliant Igbo officer and the first Nigerian to be trained in military intelligence in the Royal Military Acad-

⁴⁶ "Ireland and the Versailles Peace Conference," *Dáil 100 Éireann*.

<https://www.dail100.ie/en/long-reads/ireland-and-the-versailles-peace-conference/>

⁴⁷ Fearghal McGarry, "Ireland of the Far East?": The Wilsonian Moment in Korea and Ireland," in Patrick Mannion and Fearghal McGarry, *The Irish Revolution: A Global History* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 66.

⁴⁹ John Dorney, "The Irish War of Independence – A Brief Overview," *The Irish Story*, 18 September 2012. Accessed 11/17/2025.

⁵⁰ Roy Doron, *Biafra: A Military History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2025).

⁵¹ Ukana B. Ikpe, "Patrimonialism and Military Regimes in Nigeria," *African Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (June 2000): 152.

emy at Sandhurst.⁵² Ethnic interpretations characterized the immediate post-coup period, and political commentators, chiefly from Northern Nigeria, labeled the revolution an Igbo inclination to dominate. The suspicion seemed rational, especially because the coup plotters captured neither Michael Opara, Kingsley O. Mbadiwe, nor Nnamdi Azikiwe—prominent Nigerian politicians of Igbo extraction at the time. In fact, of the about twenty-two casualties in the putsch, only Arthur Chinyelu Unegbe was of Igbo origin; the rest of the assassinated leaders came from either the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, or lesser-known middle belt ethnic groups in Nigeria. Thus, a counter coup occurred on January 29, 1966. The plotters killed the emergent Head of State, Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo General who had introduced the controversial political centralization decree number 34.⁵³ As the chains of absurdity culminated in the pogrom—massacre of the Igbo, and ultimately, civil war, members of the international community could not recognize the Biafran claims to genocide. The indifference happened probably because the killings were not executed under the flag of any global empire.

In Ireland, the emotive nature of the public debate, engagement, and sense of national identification with the Biafran cause had a surprisingly infinitesimal impact on Dublin's decision to remain neutral.⁵⁴ Fiona Bateman wrote that parallels of suffering were drawn between Biafra and Tudor Ireland. In utmost sympathy with the starving Biafrans in 1968, the *Irish Press* invoked Edmund Spenser's eyewitness account of the nineteenth-century famine in Ireland. The column reminisced that "out of every corner of the woods and glens they came, creeping forth on their hands, for their legs would not bear them: they looked like anatomies of death, they spoke like ghosts crying out of their graves."⁵⁵ Bateman is based in the Huston School of Film and Digital Media at NUI Galway.⁵⁶ The touching illustrations from her chapter confirmed that the impact of the Nigeria-Biafra War was profound in Ireland, especially given the war's propaganda intersection with diplomatic correspondence, media politics, and the complexities of modern global relationships and religion.⁵⁷ Historian

⁵² Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1981), 65.

⁵³ Ojukwu, *Because I am Involved*, 10.

⁵⁴ Fiona Bateman, "Ireland and Biafra: Hunger, History, Politics, and Public Opinion," in Chima J. Korieh, editor, *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory* (New York: Cambria, 2012), 111.

⁵⁵ Bateman, "Ireland and Biafra," 11. See also: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/how-ireland-got-involved-in-a-nigerian-civil-war-1.3089229>

⁵⁶ <https://mooreinstitute.ie/2020/06/26/africa-and-blackness-in-the-irish-imagination/>

⁵⁷ Bateman, "Ireland and Biafra," 111-132.

Enda Staunton summarized that the war “reverberate[d] across the world, causing a response in Ireland unequalled by the reaction to any civil conflict between that of Spain in the 1930s and that of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.” In other words, the conflict brought about “the greatest emotional involvement with an African problem since Ireland’s participation in the Congo Conflict.⁵⁸ Conversely, the impact of Ireland’s participation in the Nigeria-Biafra War may be exaggerated, as not even a temporary office was granted to Biafra by Francis Thomas Aiken, who served as Minister for External Affairs throughout much of the period of conflict.⁵⁹ In contrast to Ireland’s subversive past, Aiken consistently rejected the argument for Igbo independence. He considered that to allow a single tribe to hive off on its own would encourage the remaining hundreds of ethnic groups to demand autonomy from the Nigerian state.⁶⁰ Born as the youngest of seven on February 13, 1898, Frank Aiken strongly believed that dreadful things happen in wars, and worse during civil wars.⁶¹ Thus, despite Dublin’s non-recognition policy, the people of Ireland were favorably forthright with humanitarian aid, which flowed through the Catholic missionaries. Not only was Ireland’s only African embassy in Lagos,⁶² but Nigeria has also been perfunctorily classified as *the showpiece of Ireland’s religious empire*.⁶³ In fact, “the greatest concentration of Irish missionaries in the entire world was to be found there. Of [Nigeria’s] 850 Catholic priests, more than 500 were Irish; the Irish church ran 2,419 primary schools, catering for 561,318 pupils; twice as many as in the remainder of Africa [and] the 47 religious-run hospitals serving 714,441 patients.”⁶⁴ Irish people equally dominated the bishoprics of Calabar, Benin, Ibadan, Ogoja, Kaduna, Owerri, and other cities in Nigeria.⁶⁵

But beyond Ireland, the cooperation between Christians and Judaists was generally unprecedented. *The Catholic Advance*, a Kansas-based newspaper, reported in 1968 that the response of the religious communities in the United States and overseas to the plight of the victims of the Nigeria-Biafra imbroglio was enormous.⁶⁶ The deputy director of the

⁵⁸Enda Staunton, “The Case of Biafra: Ireland and the Nigerian Civil War,” *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 124 (November 1999), 513.

⁵⁹ Staunton, “The Case of Biafra,” 517-518.

⁶⁰ Staunton, “The Case of Biafra,” 517.

⁶¹ Bryce Evan and Steven Kelly, editors, *Frank Aiken: Nationalist and Internationalist* (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), xvi.

⁶² Embasáid na hÉireann first established September 1960.

<https://www.ireland.ie/en/nigeria/abuja/about/embassy-history/>

⁶³ Staunton, “The Case of Biafra,” 513.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 513.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 516.

⁶⁶ “The Tragedy of Biafra,” *The Catholic Advance* (Wichita, Kansas), Thursday August 22, 1968. Page 7, downloaded on March 23, 2024.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) acknowledged the sustained supply of food and drugs to Biafra as a landmark in understanding the true relevance of religion to humanity. The UN official also appreciated the significance of faith, wondering how much greater the human tragedy would have been had the missionaries not been actively engaged in addressing the problems of famine and displacement.⁶⁷ James Ahern, one of the Irish priests who fled Biafra in the middle of the conflict, helped to internationalize the predicament. According to him, the name, *Biafra*, became synonymous with "images of death, wanton destruction, and human suffering, almost beyond description."⁶⁸ During this period, the Biafrans were confronted with the possibility of total annihilation; the Red Cross recorded a death toll of 42,000 persons per week, the bulk of whom included women and children. Nigerian historian Chima Korieh described the civil war as "the first black-on-black genocide in postcolonial Africa," causing massive numbers of civilian deaths, devastation of public bridges, schools, roads, towns, and hospitals.⁶⁹ In *the Santa Cruz Sentinel*, Hugh A. Mulligan, the New York-born journalist, summarized that 'death,' as of November 1968, was an everyday way of life, especially in Umuahia, the new capital of the faltering republic. "Like the vultures constantly circling in the cloudless tropical sky, [death] casts its shadow everywhere; on soldiers, on civilians, most of all on children who [died] at a rate [unknown] even in the madness of modern warfare."⁷⁰ The figures are still being contested, but the most popular ones peg the total death toll at two million Nigerians, most of whom came from the Igbo-speaking population. Despite all the suffering, the Republic of Biafra still crumbled, and Bruce Mayrock's protest suicide of May 1969 in New York could not stir the United Nations.⁷¹

⁶⁷ "The Biafra Tragedy," *The Catholic Advance*, page 7.

⁶⁸ "Horror in Biafra Seen by Matean," *The Times* (San Mateo, California), Friday, September 6, 1968, page 53, downloaded on March 23, 2024.

⁶⁹ Korieh, editor, *The Nigeria-Biafra War*, 2

⁷⁰ "Death Is an Everyday Way of Life in Biafra," *Santa Cruz Sentinel* (Santa Cruz, California), Monday, November 11, 1968, downloaded on March 23, 2024.

⁷¹ Korieh, ed. *New Perspectives on the Nigeria-Biafra War: No Victor, No Vanquished* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), xvi.

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THE DEVASTATING CYCLE: THE IMPACTS OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF BIAFRA'S SIT-AT-HOME PROTESTS ON THE INFORMAL ECONOMY OF NORTHERN IGBOLAND

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Abstract

This article examines the connection between the Sit-at-Home protest of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and the impact on the informal economy of rural dwellers in Enugu State, Nigeria. While existing scholarship has focused on the overall impact of IPOB activities on the economy of South-Eastern Nigeria as a whole, the secessionist movement's effect on the local economy in rural communities has remained understudied. Drawing from a purposive and random sampling of respondents, including traders at Ogige and Igbo-Eze markets, as well as selected Artisans, motor drivers, Okada riders, and Keke riders in Nsukka, the study found that the declaration of a sit-at-home order by the IPOB has strangled the rural economy of the northern Igbos in southeastern Nigeria. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on the impact of ethnic nationalism on the rural economy.

Keywords: IPOB, sit-at-home, northern Igbo, informal economy, rural dwellers, ethnic nationalism

INTRODUCTION

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) initiated the "sit-at-home" order to pressure the Federal Government of Nigeria for the release of their leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu. This study investigates the profound economic impact of the Indigenous People of Biafra's (IPOB) "sit-at-home" orders on Northern Igboland (primarily Enugu state) from 2021 to 2025. Using mixed methods, findings reveal that mandated weekly lockdowns have crippled local commerce, agricultural transportation, and SMEs, resulting in significant revenue losses, soaring food prices, and increased local poverty. The study highlights that the directive has led to massive economic contraction, causing a substantial drop in weekly earnings for rural and urban traders, shutting down informal trade sectors (market days), and hindering the transport of agricultural products from rural areas to urban centers. We argue that this has led to income erosion among residents

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who rely on daily earnings, effectively hampering regional economic development. Furthermore, we argue that the sit-at-home order has transitioned from a political protest to a self-inflicted economic challenge for the Igbo people, undermining local economic resilience. The study calls for urgent dialogue between local stakeholders, the government, and pro-Biafra groups to restore economic normalcy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS

The youth of southeastern Nigeria framed the new quest for Biafran autonomy and exit from the Nigerian state as an ethno-nationalistic struggle. Its immediate context was towards the emancipation of a people who risked extinction by the various ethnocidal administrations in Nigeria after the Biafran War. The struggle was therefore dressed in the garb of messianism to address the collective grievance of a people (Akeem Idowu, 2023; Tuki, 2024; Ojo, 2024; Osuchukwu et al, 2025; Njoku, 2025). Often framed as a struggle against marginalization and economic exclusion, the struggle sought to restore the threshold that Biafrans had crossed in the technological and economic spheres during the three-year Biafran war.

The nurturing of ethnic consciousness in Nigeria owes significantly to the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates (Abejide, 2022; Chukwu & Okoji, 2024). Before the amalgamation, both the designated major and minor ethnic groups cohabited without their ethnic affiliations being politicized. Nonetheless, it is important to note that ethnic minorities in Nigeria are not simply numerically lesser linguistic groups. This is because these categories did not become a topical issue in Nigerian politics until after the onset of regionalization during the colonial period (Ikre, 2023). Before regionalization, all ethnic groups in Nigeria were equal, notwithstanding the subordinate-superordinate relationships that may have existed among them in the pre-colonial past (Ikre, 2023). Nigeria was formally bifurcated into three main ethnic regions—Northern, Western, and Eastern—by the British colonial administration in 1946 under the administration of Arthur Richard. The Constitution introduced by Macpherson in 1951 and the one introduced in 1958 by Lyttleton further consolidated the move toward Nigeria's practice of federalism as a power-sharing mechanism (Omoigberale, 2025). While it reflected the historical trends through which the British gained control and managed Nigeria, the regionalization arrangement was fundamentally divisive, leading to fragmentation and instability. Specifically, the tripartite system entrenched the political dominance of the Hausa-Fulani-led northern region (Orji, 2022), which accounted for over half of the nation's population and two-thirds of its land (Omoigberale, 2025). This has fostered the idea of one ethnic group exerting control and escalating tensions among ethnic

minorities as it left out the security of their areas; and promoted a significant level of ethnic-regional division due to the disproportionate tripartite ethno-regional setup which increased the imbalance after the inclusion of the Mid-West area in the southern part in 1963, which inevitably resulted in a conflict between two opposing sides between the south and the north.

In response to these ethnic tensions, the colonial authority introduced the system of indirect rule. It reinforced socioeconomic and political rivalry among Nigerian ethnic groups (Korieh, 2013; Ediagbonya, 2020). The system of indirect rule was based on the principle of divide-and-rule, whereby certain ethnic or regional elites were empowered at the expense of others. This led to considerable mistrust between the state and the masses, as well as among the major ethnic nationalities – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (Etefa, 2019). The political and economic rivalry among the three regions of North, South, and West was reflected in the ethnicization of the political parties that emerged at that time such as the National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (later National Council of Nigeria Citizens) NCNC was formed in 1944 by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe from Igbo ethnic stock, the Action Group (AG) was formed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo 1951 to pursue and protect the interest of the Yoruba people, while the Northern People’s Congress (NPC) formed in 1950, by northerners and for northerners thus making ethnicity the base of Nigeria politics (Ojo, 2012).

By the time the early post-colonial leaders had settled down, ‘ethno-centrism, nepotism, and religious intolerance, social injustice, ethnic persecution’ (Okoye & Asogwa, 2021, p. 71) had taken into the fabrics of the political ecology, thus culminating into the ethnic riots of 1964, the Federal and Regional election crisis of 1964, the killing of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria in 1966. The seeming lukewarm nature of the state response to the crisis, especially to the massacre of the Igbo in parts of Northern Nigeria, dramatically led to the collapse of the First Republic and the first military coup on January 15, 1966. The coup, which led to the killing of many Northern leaders, saw the installation of General John Aguiyi Ironsi as the head of the Nigerian government (Duruji, 2012). The result of the 1966 military coup re-echoed and seemingly confirmed the long-held view by the northern political elite of the Igbo domination of Nigeria’s politics and economy.

This fear of Igbo domination of Nigeria’s politics, primarily among its northern neighbors, created an atmosphere of resentment against the Igbo by their Northern neighbors and indeed by other Nigerian ethnic nationalities, and resulted in the massacre of the Igbo upon any slightest or no provocation (Obumselu, 1968, p. 142; Madubuike, 2012; Achebe, 2013). The foregoing conditions of instability, wanton killings, and ethnic strife resulted in the January 15, 1966, coup (Ojukwu, 2005). However, the acri-

mony generated by the Nzeogwu coup of January 1966 resulted in the countercoup of July 29, 1966, which overthrew Aguiyi Ironsi after 194 days in power (Aro & Ani, 2017). The countercoup resulted in a wave of 'pogrom, massacre, misplaced aggression, and targeted genocide' on the Igbo, which further drummed the echo of Igbo self-determination and eventual resolution of the Igbo leaders to exit Nigeria by formal declaration of the sovereign state of Biafra in 1967 (Achebe, 2012; Duruji, 2012).

This declaration of Biafra's independence by the Igbo leaders led by Odumegwu Ojukwu opened another wave of police action against the Igbo people by the Federal Government of Nigeria. By the end of the war on January 15, 1970, more than three million Igbo had died, and properties and economic livelihood in all the major cities of Igbo land were destroyed (Asogwa & Okoye, 2021). The failure of Yakubu Gowon's administration to achieve post-war reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation, which were intended to reintegrate the Igbo, properly set the stage for a new phase in the struggle for Igbo self-determination in Nigeria. The lack of political and economic inclusion of the Igbo resulted in collective grievance and victimhood within post-Biafran Igbo nationalism (Ibeanu, Orji, & Iwuamadi, 2016). The Igbo and the Southeast region were increasingly alienated and sidelined by the federal government of Nigeria in its policies and programs, which were promised at the war's end in 1970 (Ikpeze, 2000). This left the Igbo with the feeling that the post-civil war policies of the Federal Government were designed to undermine their capacity to compete with other ethnic groups in the Nigerian political economy. Policies like the 20-pound flat rate on bank lodgement for every Igbo after the war, the indigenization policy that privatized the foreign shares of fully owned foreign companies in Nigeria after the war, and the infamous abounded property saga were some of the perceived anti-Igbo policies in the post-Biafra era, which further sustained the quest for self-determination by the Igbo (Ojukwu, 2005).

The political marginalization of the Igbo in the Second and Third Republics prompted further agitation by Igbo elites, setting the stage for the emergence of the neo-Biafra movement in the years that followed. Since Dr. Alex Ekwueme served as Vice President under Alhaji Shehu Shagari between 1979 and 1983, before General Buhari overthrew the regime in the 1983 military coup, the Igbo have not had the opportunity to elect a Nigerian president. This was compounded by an unbalanced state structure, in which the Southeast was allocated only five states – the fewest of the country's geopolitical zones – fuelling feelings of marginalization and exclusion among the Igbo in the wake of the 1999 democratization. The Igbo hoped that the emerging democratic transition led by General Abdulsalami Abubakar between June 9, 1998, and May 29, 1999, would produce an Igbo presidency, a hope that was never realized. This hope was

truncated following the humiliation of Igbo frontline politician Dr. Alex Ekwueme at the PDP convention in Jos in 1999, where the collaboration between Northern and Western politicians resulted in Olusegun Obasanjo being named the PDP flagbearer (Aro & Ani, 2017). The foregoing narrative scenario revived the sense of Igbo marginalization and exclusion in Nigeria's fourth republic, leading to the articulation of a demand for a Biafran re-secession in Nigeria's post-war history. This perceived injustice against the Igbo people in the wave of the new democratic order rekindled the agitations for self-determination and the emergence of new Biafrans with the launching of the Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) by Chief Raph Uwazurike on "September 13, 1999" (Okoye & Asogwa, 2021, p. 73). The formation of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the emergence of the neo-Biafra Movement seem to be a direct response to the failure of the Nigerian government to tackle the lingering issue of Igbo political, economic, and social inclusion since the civil war (Onuoha, 2011). The introduction of the old Biafran currency by MASSOB, the launch of the Biafran passport, and the hoisting of the Biafran flag in parts of Igbo land soon brought it into conflict with the Nigerian security forces (Ikeh, 2021). This led to the arrest and detention of Uwazurike from 2005 to 2007, when the group had significantly been factionalized. The movement for Igbo self-determination received a new twist in 2012, when a faction of MASSOB, led by Benjamin Onwuka, launched the Biafra Zionist Movement (BZM) in Enugu. Onwuka and his group, however, did not last long as he was arrested on November 5, 2012, following the aborted attempt to seize the state-owned radio station, ESBS Enugu, to re-declare the Republic of Biafra (Oketokun, Ayomola & Adesiyani, 2021).

The protests and arrest of pro-Biafra agitators by the security agents characterized the atmosphere in which the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was formed in 2012 by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (Nwangwu, 2022). The official launching of IPOB in the year 2012 "resurrected the struggle for self-determination" "waged by the Igbo that led to the bloody civil war in Nigeria (Nduba, Nnamdi & Ofodu, 2020, p. 7). Due to the confrontational and radical rhetoric of Kanu (Asogwa et al, 2024), he was incarcerated by the Nigerian state. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has employed various protest strategies designed to pressure the Nigerian political leadership to grant its demand for Igbo self-determination. IPOB, in furtherance of its goal, has adopted strategies such as the declaration of sit-at-home in the Southeast Region on Mondays and any other days that its leader, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, goes to court, armed guerrilla attacks against state institutions and security formations, engaging in acts of civil disobedience, such as election boycott and refusal to participate in the national census exercise.

Scholars, commentators, and analysts have grappled with the root causes of the Nigeria-Biafra War, the dynamics of the war itself, and the long-term implications for the region and Nigeria's future (Korieh, 2018; Uche, 2008; Raji & Abejide, 2013). Discussions have centered on the impact of colonial legacy and the failure of post-independence nation-building efforts. Others have focused on the role of ethnicity, political marginalization, and economic disparities in fueling the conflict (Ekwe-Ekwe, 1990; Stremmlau, 1977). These narratives, though complex, have been preoccupied with examining the events that led to the declaration of Biafran independence and the subsequent police action against the Igbo in southeastern Nigeria. Scholars have also devoted considerable attention to discussing post-war conditions and the intersection of various factors that contributed to the emergence of neo-Biafran movements and the ongoing struggle for self-determination (Falola & Heaton, 2008). These movements have sought to rekindle the Biafran identity, address perceived injustices, and advocate for greater autonomy or secession from the Nigerian state (Atogu, 2016; Muzan, 2014).

The outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War in 1967 and the continued agitations for Biafra have been widely attributed to the complex legacy of British colonial rule in the region and the failure of post-independence nation-building efforts (Falola & Heaton, 2008; Korieh, 2018; Ojibara, 2016). As Afigbo (1981) succinctly explained, prior to colonization, the area that later became Nigeria was home to diverse ethnic groups and political structures. Ethnic nations existed in their own distinct enclaves, ranging from the centralized Sokoto Caliphate in the north to the decentralized Igbo communities in the east. Thus, according to Falola & Heaton (2008), British colonial administrators, in their efforts to consolidate control, implemented policies that exacerbated existing tensions and laid the groundwork for conflict, including the Biafran War. This informs the assertion by Korieh (2018) that the Nigerian-Biafran War was the culmination of the political problems created by the colonial authorities in Nigeria when Frederick Lugard merged different parts of the territory in 1914. According to him, this problem was further complicated by the 1954 regional constitution, which divided the country into three provinces: Western, Eastern, and Northern. This, he argued, led to the introduction of "ethnic and regional parochialism" that resulted in a 1966 military coup and counter-coup (Korieh, 2018, p. 80). Scholars such as Olusanya (1980) and Ribadu (2015) have supported the above account by arguing that the most significant factors leading to the Nigerian-Biafran War and numerous other inter-ethnic conflicts in post-independence African states were the failure to consider the complexities of local identities and power structures in colonial state formation. According to Ribadu (2015), this resulted in a power imbalance and competition for resources between the regions,

which later became a significant point of contention. For Ojibara (2016), the structural imbalance of the Nigerian federation results from the colonial asymmetrical distribution of power among ethnic and geographical groups. He continued that the above factors resulted in a cobweb of events that catalyzed the outbreak of the Biafran War, such as the January 15 and July 29, 1966, coups and countercoups, respectively, and the killing of the Igbo in the north from May to September 1966.

In a related account, Das (2021), in a paper titled “The Inseparable Ties of the Past: Indirect Colonial Rule in Nigeria and the Biafra War,” has advanced the argument that the enthronement of the system of indirect rule by the British destabilized all the Indigenous political structures and laid the groundwork for ethnic rift and tension. This resulted in what he called the “campaign of ethnic cleansing” in 1966, which was the immediate precursor to the Biafra declaration in 1967. According to him, the British system of amalgamation and the prolonged practice of indirect governance only ensured the grouping of hundreds of ethnic communities into one nation, without any attempt to build a culture of national unity. Thus, ethnic tensions and regional affinities persisted because each ethnic nation was more strongly affiliated with its ethnic heritage than with its national identity. However, while the colonial legacy undoubtedly contributed to the structural problems Nigerians faced at independence, it would be an oversimplification to attribute the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War solely to this factor. The interplay between post-independence economic conditions and the actions of Nigerian leaders played an important role in the conflict. For instance, according to Okolie (2003), in his work *Oil, Politics, and Conflict in Nigeria*, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region heightened regional disparities and economic competition among Nigeria's ethnic groups. According to him, this fueled the Eastern region's secessionist impulse to secure control over its oil resources. Additionally, Das (2021, pp. 46-47) notes that “although petroleum was discovered in the Niger Delta in 1958, it has instead generated revenues for economic independence.” Instead, it led to rising ethnic resentments, which, according to him, ultimately culminated in the outbreak of a three-year-long Nigeria-Biafra war. Das also argued that the Federal Government of Nigeria, under Yakubu Gowon's resistance to the formation of the Biafra nation, was based not on the ground of national unity but on the ground of losing revenue that came from the oil discovered in the Niger Delta in 1958. This narrative is crucial to understanding the dynamics of the political and economic environment that led to the civil war, suggesting that immediate economic interests and power struggles, rather than solely colonial legacies, contributed to the outbreak of the Nigerian-Biafran war.

Scholars have also been preoccupied with explaining the link between the post-war conditions of the Igbo and the continued agitations for Biafra in contemporary Nigeria. As Uzoigwe (2012, p. 234) states, there is no doubt that "the state of the Igbo nation since the fall of Biafra has not been good and has been getting increasingly bad." This obvious precarious post-Biafra war condition of the Igbo has been attributed to the failure of the promised reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation program by the General Yakubu Gowon-led military government. As documented by Omenka (2021), "the subsequent actions of the Federal Military Government (FMG) and its cohorts stood glaringly at variance with the declarations of the promises made." According to him, there was no systematic effort by the Nigerian government to rebuild Igboland. This, however, explains why the missions pioneered the postwar reconstruction of Biafra, apparently due to neglect by the government of the day. Thus, KorieH (2021) explains that the Nigerian government did not adopt any meaningful strategy to enshrine durable peace in the post-Biafran period. For him, the rhetorical proclamation of 'no victor, no vanquished' was not followed by a proactive strategy to ensure integration or any form of transitional justice. This, according to Ihunna (2021), has continued to make the conditions of the Igbo in Nigeria a dominant topic in contemporary Nigerian political discourse, thereby explaining the resurgence of a new wave of consciousness among many Igbo toward Biafra.

The above position suggests that the recent wave of agitation for the sovereign state of Biafra is a direct response to perceived failures in the Nigerian government's post-war policies. The failure of the No Victor, No Vanquished program can therefore be seen as a catalyst for the resurgence of the neo-Biafra movements. The neo-Biafra movements, such as the emergence of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), with its radical approaches, are a manifestation of the unaddressed grievances and numerous unmet promises of the Nigerian government's post-war reconciliation and reintegration of the Igbo. While the above view has sufficiently explained the intersection of post-war conditions among the Igbo with the emergence of the neo-Biafra movements, it falls short of addressing the historical grievances that contributed to that emergence. This perspective often overlooks the impact of contemporary socio-political dynamics on the resurgence and persistence of the neo-Biafra movements. The movement also reflects the broader dissatisfaction of Nigerians and Igbo alike with the contemporary decline in state capacity and efficiency. As argued by Suberu (2001), the failures of successive governments to address systemic issues at all levels, such as corruption, poor governance, insecurity, and the growing inequality between those in power and the governed, have the potential to fuel separatist sentiments not only among the Igbo but also in other regions. Implicit in the above view is the idea that eco-

conomic marginalization, political exclusion, identity politics, and contemporary political dynamics intersect to ignite the neo-Biafra movement.

Scholars hold divergent views on what may have accounted for the rise of separatist Movements in Nigeria, particularly the emergence of IPOB. In explaining this trend in secessionist movements, three explanatory strands emerged- those who tend to situate it on the colonial origin of the Nigerian state, the ethnic politics and ethnic mobilization point of view, and finally, those who argue that the exclusionist politics of the Nigerian ruling class informed the eruption of IPOB separatism. The colonial state perspective centers on its account of the Nigerian state's role in the emergence of inter-class struggle and conflict arising from the struggle for hegemony among ethnic groups. They thus attribute the eruption of the neo-Biafra Movement and the formation of pro-Biafra separatist groups in the wake of the return to democratic governance in 1999 to the progressive marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria that is akin to the nature of the Nigerian state (Ikpe, 2012; Okafor & Udalla, 2018; Maigari & Umar, 2018; Taiwo & Ariyo, 2020; Nnoli, 2003; and Ikelegbe, 2013). They argue that in Nigeria, the interplay of state dynamics and marginalization was a result of colonial manipulation of the African Indigenous ethnic nationalities, which has resulted in the zero-sum nature of inter-ethnic relations and the mobilization along ethnic lines. Ikpe (2009) has argued that the patrimonial nature of the Nigerian state, occasioned by the colonial fabrication of Africans along ethnic lines, has continued to shape the dynamism of ethnic relations in Nigeria. He explained that the colonial division of the Nigerian state along ethnic lines and the policy of divide and rule sowed the seed of competition for hegemony among the three major ethnic groups and the resultant exclusion and crisis of marginalization that has continued to divide the people of Nigeria. He disagrees with the prevailing view that separatist groups arise from ethnic competition. Instead, he argues that the systemic chaos in the Nigerian state stems from its patrimonial nature, in which state power and resources have been commodified and personalized. The commoditization of the state, therefore, leads to competition and occasional exclusion of some ethnic groups that often respond by mobilizing in the form of separatist agitation.

The end of the war, however, ushered in another phase of state-organized destabilization of the Igbo people and economy. The Igbo in Nigeria before 1999 had endured the harsh realities of post-civil war government policies, which were designed to undermine their economy and political participation. With the hope that the democratisation process of 1999 would open a window of opportunity, the Igbo sought to accommodate and eventually integrate into the Nigerian political economy. This explains the enthusiasm that greeted the wave of democratization among the Igbo elite and masses, which presented an ample opportunity for the

Southeast, predominantly composed of the Igbo ethnic stock, to have a commensurate stake in the political economy of the Nigerian state. The political transition in 1999 raised the hopes of the Igbo elite, who had paid a huge price during the heyday of the military dictatorship. It informed the enthusiasm that marked the participation of the Igbo political and economic class in the transition process.

The predominant feeling among the Igbo was that the 1999 democratisation process would address the issue of marginalization that had pervaded the long period of military rule, particularly in areas such as post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation, state creation, infrastructure development, and general economic disempowerment. Drawing from the above view, it is compelling to argue that the renewed agitations for Biafra are related to the post war marginalisation of the Igbo and the feeling of collective deprivation occasioned by the inability of the Igbo political elite to occupy the Nigerian highest office in 1999 as widely expected by the majority of the Igbo (Onwubiko & Ugborji, 2022) given the pedigree and popularity of Dr. Alex Ekwueme, a foremost Igbo politician was widely expected to emerge as president by majority of the Igbo people at the time. The belief among some sections of Igbo that the result of the 1999 election, which eventually produced Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo as president, would continue the propagation of the progressive marginalization they had suffered for years was the primary cause for the renewal of the agitation for Biafra and prepared the ground for the emergence of MASSOB and the subsequent rise of IPOB in 2012.

Consistent with the above position, Ibeanu, Orji, and Iwuamandi (2016) found in their study of Biafran separatism that there is a nexus between feelings of collective victimization and the separatist Movement in Nigeria. They explained that the feeling of collective victimization among the Igbo and other ethnic groups in Nigeria could only be understood in the peculiar context of the nature and character of the Nigerian state. The multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian state stems from the colonial construction of states in Africa, which has occasioned primordial contestation among the ethnic nations and the resultant feelings of marginalization, as well as the aggregation of collective victimhood among regions that felt marginalized. According to scholars, these contestations arise from feelings of exclusion and deprivation stemming from the country's unfair and inequitable state structure. The long years of social, political, and economic imbalance against the Igbo have enshrined feelings of marginalization and a sense of being collectively victimized in Nigeria, thereby pushing them to think of the resurrection of defunct Biafra. Impliedly, therefore, IPOB emerged due to the failure of the Nigerian Government to address the lingering issue of marginalization of the Igbo. The above position suggests that the Igbo are being denied their share in both the politics and the

economy of the Nigerian State and explains the tendency to seek a separate state of their own – the Sovereign State of Biafra. This position, however, failed to explain the reasons for the noticeable divide between the Igbo political class and most underclass youth, who form the fulcrum of the neo-Biafra agitation in the Southeast.

Scholars have also linked the rise in IPOB and other ethnic-based organizations in Nigeria to economic discrimination, inequality, and unfair inequitable distribution of national resources by the Nigerian government. In the view of Obiegbunam & Abah (2023), the immediate trigger of the rise in separatist agitation and the formation of separatist organizations in Nigeria is the wilful discriminatory practices of the Nigerian political leaders who use their positions of power to allocate political values in the form of resources and appointments to their favoured ethnic group. This scenario breeds inequality and exclusion as one tribe or ethnic nation is positioned for the greater benefit of power, thereby edging other ethnic groups out. Saleh (2013) attributes the growing quest for secession in Nigeria to inter-ethnic competition and deprivation, as outlined in his work on relative deprivation theory, ethnic nationalism, and conflicts over ethnicity and identity. He explains that the desire to secede becomes inevitable when the major ethnic community in a country exercises unfair control over all economic opportunities, leaving members of other regions, ethnic groups, or tribes at a disadvantage. This will result in expressions of discontent over marginalization, which are often silenced or ignored by the leading ethnic elites, thereby fuelling agitation for autonomy and a separate state. This view was further elaborated by Obiegbunam and Abah (2023), who explained that the unfavourable policies of President Muhammadu Buhari, which excluded the Igbo ethnic group from his appointments and projects, provoked the emergence of IPOB to seek a separate state for the Igbo, where their political and economic interests would be guaranteed.

Okoye & Asogwa (2021) have argued that the Igbo's ongoing struggle for self-determination is sustained by the Nigerian state's refusal to address the feelings of deprivation engendered by perceived socio-economic marginalization and inequalities in the distribution of power. According to them, IPOB emerged from frustration. As a last resort, pressure the government to streamline revenue-sharing processes, political appointments, and other structural imbalances. Furthermore, Oyetunde (2021) aligns with this view, positing that the primary impetus for separatist agitation in Nigeria is power sharing. He explained that Nigeria's diverse ethnic and geographical composition has made the equitable distribution of political power and economic benefits within the country difficult. The result has been the emergence of new forms and ways of expressing disenchantment among disadvantaged ethnic groups. This issue of the dis-

tribution of political and bureaucratic offices becomes imperative in a diverse country like Nigeria to prevent the monopolization of state institutions by a few privileged ethnic groups. The collapse of zoning and the federal character principle in Nigeria due to the ambitious nature of the political elites to use their positions to advance their personal and tribal interests has resulted in the eruption of groups representing various ethnic groups to agitate for ethnic balancing and just distribution of national resources, hence the rise in IPOB agitation (Oyetunde, 2021).

While acknowledging the intricate role of state dynamics and marginalization in the rise of the IPOB separatist movement in Nigeria, it is important to scrutinize the oversimplification of these factors. The assertion linking the state, marginalization, and the rise of the IPOB separatist movement in Nigeria provides a valid framework; however, we view that the impact of the crisis on the rural economy of the people targeted for salvation has not been satisfactorily examined.

THE ENFORCEMENT OF THE SIT-AT-HOME ORDER AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS TO THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IN NORTHERN IGBO OF SOUTHEAST, NIGERIA

Since the declaration of a sit-at-home order, the Southeast has become a ghost region, with all businesses shut down on such days and every Monday, as residents stay at home, mainly out of fear of attack (Ukwa, 2022). The foregoing observation revealed circumstances in which the residents of the Southeast found themselves following IPOB's sit-at-home protest in the region. The region is awash with reports and cases of attack by the purported enforcers of the protest on the residents who attempted to go to their normal businesses on Monday. Recent data show a rise in violent separatist agitation and counter-separatist violence in the Southeast Region, claiming so many lives and property worth millions of naira to have been destroyed (Chime, 2022). The violence in the region has been attributed to the clash between the pro-Biafra militias and the Nigerian security forces (Okeoma, 2021). The IPOB paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), which was created by the group in 2020, has been variously implicated in the deaths of civilians and members of the security forces as well as attacks on state infrastructures and property. According to Emma Powerful, all institutions, public and private, transport companies, schools, banks, markets, airports, and seaports in Biafra must shut down every Monday beginning from August 9, 2021 (Eleke, 2021). Consequently, findings have shown that the enforcement of sit-at-home in the Southeast by the IPOB has resulted in untold hardship in the region, severe economic loss, loss of earnings and jobs, and unemployment and poverty. This has been corroborated by Ujumadu (2022), who observed

that the strict enforcement of the sit-at-home order has led citizens to endure unpleasant experiences every Monday. It has also been observed that the unknown gunmen crisis in the Southeast region originated from forcing people to comply with the sit-at-home order by pro-Biafra supporters. A tricycle rider in Ogurute, Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area, explained that ‘it was indeed in order to enforce the sit-at-home that led to the emergence of unknown gunmen in our community here’ (anonymous, 2024i). He stated that, prior to the sit-at-home declaration, the area was peaceful, despite the presence of many pro-Biafra supporters. According to him, the normal IPOB protest of marching on the streets with their flags changed over time, and gunmen started killing people to force them to stay at home on Mondays. To make the whole situation worse, IPOB also declares and indeed enforces sporadic sit-at-home at one time or another in the region. Njoku (2023) reported that, in addition to the weekly Monday sit-at-home, the IPOB also declared sporadic sit-at-homes on other days it deemed necessary, with little regard for residents’ plight. For instance, in 2022, IPOB declared four days of sit-at-home on December 9th, 10th, 12th, and 13th, and on May 16th to 18th. During these days, those who tried to defy this order were met with a volley of bullets from the IPOB enforcement gang.

Due to the sit-at-home order, the Southeast is under a total lockdown, with all banks, government offices, markets, and shops closed every Monday (Abba et al., 2023). The sit-at-home order imposes a complete ban on all forms of interstate movement and travel within the Southeast Region. Okon-Ekong, Isiguzo, and Arinze (2021) have observed that Sit-at-Home enforcers are the militant wing of the IPOB known as the Eastern Security Network. As observed, due to fear of being attacked by the pro-Biafra militias, roads, shops, markets, and all forms of enterprises are closed on Mondays and other designated days. The Southeast is greeted every Monday by empty streets, deserted roads, closed shops, and locked business premises.

The enforcement of the sit-at-home order in the Southeast has increased the spate of violence and attacks by unknown gunmen, thereby inflicting fear and death on the citizens. As one informant reported, “Every sit-at-home is a terror day in our area as there is always the likelihood of masked men with guns attacking those who try to come out, not minding the urgency of their mission.” This agrees with the statement of the former Kaduna Central Senator, Shehu Sani, in *Sahara Reporters* on December 11, 2022, that “sit-at-home is a peaceful and legitimate means of dissent or civil protest; but once it is enforced by force, violence or threats, and complied with, out of fear, it has become another form of terror and tyranny.” The spate of violence and casualties recorded in the Southeast every Monday and other days, as represented in Table 4.1 below, suggests

that the armed men force residents to stay indoors against the wishes of the people and also points to the level of suffering and loss of livelihood in the form of destruction of lives and property as a result of the sit-at-home enforcement.

Table 1: Selected Cases of Armed Attack by the Enforcers of Sit-At-Home in Enugu State between 2021 and 2023.

| No | Reported IPOB-Related Attacks | Date | Place of attack | Source |
|----|--|--------------------------|--|--|
| 1 | Two operatives of the Neighbourhood watch group were killed, and two operational vehicles were burnt. | Tuesday, October 6, 2021 | Ogurute, Igbo-Eze North LGA | <i>The Guardian</i> https://guardian.ng/news/police-confirms-killing-of-2-neighbourhood-watch-operatives-in-enugu/ |
| 2 | Many people were injured, and valuable items were destroyed and looted as masked men on motorcycles invaded Ogrurute headquarters of Igbo-Eze North LGA. | Monday, 9th August 2021. | Ogurute, Igbo-Eze North LGA | The Sunnews https://sunnewsonline.com/6-killed-as-ipob-sit-at-home-grounds-south-east/ |
| 3 | Masked men attacked traders who came early to display their wares with various weapons. | Monday 9 August 2021 | Nkwo Aji Market, Igbo Eze North LGA | Sun News https://sunnewsonline.com/6-killed-as-ipob-sit-at-home-grounds-south-east/ |
| 4 | Gunmen enforcing the IPOB Sit-at-home order attacked shops, markets, and schools in Enugu. | Wednesday 5 July, 2023 | Enugu Areas: Asata, Trans Ekulu, New Heaven, Artisan Market, Coal Camp, and Uwani Enugu. | BBC: https://www.bbc.com/pidgin/articles/cqvqvjxwz97o |
| 5 | An INEC official was injured, and electoral machines were destroyed as gunmen attacked a registration center in Enugu. | Wednesday, July 13, 2022 | Community primary school Umuopu, Igbo-Eze North LGA | Daily Nigerian https://dailynigeria.com/inec-official-injured/ |
| 6 | Unknown gunmen burnt down the INEC office in Ogurute. | Sunday, July 3, 2022 | Ogurute, the headquarters of Igbo-Eze North LGA. | Daily Nigerian: https://dailynigeria.com/inec-official-injured/ |
| 7 | Gunmen killed at least seven police men in Enugu state capital | 11-12 February, 2022 | Enugu | Crisis Watch Group: https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/database?page=2&location%5B0%5D=28&da= |
| 8 | Unknown gunmen killed two persons and injured three with | Monday, January 17, 2022 | Nkpologwu in Uzo-Uwani | Vanguard: https://www.vangu |

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|---|--|
| | machete in Nkpologwu, Uzo-Uwani LGA. One of the dead is a member of the neighborhood watch. | | LGA | ardngr.com/2022/01/sit-at-home-enforcers-wrakhavoc-in-s-east/ |
| 9 | A trailer loaded with motorcycle spare parts was set on fire by unknown gunmen who claimed to be enforcing IPOB's Sit-at-Home order. | Monday 6 th September, 2021 | Eluagu Junction Obukpa, Nsukka LGA. | SB Morgen Intelligence. https://www.sbmin.tel.com/2021/09/im-pact-of-ipob-ordered-sit-at-home-protests/ |
| 10 | Gunmen set ablaze a bus conveying tomatoes, vegetables, and other foodstuffs to Enugu for violating the Monday Sit-at-Home order. | Monday 6 th September 202. | Edem Junction, Ibagwa Nike, in Enugu East LGA of Enugu State. | Punch Newspaper https://punchng.com/hoodlums-allegedly-enforcing-ipob-sit-at-home-set-ablaze-bus-carrying-foodstuffs-in-enugu/ |

Compilation from the IPOB Conflict Dataset, 2014-2022.

From the data in Table 1 above, it can be deduced that gunmen have been attacking traders and commuters across the region who flout the order. These attacks, as shown in the table, have resulted in the death of many people, and as reported by Ugwu (2022), goods worth millions of naira being sold or transported on such days have also been set ablaze by these mask-wearing men. Thus, a statement by the President General of the Pan Igbo socio-cultural organization, Ohaneze Ndigbo, Chief Emmanuel Iwanyanwu, published in Punch on August 2, 2023, revealed that over 250 people have been killed since 2021 in the implementation of the Sit-at-Home order by its enforcers. According to Chief Iwanyanwu, alluding to the emergence of unknown gunmen, he said, "Unfortunately, several non-state actors, in an attempt to enforce order, have unleashed mayhem on the people. As a result, many people have been killed, maimed, and properties worth millions of naira destroyed" (Iwanyanwu, 2023).

Apart from the civilian population, the personnel and emblems of the Nigerian state, which protect various businesses of the Igbo people, have also become objects of attacks. Since 2021, when IPOB launched its sit-at-home strategy, the group and its paramilitary wing, the ESN, have reportedly committed a series of organized attacks on both security personnel and civilians across the Southeast states. According to the *Daily Trust* security report for 2022, a total of 148 deaths and 111 attacks occurred in the single year under review. The breakdown of the casualties showed 43 policemen, 20 soldiers, 71 civilians, and two officials each of the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), Nigerian Customs Services, Nigerian Correctional Service, and the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). The Table below highlights the attacks on policemen and sta-

tions in the Southeast in 2021, the year that the IPOB declared the sit-at-home in the region. A report by Raphael Ede published in *Punch* newspaper on October 27, 2021, said that between February and October 2021, no fewer than 255 citizens, including security agents, had been killed in an undignified manner, while property worth billions of naira was destroyed.

Table 2: Timeline of attacks on policemen and Police Stations in Southeast in 2021

| SN | Details of the Attack | DATE |
|----|--|-----------------|
| 1. | 3 policemen killed by armed men at Onueke Police Station in Ezza LGA, Ebonyi State | January 8, 2021 |
| 2 | Two policemen killed by unknown gunmen in Aba, Abia State | January 23 |
| 3 | Gunmen numbering 20 attacked and killed one policeman at Omaba Divisional police station in Ngwa South, Abia State. | February 1 |
| 4 | Unknown gunmen burnt Isu police station in Onicha LGA Ebonyi State. | February 4 |
| 5 | Two policemen killed at Umulowo Police Division in Obowo LGA, Imo State. | February 5 |
| 6 | A policeman was killed as gunmen attacked Abayi Police Station in Osisioma Ngwa LGA in Abia State | February 23 |
| 7 | Gunmen killed a police officer and burnt a patrol vehicle in Ekwulobia, Anambra State | February 24 |
| 8 | A policeman was killed when gunmen attacked the Aboh Mbaise Police Station in Imo State. | February 25 |
| 9 | Gunmen attacked and burnt an Izzi Police Station in Ebonyi State | March 1 |
| 10 | A police station was burnt in Ihitte Uboma LGA in Abia State | March 9 |
| 11 | Many policemen were killed by organized attacks in Ekwulobia, Anambra State. | March 18 |
| 12 | Gunmen attacked the Divisional Police Headquarters at Isiala Mbano in Imo State. | March 20 |
| 13 | 3 policemen killed by gunmen attackers at Abariba Police Division in Ohafia LGA in Abia State | March 22 |
| 14 | 3 policemen attached to Charles Soludo were killed in Isuofia, Anambra State | March 31 |
| 15 | Gunmen attacked the Imo Police Command Headquarters and the Nigerian Correctional Center in Owerri, Imo State, looted the armory, burnt vehicles, and freed 600 detainees and 1,844 inmates. | April 5 |
| 16 | Gunmen set ablaze four operational vehicles at Ehime Mbano Police Division in Imo State. | April 6 |
| 17 | Gunmen attacked Ugbodo Police Station in the Ebonyi LGA of Ebonyi State | April 6 |
| 8 | Gunmen attacked the Mberi Divisional Police Headquarters in Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State. Some suspects were freed. | April 8 |
| 19 | 3 policemen of the Safer Highway Patrol Team in Ebonyi State were killed on the Ogoja/Abakiliki Express Road. | April 14 |
| 20 | Gunmen attacked and killed two policemen in the Zone 13 Police Headquarters in Ukpo-Dunukofia LGA in Anambra State. | April 19 |
| 21 | Gunmen burnt a police station in Uzoakoli, Bende LGA, Abia | March 19. |

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| | State. | |
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Source: Adapted from Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED), 2022.

From Table 2 above, it can be deduced that the attacks on the police personnel and the police formations, as well as other security agents within the Southeast Region in 2021, took place in most of the major cities and towns in the affected states on Monday and other days, being enforced as a sit-at-home within the Southeast Region. This invariably had unprecedented socio-economic consequences like those of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, where the base of the Igbo economic structure was destroyed. This is even clearer as these attacks by unknown gunmen on security formations were always immediately followed by reprisal attacks by the strike team of the Nigerian security forces, targeting both the suspected IPOB members and the perceived supporters of the movement, who are all members of the community involved. This is severely affirmed in reports of the destruction of private properties and the killing of civilians, thus forcing residents to desert the place for fear of being attacked or unduly arrested (Ikem, 2022). This was reaffirmed in the report by the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), which explained that the attacks on police formations in the Southeast render the communities vulnerable (ICIR, 2023). After such attacks, residents are usually scared for safety, and all economic activities, such as shops, workshops, and other public offices like banks and markets, are deserted for fear of being killed. As further observed, the police officers were not the only victims; the attack also had a telling effect on the residents who now live at the mercy of criminals and can no longer sleep with both eyes closed as police officers have stopped patrolling the streets (Oyedeji, 2021). In essence, the attacks on perceived violators of the sit-at-home order heightened security in the affected area, disrupting local transportation and the economy.

EASTERN SECURITY NETWORK AND MARKET OPERATIONS IN THE NORTHERN IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

Another area most affected by the IPOB sit-at-home protest is the closure of markets. A market, according to Good, is a designated and authorized place where people assemble regularly to buy or sell goods and services. He explained that the market occupies a central place in Igbo culture and economy, serving not only as a site of commerce but also as a social and cultural meeting point. It is the center of commerce in society, often bustling with the economic activities of buying and selling goods and services. In the Southeast Region, well-structured markets exist across major cities, rural communities, and villages, where traders come daily and

spend weeks conducting financial and commercial transactions. Southeast is known for its micro, small, and medium-scale enterprises, and is populated by traders, artisans, and numerous other small-scale traders and hawkers (Sulaimon, 2023). Studies have shown that among all ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo have demonstrated the highest skill in modern entrepreneurship, controlling and dominating trades not just in the Southeast but also in other regions and states outside Igbo land (Mudashir & Alade, 2021). Igbo traders are present in every sector of small and large-scale business enterprises in modern times. The market therefore serves as a meeting point for small-scale and wholesale trading, as well as for other forms of service exchange among traders, including shop owners, hawkers, and kiosk operators. Undoubtedly, as our findings reveal, the continued enforcement of the IPOB Sit-at-Home order in the Southeast has undermined this long-standing business orientation among the Igbo. One of the critical areas the sit-at-home has impacted is the forceful closure of markets in the entire region every Monday and on any other day designated as a sit-at-home.

Consequently, traders are compelled to stay out of the business on the first business day of the new week. As reported by Aligekwe (2022), the most devastating impact of the sit-at-home in the Southeast is the forced closure of the entire market. According to him, Monday is the busiest day of the week for traders, as they begin their week-long business plans on this day. Closing markets on Mondays due to fear following IPOB's declaration and enforcement of a sit-at-home order in the Southeast has disrupted traders' income and that of the zone at large. Reports from our informants indicate that the shutdown of markets every Monday in the Southeast due to IPOB's sit-at-home order has affected the income and businesses of both low- and high-income earners in the region. A trader in Abakpa Nike Market in Enugu East Local Government Area explained that the market serves as the rallying point for all forms of business activities in the Southeast Region. He averred that the continued closure of all markets in the Southeast due to the IPOB order is detrimental to the survival and livelihood of the people in the zone, many of whom rely on daily earnings from business transactions (Anonymous, 2024a).

Another trader, Nkechi, who deals in foodstuffs in Enugu Ezike, stated that since the enforcement of the sit-at-home order, her income has declined, and her usual daily earnings have decreased. She explained that the market is the mother of other economic activities in society. Whenever it is closed, other sectors, such as transportation, wheelbarrow pushing, hawking, and trading, will become inactive (Nkechi, 2024). This aligns with Okoye's (2021) view that the shutdown of the Southeast every Monday inflicts collateral damage on the local economy. He observed that whenever the markets in the region are closed on Monday, those who

depend on daily income, the hawkers, the kiosks' business owners, and other small business holders, who eke out their daily livelihoods by hawking their products, are disengaged and their income line is disrupted.

The Transport sector is also affected by the order, as deduced from the field response. A tricycle rider in Nsukka stated that “whenever Ogige market is closed, the passengers remained in their houses and even if he tried to come out, he would certainly waste his petrol for nothing, in addition to risking his life for the unknown gunmen (Anonymous, 2024h). He reported that every Monday, because he stays at home for fear of being killed or having his Keke burnt by IPOB enforcers, he would resort to whatever he saved the previous day before his family could see what to eat. This corresponds with the statement by Owoye, Ezeanya & Obieg-bunam (2022, 95) that “IPOB Monday sit-at-home order has continued to inflict suffering, hunger, and poverty in the Southeast Region, as many people could no longer engage in their daily activities on Mondays and other IPOB sit-at-home days”. In essence, people’s economic interests are being undermined due to the IPOB’s Monday sit-at-home order.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND RESTRICTION OF MOVEMENT IN NORTHERN NSUKKA IGBO OF SOUTHEAST

The Constitution of Nigeria, in its various provisions, recognizes the importance of the free movement of people and goods within the country. Accordingly, section 41(1) of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria, as amended, provides that “every citizen of Nigeria is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and to reside in any part thereof, and no citizen of Nigeria shall be expelled from Nigeria or refused entry thereby or exit therefrom”. The scope of this right is also reinforced in sections 15(3) and (4) of the constitution, which provides that ...it shall be the duty of the state to provide adequate facilities for and encourage free mobility of people, goods, and services throughout the federation. The above provisions underscore the importance of freedom of movement in society. A study by Caraka et al. (2020) has also revealed a relationship between restrictions on movement and economic decline in a society. They explained that large-scale restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic led to severe economic losses across the industry, companies, and society at all levels, disrupting the economic chain. Similarly, research has shown that restrictions on movement during COVID-19 have negatively affected global stock markets and economic activity (Chowdhay, Khan, & Dhar, 2022). They observed that a series of lockdown days and restrictions on movement had a detrimental impact on economic activities and, if unchecked, would have a catastrophic effect on individuals' and corporate bodies' incomes.

However, due to the declaration of sit-at-home by the IPOB in the Southeast as a protest to the continued detention of its leader, Nnamdi Kanu by the Nigerian Government, the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo have been observing lockdown every Monday and on other days that Kanu appears in court. This has restricted the freedom of movement within the region (Ozibo & Okorie, 2022). It also halted all forms of movement, including that of persons, goods, and services of any kind, on every Monday. To achieve total compliance, there have been reported cases of attack by the pro-Biafra militias on traders, vehicle owners, and other commuters who flout the order. Hundreds of persons and property worth millions of naira have been reportedly destroyed as a result of these attacks, and victims are either killed or forced to submit, so most of the cities in the region are deserted, with all forms of business and enterprises closed.

Findings have revealed that restrictions on movement have hurt every sector of the economy in the Southeast. For instance, according to a policy brief by Civil Society Legislative Advocacy (CISLAC) in August 2022, transportation is grounded every Monday in the Southeast due to sit-at-home enforcement by IPOB militias. It stated that the sit-at-home has restricted the free flow of people and goods in and out of the Southeast Region on Mondays, as drivers and commuters are afraid to travel for fear of being attacked by the militias, also referred to as the unknown gunmen. Media reports indicate that suspected IPOB militias have burned down several vehicles, as the ESN enforces the sit-at-home order in many parts of the Southeast Region. A report by Ede (2021) in Punch News online showed that armed men attacked and set ablaze a bus conveying tomatoes, vegetables, and other foodstuffs from the northern part of the country to Enugu for violating the Monday sit-at-home order. Similarly, a report by Njoku, Ogugbuaja, Nzegwu, Daka & Ameh (2021) in the Guardian online newspaper indicates that persons suspected to be sit-at-home enforcers on Monday, September 6, 2021, set ablaze a truck fully loaded with motor spare parts in Eluagu Junction, along Nsukka-Enugu Ezike Road, Obukpa in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The restriction on movement has also affected the low-income transportation sector, including tricycle riders and motorcycle riders, popularly known as Keke and Okada, respectively. Nwaeze (2022) reported that enforcers of the sit-at-home set Keke and Okada ablaze in Nsukka on May 26, 2022, for daring to come out on Monday. Also, as reported by Ikem (2022), a trailer was set ablaze on Monday by gunmen believed to be enforcing a sit-at-home order at Beach Junction, close to the University of Nigeria's second gate. According to the report, the trailer, which was fully loaded with BUA cement, was heading to Nsukka from the Obollo-Afor axis of

the Enugu-Makurdi express road when it was attacked and set on fire around 5:30 am.

These incessant attacks on both commercial and private vehicles, as reported by our respondents, have left major roads and streets deserted, with citizens, especially those in the metropolis, staying indoors. For instance, a Keke rider in the Abakpa area of Enugu explained that on Mondays and other sit-at-home days, there are usually no commercial buses or tricycles on the roads. This, according to him, is partly due to fear of being attacked by gunmen and to the fact that most residents stay indoors, as shops, markets, banks, fuel stations, and every business premises are shut. This restriction undermines the stability of the supply chain in the Southeast Region (Ozibo & Okorie, 2022), as most perishable goods and groceries are transported into the region from other parts of the country. This has been corroborated by the 2022 report of the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy (CISLAC) on the socio-economic impact of the IPOB sit-at-home in the Southeast, which noted that the order, specifically the restriction on movement, disrupts the transport of goods from other regions into the Southeast and vice versa. It reported that interstate transportation breaks long trips of 11-12 hours into two and continues in the morning to avoid arriving in the Southeast after the curfew commences. This means that, in addition to attacks and the destruction of goods by IPOB enforcers, traders of perishable goods, such as vegetables, tomatoes, fruits, and other farm products, will experience increased spoilage due to the extended off-market days.

SIT-AT-HOME PROTEST AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON NORTHERN IGBO OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

The enforcement of IPOB sit-at-home has impacted the Southeast socio-economy over the years. A study by SBM Intelligence (2023) shows that IPOB's enforcement of sit-at-home protests and the associated insecurity in the Southeast have led to massive economic losses, estimated at 4 trillion naira over two years. It linked the losses to factors such as the loss of four to five working days per week, job losses due to business owners' cutbacks in response to reduced working hours, and other lost opportunities, including the loss of clients and customers who found alternatives because of the region's unstable business environment. Others include losses due to incurred service-delivery costs, fear, insecurity, and uncertainty.

In its 2022 report on the economic implications of the IPOB sit-at-home in the Southeast, the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy (CISLAC) found that the region lost approximately 327.6 billion naira in a year. According to its analysis of businesses in the Southeast, the region generated

between 5.56 billion naira and 31.39 billion naira per day during the period under review. It was further noted that, due to the sit-at-home, the region lost approximately 5 days per month, totaling 60 days per year. This results in an estimated annual loss of 327.6 billion in lost earnings on sit-at-home days (CISLAC, 2022). This is like the statement made by Governor Peter Mbah of Enugu State, who claimed that the state loses 10 billion naira every Monday due to a sit-at-home order issued by IPOB (Olafusi, 2023). Mbah further explained that the sit-at-home order disrupted economic activities and hurt the citizens. If it continued, the state would not be able to meet its revenue target. Additionally, a report by Ndukuba (2022) states that Anambra State Governor Prof. Chukwuma Soludo estimates the state's economy lost approximately 19.6 billion due to Monday's sit-at-home order.

Further estimates of the economic loss in the region due to the sit-at-home have revealed declines in productivity and investments. Njoku (2023) estimated that the Southeast lost a total of 105 Mondays from August 9, 2021, to July 2023 due to compliance with the IPOB sit-at-home order. This, he explained, had grounded the regional economy, resulting in an estimated loss of N7.6 trillion in productivity and potential investment, as well as the loss of lives and property. He further found that since the Monday sit-at-home order was implemented, regional productivity has declined significantly, and jobs are at risk. According to him, there is also a loss of investor confidence, heightened insecurity, and a near collapse of the region's infrastructure. Another finding by the International Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), published in May 2023, on the economic impact of the sit-at-home order in the Southeast Region, revealed that businesses lost a whopping N5.373 trillion between August 2021 and December 2022 (ICIR, 2023). Interviews with businesspeople, artisans, and transporters also revealed that the enforcement of the sit-at-home order has undermined the economic interests of the Igbo in Nigeria. According to a businessman in the Abakpa market in Enugu, "the current wave of sit-at-home has crippled the economy of both the low-income and that of corporate businesses in Igbo land" (Anonymous, 2024a). When asked to describe how the sit-at-home order affects Abakpa Nike and its environs' economic activities, he responded:

This place you see now, bubbling with heavy traffic of both people and vehicles, is usually a ghost town on Mondays; nobody dares come out, or the men in masks will attack the person or even kill him. Markets, as you see, everybody now in his or her shops, will remain deserted and unlucky. Economy is halted and in Enugu here, and even in other states like Abia, where my customers in Aba will call me

to say they are only watching televisions at home” (Anonymous, 2024a).

Traders interviewed have also confirmed that the closure of markets in the Southeast Region on Mondays has disrupted the daily economic sustenance of millions of Igbo people. They explained that the market is the place where economic activities take place, where traders and buyers meet to exchange goods and services. A trader in the Ogige market in the Nsukka Area retorted “Without market, what are we doing here, pointing at other traders in their shops; it is this market that offered us the opportunity to survive economically, and this crisis is trying to destabilise it completely” (Anonymous, 2024b). A middle-aged hawker of assorted vegetables in Ogige Market explained that the worst hit by the sit-at-home is those who survive on their daily income. According to her “closing the market means strangulating the poor and the petty traders who eat from their daily struggle” (Anonymous, 2024c). While explaining the impact of the closure of markets on daily income earners, she averred:

We have only been able to sustain ourselves through this vegetable hawking business since my husband fell ill. I buy from farmers who bring produce from their farms, and I start my day by pushing this wheelbarrow from one edge to the other. As it happens, I make enough to buy food. Following the sit-at-home being forced on us by the unknown gunmen, it became challenging to feed, especially on Mondays, when everywhere is empty (Anonymous, 2024c).

The restriction on movement imposed by the sit-at-home order has also affected the socio-economic interests of the Igbo. No doubt situations like this reduced the flow of income in society and exacerbated poverty and unemployment. Commenting on the impact of the sit-at-home of Monday on the economy, a market woman in Eke Ozzi in Ogurute in Igbo-Eze North Local Government Area explained that ‘it has made many people live in poverty and fear’ (Anonymous, 2024e). She further said that “Igbo people are known for their business all over the place, and so anything negatively affecting this business is like taking the life out of the people.” Another middle-aged dealer of motorcycle spare parts in Eke Ozzi, Enugu Ezike, lamented that his business has been severely affected and that his income has declined significantly. According to him, “my business has been badly affected by this IPOB order, especially in an area like this where the support of IPOB is high” (Anonymous 2024f). He explained that his income has been affected by the market closure on Mondays, a day that is particularly important for business. He added that “my customers, most of whom come from neighboring Kogi state, have

stopped coming due to insecurity, leaving me with low turnover and income." These responses confirmed Alaribe's (2023) observation that the sit-at-home order has become a permanent fixture on Mondays, resulting in revenue losses and a decline in investor confidence in the region.

CONCLUSION

We set out to investigate the implications of IPOB's protest strategy on the economy of the northern Igbo in Southeastern Nigeria. It was observed that IPOB emerged as a political movement to champion the political and economic inclusion of the Igbo in Nigeria. The rise of IPOB was due to the long years of socio-economic and political marginalization of the Igbo in Nigeria. The group, thus, in a bid to achieve Igbo self-determination in Nigeria, has adopted various strategies designed to compel the federal government of Nigeria to do its bidding and grant the Igbo its long-cherished sovereign state of Biafra. We observed that, rather than improving the economic conditions of the Igbos, the protest inadvertently harmed the economic conditions of rural dwellers through various mechanisms. The sit-at-home declaration and its militant enforcement have far-reaching implications for the Igbo economy. The closure of markets in the region has disrupted the Southeast Region's economy, as traders, motorists, and artisans have incurred significant losses due to restrictions on the movement of goods and services on Mondays. There have also been increased attacks on violators of the sit-at-home order in the Southeast region of Nigeria. These attacks have resulted in human casualties and the destruction of economic livelihoods, as both private and corporate businesses have often been targeted for attacks by unknown gunmen. IPOB's adoption of a confrontational strategy has, therefore, radicalized the neo-Biafra movement and undermined the Igbo economic interests in Nigeria.

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GENDER AND LABOR ROLES IN BUILDING CONSTRUCTION IN ABAKALIKI, NIGERIA

ROSEMARY AKPAN

Abstract

This article explores the phenomenon of women as a significant source of labor in the building construction industry. While construction work is conventionally masculinized in much of Africa and elsewhere. In Abakaliki town, Southeastern Nigeria, women became the dominant labor force at building sites. This situation unsettles assumptions about gendered divisions of labor and invites a rethink of how women's labor is made visible or invisible in African history. Bringing their experiences into focus challenges stereotypes of women confined to domesticity and in sectors conventionally assumed to be the preserve of men or coded as male. Elsewhere in Nigeria and West Africa, women have been central in agriculture, trade, and petty commerce. The paper employed a combination of oral history and traditions with secondary literature data, as necessary for background information. A study like this contributes to debates in African and global labor history about women in non-traditional sectors, the informalization of urban economies, and the reconfiguration of gender roles under the economic changes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Keywords: Women, Labor, Construction, Rural, Urbanization, Abakaliki, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

From ancient times to the present, building and civil engineering construction has been a male-dominated industry and activity. In those times, women were known to assist their husbands, families, and communities in various community-building construction projects. They carried sand, bricks, and blocks, fetched water, and cooked food for the workers. Over the years, women have broken away from the stereotyped confines of domesticity. In modern times, they have entered white-collar professions such as teaching and nursing. They are venturing into the building and civil engineering industry, which is considered an absolute preserve of men and a "no-go area" for women. As a result, the building and civil engineering industry is no longer the exclusive preserve of men. Even though women are venturing into the previously male-dominated disciplines, the bulk of the women in building and civil engineering construction sites are engaged at the lowest level, as casual and unskilled hands, with all the inhuman exploitation it entails.

No doubt, women give a helping hand at some construction sites in some Nigerian towns. However, these are minuscule in number and hardly attract attention. Nevertheless, the Abakaliki scenario, an emerging urban centre in Nigeria, is starkly different. Here, women loitering in front of the Abakaliki Township Stadium (now known as Pa Oruta Ngele Township Stadium) and at Spera-in-Deo Junction, looking for employment, is a common sight. The sight of these women keeps one wondering what their menfolk would be doing. These women work as labourers on construction sites, granite quarries, and road projects, among other traditional jobs typically associated with men, from sunup to sundown. Hunger seems written over their faces; their breasts sagging, and their children firmly tied around their waists with dirty wrappers. They are strong women, and hardly would you see any of them robust. These women may be among the hardest-working groups one can meet anywhere. As early as 6 am, they arrive at their locations, armed with cutlasses, hoes, head pans, shovels, diggers, axes, and more, all waiting anxiously to work and earn money to feed their families. It is especially heartbreaking to see these women rush towards any car that stops by; they hope the driver is a prospective hirer. This paper examines the peculiarities of women's engagement in the building construction industry with a focus on women in Abakaliki, Nigeria. Women labourers in Abakaliki face labour realities determined by socio-economic conditions and employers. This study intends to empirically examine the working conditions of women labourers in the building construction industry in Abakaliki.

FRAMING THE INQUIRY: CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The construction industry is globally recognized as a major contributor to a nation's economic development. The linkages between the construction sector and the rest of the economy are widely emphasized. However, today's building construction industry in Abakaliki, Nigeria, commonly employs women as laborers.¹ Most women in the building construction industry typically perform minor, non-technical, and unspecialized tasks. The women are hardly allowed to manage and supervise the construction site. This is because of inadequate skills and a lack of educational opportunities. Despite the reasonable earnings these women labourers earn from their work in building construction, they are not commensurate with the energy they put into performing their jobs, mixing concrete, and rendering services to masons.

Women almost dominate the informal sector of Abakaliki's economy, and this has had a significant impact on the state's economic development. Women are engaged in all sorts of labour (complex and simple), like petty trading, farming, and arduous labour in building construction projects.

Interestingly, this has made the women more pronounced and has led them to assume a dominant presence in most unskilled labour common in the town. It should be noted that the women who supply this labour come from rural areas to the urban city, as will be seen in the paper. This situation is worrisome and deserves scholarly attention. Hence, this paper aims to highlight the role of women in the building construction industry and the circumstances under which they work. It is hoped that the research will bring to public attention the often-overlooked contributions of these women to the rapidly growing economy of Abakaliki, the capital of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. This fact has not received the research attention it deserves. There can be no doubt that women play a critical role in this regard. However, as stated earlier, those roles have not been brought to public notice for appreciation. As is commonly the case, when knowledge is lacking, unfounded speculation thrives. If such speculations are repeated often without challenge, people will accept them as factual, thus perpetuating ignorance. This paper refutes the common misconception that the construction industry is male dominated. It draws attention to the role women in Abakaliki have been playing in the infrastructural development of the capital city, specifically, and its catchment area generally, while revealing rural women's response to labour demands in urban areas. This research limits its scope to the Abakaliki urban core, an integral part of Abakaliki Capital Territory, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. It spans approximately two decades, from 1996, when Ebonyi State was created, to 2020. Since the state's creation, women have been actively involved in various aspects of its economy. For clarity, Abakaliki urban covers Abakaliki LGA and some parts of Ebonyi and Izzi Local Government Areas.

I utilized various primary and secondary sources to produce a coherent paper that aligns with the research's stated objective. The primary source was with a heavy emphasis on physical oral evidence from knowledgeable individuals and the women labourers (single participants and focus group interviews), who are the subjects of the study. This also included recordings of personal testimonies from individuals who have resided in Abakaliki for an extended period, as they have observed changes over time. Also, newspaper articles, government official publications, and communiqués were used in this research. The secondary sources comprise written texts (both published and unpublished), journal articles, newspaper reports, online sources, and other relevant literature related to the subject of study. It also combines qualitative data with descriptive narrative, as circumstances permitted, to provide a holistic picture.

The first explores why this phenomenon in building construction begs explanation and how it contributes to historiography. The second section gives a brief overview of women in Igbo society, spanning from the pre-colonial to the postcolonial period. In noting the demand and supply for

labour in Abakaliki, I examine in the third section the role of Abakaliki as an emerging urban centre in the building construction industry, as well as its growth and economic development. The final section examines women labourers in the building construction industry in Abakaliki.

AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN IN IGBO SOCIETY FROM PRECOLONIAL TO POSTCOLONIAL TIMES

The Igbo-speaking people are in Nigeria's Southeast and South-South geopolitical zones. The Igbo culture is homogeneous mainly, although distinct subcultural variations exist among its subgroups. Igbo society promotes openness and equality, enabling competitive advancement and the rise of individuals to prominent societal positions without rigid monarchical structures.² Understanding the construction of gender roles for Igbo women from precolonial to modern times is crucial, particularly regarding the role of rural women in urban building projects. Women's history studies employ a gender lens and intersect with sexuality and feminist studies, examining diverse women's issues within a geographical context. Notably, the historiography incorporates non-Western perspectives, centering African women's experiences in the discourse.

Many writings have explored women's roles in gender and labour, with authors such as Chimamanda N. Adichie addressing feminism in Africa. Adichie depicts African culture as dehumanizing to women through the character Beatrice Achike, representing a typical African woman who endures abuse to conform to societal expectations. In contrast, the character of Auntie Ifeoma challenges these norms.³ While the research highlights traditional values, it also underscores African feminism as an essential space for women's empowerment and advocates male involvement. Scholars like Ada Azodo suggest that differing gender roles are not inherently inferior or superior but recognize that past negotiation methods have failed to resolve contemporary women's issues.⁴ To this end, proactiveness is the ultimate goal rather than gradual change to challenge constructed gender roles. Concern is less with the prosaic form which gender roles take but with how these roles adapt to global standards without destroying culture as "western one-size-does-not-fit-all feminism."⁵ This frames feminism as a tool for political engagement to combat poverty and challenge women's subordination. Di-feminist perspectives advocate for women's rejection of subordinate roles, viewing men as allies in achieving active participation in equity. While this approach might reinforce existing hierarchies, it could also symbolize strength rather than subjugation. Akachi Ezeigbo's snail-space approach analyzes how cultural prescriptions shape women's roles and suggests that reversing gender roles may not be an effective means of addressing women's

issues, contrasting with traditional feminist views that advocate equality through aggressive means.⁶ Ezeigbo's perspective promotes dialogue from a position of resilience rather than weakness.

Igbo women have played crucial roles in economic transformation across various historical periods, challenging rigid gender roles traditionally seen in society. They actively engage in roles that are neither strictly masculinized nor feminized in the economy, including rural occupations such as farming and trading, as well as urban roles such as those of merchants and entrepreneurs. Studies, such as historian Gloria Chuku's, focus on the "female principle" and highlight these contributions, as well as the underlying societal structures, including kinship and cosmology.⁷ Despite their significant involvement, there remains a disparity in status compared to men, as cultural perceptions often limit women's participation in governance and executive roles. The Igbo economy comprises agriculture, trade, and manufacturing, with regional natural resources shaping women's economic roles.⁸ Understanding these dynamics is essential for recognizing the complex contributions of Igbo women in various economic endeavours.

In pre-colonial Igbo society, dual-sex symmetry dominated, with gender roles defined by ability rather than biological sex.⁹ Despite a predominantly patrilineal structure, matrilineal subgroups existed, granting women critical roles, including those of female kings, priestesses, and producers.¹⁰ The traditional economy was centred on agriculture, with women playing a significant role in farming, food processing, and trade.¹¹ Farming was a prestigious occupation for both genders, and women contributed significantly to family food consumption by cultivating a variety of crops.¹² Although men's tasks, such as bush clearing, were physically demanding, women's roles, including weeding, also imposed considerable strain, challenging the notion that men typically engaged in the most arduous work. Overall, the economic importance of women has empowered their status within society. Women significantly contributed to non-agricultural industries in Igboland, engaging in crafts like soap, pottery, mat, and basket weaving. They showcased their skills through industries such as weaving, salt production, and pottery, with regions like Abakaliki recognized for these crafts.¹³ Salt production, particularly in Okposi and Enyigba, was traditionally women's domain, often influenced by cultural norms surrounding menstruation.¹⁴ Pottery, one of the oldest industries, was primarily held by women in various notable centres.¹⁵ Additionally, women played key roles in the textile and weaving industries, addressing market demands and participating in trade, which enhanced their socio-economic status and wealth; they even engaged in slave trading alongside men.¹⁶ Their entrepreneurial spirit and resourcefulness were crucial to advancing their social status.

The colonial period in Igbo land brought about essential changes that affected women, who were often overlooked in both pre-colonial and colonial governance systems.¹⁷ While women played crucial roles in peace and conflict resolution before colonialism, they faced political invisibility under colonial rule, highlighted by the absence of female warrant chiefs or staff members in the native court.¹⁸ The 1929 Women's War, analyzed by Misty Bastian, reveals women's strategic protests that challenged colonial policies, underscoring a struggle for gender roles amidst colonial authority.¹⁹ Broader conversations on how colonialism was closely tied to the construction of gendered identities and power relations position gender as foreign to African culture. Oyeronke Oyewumi, although for the Yoruba society, argues that colonial imposition of Western gender binaries disrupted pre-colonial Yoruba social identities based on seniority rather than biological sex.²⁰ Additionally, Victorian ideals of domesticity justified imperialism, with women missionaries navigating and exercising agency within male-dominated structures, as seen in their collaborations to establish educational and health services in Africa.²¹ Through their dual roles, missionary women both reinforced and subverted prevailing gender ideologies in their societies. For instance, Elizabeth Prevost asserts that "Women missionaries understood the revolutionary power of the gospel as a tool to subvert African and British patriarchies and create new avenues for leadership and reform."²² Colonial agricultural policy in Nigeria focused on export-crop production, often sidelining domestic food production, which was primarily managed by women. Despite minimal support from the colonial government, women actively contributed to the export of crops vital to the colonial economy and to their families' well-being. Colonial land laws further disadvantaged women by shifting land ownership exclusively to men, disrupting previously collective land practices.²³ This historical context illustrates how colonial policies reinforced patriarchal norms that still affect women's economic roles today.²⁴

Observing from these writings, it seems right to affirm that colonialism in Igboland, as in Nigeria generally, took no notice whatever of women. Colonialism in Igboland marginalized women by enforcing Western views on gender roles, diminishing their socio-political influence. Traditionally, Igbo society had a flexible gender construct that allowed women to assume male roles; however, colonial economic changes favoured men, limiting women's opportunities in modern sectors.²⁵ Although women's participation in agriculture persisted, they were largely excluded from export production.²⁶ The colonial era saw women retain a role in non-agricultural sectors. However, they became politically and socially invisible, lacking representation in governance, unlike in the pre-colonial period when they actively engaged in decision-making.²⁷ Women's evolving roles from pre-colonial to colonial times reflected both continuity and

change amid these imposed constraints. Postcolonial changes have significantly transformed the status and roles of Igbo women, fostering a push towards self-reliance and education as a means of assuming responsibility. Kenneth Omeje's work analyzes the ongoing gendered influence of colonial legacies, which manifest in economic dependency and cultural conflicts between Western and indigenous practices.²⁸ Colonial legacies now persist in various forms, including economic dependency, political instability, and cultural conflict between Western modernity and indigenous societies. Thus, a paradox of Western models of governance and African indigenous institutions. Women's formal education is now recognized as vital to societal contributions, rather than a "waste of resources." Igbo women are advocating for recognition, educational rights, and participation in the workforce. They are now leveraging the social capital (the resources available to an individual to improve their life condition) at their disposal. The formal education system has empowered many elite women, enabling them to contest patriarchal norms and enter politics.²⁹ Notably, during the Nigerian Civil War, women expanded their roles beyond traditional boundaries, actively supporting both sides of the conflict.³⁰ Today, many Igbo women have achieved high levels of education and hold significant positions across various sectors, including government, the military, and the civil service, challenging traditional gender roles and becoming primary providers for their families.³¹

In the capital city of Abakaliki, women have moved beyond the familiar engagements in petty trading, hairdressing, and similar activities to the grueling work of mixing concrete and carrying pans of concrete mixture at construction sites. This physically demanding job mocks masculine physical superiority pretensions. This unique labor force, specific to Abakaliki, is the focus of my research and is discussed in detail in the last section of this paper. More than anything, the rapid urbanization in the newly created state of Ebonyi, Nigeria, where Abakaliki serves as the state capital, has shaped the dynamics of women's work, which will be explored in the next section. This situates women's entry into construction labor within the broader context of city growth and change. The existing information from these studies provides a reliable basis to argue strongly that women play a vital role in the socio-economic development of rural communities in Nigeria. However, it omits the activities of women laborers in building construction in Abakaliki. From the foregoing, it is evident that no known researcher has previously explored the subject of the present research. This leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the role women play in shaping the Abakaliki economy. This shortcoming in the literature justifies my current effort.

LABOR DEMAND AND SUPPLY IN ABAKALIKI BUILDING CONSTRUCTION SUB-SECTOR

Abakaliki, the capital city of Ebonyi State in southeastern Nigeria, is located 82 kilometers east of Enugu and falls within the micro-ecological niche of the Cross River Valley sub-zone.³² It was the headquarters of the Ogoja province before the creation of the Southeastern State in 1967.³³ It became the capital of Ebonyi State in 1996. Abakaliki was graded as a Third-Class Township during the colonial period. It should be recalled that places such as Calabar, Opobo, Port Harcourt, Enugu, and Aba in the Eastern Province, where Abakaliki is situated, were graded as Second-Class Townships.³⁴ At the same time, Lagos remained the only First-Class Township. However, 18 years after the creation of Ebonyi State, the state capital was established in 1996, leading to significant growth and development.³⁵ The town attracted corporate agencies and private enterprises, including financial institutions and industries operating in Ebonyi State.³⁶ Employment in Abakaliki capital territory is categorized into junior, senior, management cadre, and contract staff. The majority of people in Abakaliki are unemployed due to the country's high unemployment rate.³⁷ Primary production activities in agriculture, mining, solid minerals, and commercial activities characterize Ebonyi State's economy. The economy is privately led with capital investment in rice milling. Industrial activities in Abakaliki are dominated by mining and agro-based firms, as well as by the hospitality, telecommunications, and financial services sectors. Building construction is one of the fastest-growing industries due to population growth and the need to provide office space for rapidly emerging firms.³⁸ In trade and commerce, Ebonyi State is well known as a center of commercial activity due to its location on the Trans-African Highway. Commercial activities in Abakaliki include telecommunication, banking, small- and large-scale trading, hawking, transportation, and laundry services.³⁹ However, these industries face several challenges, including insufficient funding, a shortage of skilled labor, inadequate government support, power supply issues, illegal collection, and levies imposed by government officials.

As a result of Abakaliki's growth and economic development, labor demand increased, necessitating housing and accommodation, as well as the construction of government buildings, public buildings (such as schools, worship centers, and hospitals), industries, and hotels. The implication is that the construction of these buildings stimulated the development of Abakaliki as an urban center. A striking feature of urbanization is the availability of public utilities and social amenities for an increasing population, including shelter (in the form of buildings). It should be recalled that when Abakaliki became the capital of Ebonyi in 1996, people

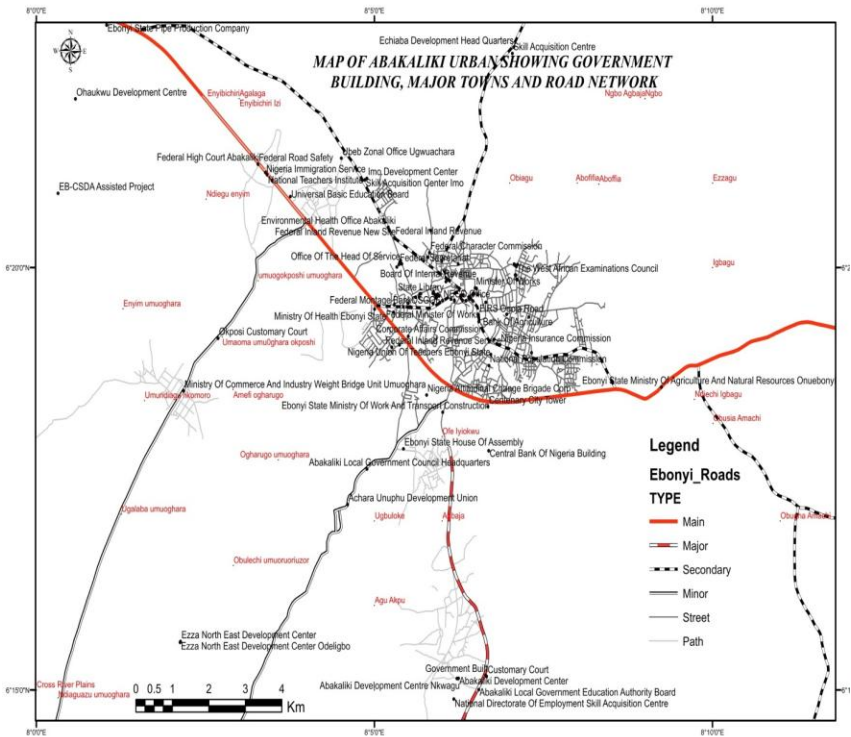
from different parts of Abakaliki, which they considered developed, hurried to seek better opportunities, leading to rural-to-urban migration.⁴⁰ As a result, building construction became essential due to population growth in the state capital. These buildings had to be placed to identify an area as an urban center. To address the challenges of housing and public building construction, the labor shortage necessitated women's participation in construction in Abakaliki. Many unemployed people viewed construction work as a means of earning a legitimate living, especially women who were unemployed housewives with little or no education, and those who lacked the financial means to start a trade. As Abakaliki's population grows, so does the demand for housing, creating a need for construction laborers.

The labor force in Abakaliki Capital Territory comprises skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled workers, as well as teenagers. Most of the labor force is engaged in agriculture, agro-based industries, hawking, and petty trading. The remaining population is engaged in mining and other self-employment.⁴¹ The evaluation of manual labor in Ebonyi State is informed by the state's socioeconomic status.⁴² At its creation, Ebonyi State lacked a sufficient number of educated indigenes—those who were readily available secured good government jobs. The non-literate ones became manual laborers and night watchmen. Many who attend higher education institutions secure good jobs upon graduation.⁴³ According to the states, former Commissioner for Finance Emmanuel I. Onwe, some implications of Abakaliki's emergence as an urban center have led to people moving into the city without a clear purpose. This means that some people would come to Abakaliki without a clear idea of what they intend to do, because of the common notion that there are prospects in the state capital. Consequently, some persons would engage in criminal activities and other social vices.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding this, some individuals may also have come to seek favorable opportunities. In addition, the establishment of Abakaliki coincided with the depopulation of rural areas, as many people left villages for the city, which they regarded as a town. The implication was that there were too few farmers, resulting in hunger because insufficient labor was available to cultivate crops. Additionally, as people flocked to the state capital, cultural clashes became more frequent, and conflict-resolution strategies were put in place to mitigate tensions. It also fostered unity as people interacted with different groups and learned Igbo dialects; establishing Abakaliki as the state capital exposed many people to formal education.⁴⁵

Buildings of various types in Abakaliki cover approximately 12.7012 square kilometers of the city's space. The buildings encompass a range of structures, including residential, commercial, industrial, educational, religious, and miscellaneous facilities.⁴⁶ Several notable public buildings and

landmarks include the Ebonyi Forest Reserve at Effium, Ishieke Ndiegu Enyim, the Federal University located in Ndufe-Alike, Ikwo Local Government Area, the permanent site of Ebonyi State University, and the Military facility on Afikpo Road. In the Abakaliki core urban area during colonial rule, the type of housing for offices, officers, and their quarters was the bungalow. Their present locations include the Area Command Office on Ezza Road, the Native Court (currently located at the High Court premises), the Post Office, and the prisons, among others.

Figure 1: Map of Abakaliki Urban Showing Government Buildings, Major Towns and Roads.



Source (Ibujoe Map Production, Abakaliki, 2018), quoted in Peace S. Basagi, “Challenges of Urbanisation in Abakaliki Urban, 1996-2021,” Unpublished B.A. Thesis, Evangel University Akaeze, 2021.

Subsequent development followed the pattern of bungalow rooming-type houses until 1960. In subsequent years, the development of storied flats and a few modernized buildings was spotted.⁴⁷ Recently, the old government buildings in Abakaliki have been replaced with modern structures, including the Governor’s Office, Government House, International Conference Center, and Abakaliki Township Stadium. Notwith-

standing, you may still find housing that is traditionally and culturally influenced. A village homestead typically consists of mud-built structures clustered in rural areas. Massive infrastructure developments have been underway in the urban center, including road construction, shopping malls and marketplaces, and trans-Saharan flyover bridges at the Presco and Spera-in-deo junctions, among others. Specifically, women laborers in building construction in Abakaliki work under the umbrella name of Building and Construction Skilled Artisans Association of Nigeria (BACSAAN), Ebonyi State Chapter.

Figure 1: ID Card of one of the female laborers registered under BACSAAN. Photo taken by the author with consent from the individual during field work for research purposes.



Working under a single registered organization suggests some level of coordination and focus by the women laborers in building construction in Abakaliki. Daily, except Sundays, they are easily located in specific areas of Abakaliki urban center, waiting to be hired. Their general points of congregation include a spot opposite Abakaliki Township Stadium (now Oruta Ngele Stadium), the Vanco by Ogoja-Afikpo Road intersection, St. John Okpoko-Oru, Spera in Deo, Ebebe Junction by Ogbaga Road, Ahiao-

fu-New Market, and Ugwu Achara after Mile 50.⁴⁸ In addition to various odd jobs at building sites, their main job is to provide concrete mixing and rendering services to masons and bricklayers.⁴⁹

Figure 2: Women Laborers in the job of Concrete Mixing in an ongoing building construction in Abakaliki. Photo taken by the author during field work on 10/30/2019



WOMEN LABORERS IN BUILDING CONSTRUCTION
IN ABAKALIKI

Traditionally, women have been expected to fulfil roles as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives. Thus, they generally play essential roles in both societal and domestic affairs. This expectation has undergone significant changes as many women in African societies have engaged in various spheres of life outside the home over the past few years. Throughout Nigerian history, women have also generated household incomes from small businesses, craft making, house-to-house commercial exchanges, and thrift societies.⁵⁰ In Ebonyi State, women who participate as laborers at building sites are enslaved in a circle of poverty. They are subjected to

various forms of neglect, discrimination, and exploitation by their husbands most of the time. Most often, they are also subjected to different forms of violence by their male counterparts.⁵¹ Researchers believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and a gender role that makes them subservient to men.⁵²

Women's participation in building construction in Abakaliki is not a recent phenomenon. This phenomenon predates the creation of Ebonyi State. The exact year or period during which this development began is not yet known. However, based on interviews with most women, it was observed that some laborers began their work even before Abakaliki was designated the capital of Ebonyi State.⁵³ Women are a tremendous, untapped resource in many developing nations. Abakaliki women are a stunning example of local beauty. Women participate actively in the construction industry. Usually, they outnumber men on building sites in Abakaliki and dominate the construction stage. They are generally employed as laborers or helpers at construction and building sites. This large army of women is at variance with the norm in other parts of Eastern Nigeria, where women are rarely involved in the tedious work of concrete mixing at building sites. Notwithstanding the tedium of their work, the women suffer unpardonable discrimination at work sites. They are commonly placed at the lowest level of job hierarchy, as unskilled workers and head-load carriers. They perform some of the most demanding tasks and are paid substantially less than men performing similar tasks, such as concrete mixing and bricklaying.⁵⁴

The oral interviews revealed that many women engaged in this job are primarily from the Ohaukwu, Izzi, and Ezza communities. The women are mostly from polygamous families where less attention is given to women and the girl-child. To survive in the construction industry and make their work easier, women, who are largely uneducated, operate in groups under different agents and leaders who connect them to available jobs. Besides, some women who work as laborers on building sites also work in quarry and road construction in the metropolis and the environs. These women come to the city from remote villages daily and congregate at central locations, such as Ogbaga Road, opposite the Abakaliki Township Stadium (now known as Oruta Ngele Township Stadium), Presco Junction, Spera-in-deo Junction, Mile 50, and the popular Vanco Junction, located opposite Zenith Bank on Ogoja Road.⁵⁵ These locations serve as meeting points for prospective clients, with the Ogbaga Road site, opposite Abakaliki Township Stadium, being the primary one.

Map 2: Showing Abakaliki City Center and some locations where women laborers congregate, such as Abakaliki Township Stadium, Vanco by Ogo-

ja-Afikpo Road intersection, St John Okpoko-Oru, Spera in Deo, Ebebe Junction by Ogbaga Road.



Source: Ify Nwaogazie, S Okonkwo, and Chukwuemeka, "Rainfall-Intensity-Duration- Frequency Modeling and Comparative Analysis of Developed Models for Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria", *International Journal of Trend in Research and Development* 4 no. 2 (2017): 776-783. www.ijtrd.com.

This issue of women participating in building construction as laborers is not new in Abakaliki. Cyril Odomanam, who runs a hotel business at Isikwuato Street and has spent over 30 years in the city (Abakaliki), said the issue of hiring Abakaliki women for manual labor is an old practice that is now becoming a culture. He believed that increased infrastructure investment—such as buildings, roads, and bridges—was responsible for the increase in the number of female laborers on construction sites. The emergence of Abakaliki as Ebonyi State's capital has spurred massive construction, which demands a variety of manual labor. Women responded to the pull and became involved as laborers at building sites. However, this development was unknown before the creation of the State. Before then, rural women were primarily engaged in other forms of manual labor, such as farming, selling firewood, and fetching water for pay for in-

terested residents. During those periods, some women requested food rather than monetary payment. These rural women were known to frequent the urban area of Abakaliki in search of household chores for some income, as part of their routine manual labor. The scenario has changed a lot to arduous manual labor. Most rural women who migrate to Abakaliki in search of work choose to mix cement and carry blocks, or cement, sand, and stone for a living.⁵⁶ Additionally, with the benefit of hindsight, it was discovered that a few women had already begun the job before Abakaliki was designated the capital of Ebonyi State.⁵⁷ Mary Oyinbe, a native of Izzi, lamented the attitude of their men towards their wives, saying the mad rush into marriage was the key reason why most of these women engage in this hard labor of concrete mixing. She said:

I own a provision shop here, but if I tell you what some of these female laborers are passing through in their various families, you will really pity them. I have seen a case where a woman with a nine-month-old pregnancy was carrying cement in the name of finding her daily bread. Look, it is not a laughing matter. It is better to marry a man whom we refer to as a foreigner in the land than our people. They don't value us (women), let alone care for us. Engaging in this hard manual labor has become a tradition of sorts among the people of Izzi and Ezza; it is either this job or one is forced to look for an alternative. But finding an easy, better alternative is almost impossible for someone from a poor background.⁵⁸

Mary's testimony makes it clear that most women are compelled to work as laborers on construction sites to earn a legitimate living because of their husbands' lack of care and the lack of alternative jobs. This is because most women lack the requisite skills to engage in other, less strenuous work. Moreover, most of them lack even an elementary education. Those who have acquired some skills lack start-up capital for a business venture, even for petty trading.

NATURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE WORK: WHY WOMEN SERVE AS LABORERS AT BUILDING SITES

At construction sites in urban areas, it is common to see female laborers carrying bags of cement, blocks, and head pans of sand to earn a living. Although not skilled in construction, these laboring women are essential at such sites, as they complement the efforts of the professional workforce. In most other urban areas in Igboland, these jobs are typically performed by young men. Not so, in Abakaliki, the capital of Ebonyi State, where

women have virtually taken over, and young men are hardly seen performing these tasks.

The reasons why women engage in laborious work, such as concrete mixing and head loading, are numerous and varied. For instance, when interrogated on the motives behind their engagement in the hard labor at the construction site, many of the women attributed it to the harsh economic conditions and high poverty level in the area. This implies that it results from inadequate finances and the unavailability of skilled occupations suitable for women, such as machinists, plumbers, craftsmen, accountants, physicians, and software developers, which would have served as alternatives. Upon further investigation, most individuals who had acquired a skill reported that they lacked the capital to establish a business or the skills required to become self-employed. Hence, they have taken on casual work in building construction to save money that could enable them to establish their own business or advance their skills. Thus, the women in this engagement view it as a quick way to tackle hunger, alleviate poverty, and save money for other domestic needs, such as caring for their children.

Figure 3: A Group of female laborers gathered waiting to be hired for work for the day at the Abakaliki Township Stadium. Photo taken by the author on field work on 08/15/2020.



Most of these women engaged as laborers in building construction were found to have a common challenge of marital problems. Almost all the women are married, mostly into polygamous families; a few are single women, and others are widows. The married women engaged in this arduous work have families and responsibilities to cater to. This could support the claim that most women went into the job either to support their husbands or take full responsibility for providing for their families, especially in polygamous homes, which are predominant in the area under

study. Evidence shows that women are denied the right to a say about whom they would marry or who would marry them.⁵⁹ As a result, when women are married, their husbands often deny them financial support for proper feeding and childcare. In this circumstance, most women will work as laborers on building sites.⁶⁰ In reality, though, the majority of the husbands in most instances struggle against biting poverty that inhibits their ability to cater for their (supposed) wives. For example, some men, as husbands, are poor subsistence farmers, artisans, and unskilled laborers.⁶¹

Significantly, some of these female laborers bear the heavy burden of not only feeding their families but also sponsoring their children's education and the general well-being of their immediate families.⁶² For example, a teenage girl who identified herself simply as Edith stated that she took the job because she had recently lost her father and had no one to care for her. Her mother could not afford to pay her school fees or buy her textbooks. Nor could she properly care for her younger ones, either. She had to assist the family by working, which she said is financially more advantageous than farming. She said the job is always available, unlike agriculture, which is seasonal. A 19-year-old, Promise Nweke, a single woman and native of Igbeagu in the Izzi Local Government Area, relies solely on manual labor to support herself, her younger children, and her ageing grandmother.⁶³

It is also worth noting that many of these women who work as laborers on construction sites have little or no formal education. Most did not attend primary school; those who did attended only partway, and those who proceeded to secondary school stopped at the Junior Secondary Level at best.⁶⁴ Interestingly, of more than 20 women involved in concrete mixing, only one finished secondary school. She could not secure a relatively decent job because she had not acquired the vocational skills necessary for employment or self-employment.⁶⁵ A 27-year-old Elizabeth Nworie, the third wife to a 40-year-old Izzi man, in sharing her experience, regretted ever getting married into a polygamous family. Her husband either could not or would not cater to her needs. Elizabeth does the job because she is not educated enough to get a white-collar job. However, she must find the strength to work and make ends meet.⁶⁶

BENEFITS OF WOMEN LABORERS IN BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

Kesiah Awosika submits that the working conditions of short-term workers are not only debilitating but also as punishing as they are precarious. She is of the view that the use of women laborers violates established labor ethics in Nigeria. However, this may be; it is sometimes suggested that the benefits of short-term jobs constitute the price of progress. From this

perspective, short-term jobs enhance job flexibility, which, in turn, is an essential precondition for economic progress. Short-term labor is flexible because laborers do not always work in a single location and can easily transition from one job to another. However, this has the demerit of being susceptible to undue exploitation of the laboring women.⁶⁷ Women laborers on construction sites do very back-breaking work. The gains of women laborers in the building construction industry are visible, particularly in their families. For instance, most of these women laborers use the money they earn from their jobs to meet family needs, such as feeding the family and paying children's school fees. Some even use the proceeds from this job to pay laborers who work on their farms. One significant benefit of this type of job for women is the instant pay they receive at the end of each working day. A casual worker may not have to wait for the end of the week or month to accept payment for work done, as in the case of a farmer who endures periods of clearing, planting, weeding, harvesting, and probably selling the produce before reaping the reward for her labor. Payments are not made through banks, which requires valuable time in queues to collect funds.

In 2020, a laborer at a building site was paid daily, with the amount depending on the type of work performed and the type of building. For instance, 500 NGN (five hundred Nigerian naira) is charged for a bag of cement concrete mixing. However, charges regarding the story building depend on the decking level. A fee of 500 NGN is charged for ground concrete mixing; approximately 600 NGN for the first decking; 700 NGN to 800 NGN for the second decking; and 1,000 NGN or 1,200 NGN for the third decking, depending on the negotiating power of the women involved and the site engineer. Some women can mix and pour five to six bags of cement daily, at 500 NGN per bag. Pouring concrete during building construction has a different payment schedule/rate. This depends on how many bags of cement one can mix with concrete and carry to the designated location.⁶⁸ This implies that women earn an average of 2,000 NGN per day, corresponding to an average weekly income of 8,000-10,000 NGN. This roughly translates to 32,000 NGN-40,000 NGN per month for four weeks. This is significantly higher than the earnings of some lower-grade white-collar employees. However, the female laborers received this pay before the COVID-19 pandemic and were paid only if they secured employment for 4 to 5 days per week. For instance, a 27-year-old Ebere, who works at an ongoing construction project on Mile 50 road, narrated the following mode of payment:

A job like mixing cement with stones is paid for by the number of bags you can finish in a day, and each bag is valued at 500 NGN. My duty as a laborer on this site is to mix cement, sand, and chippings in

the required ratio, and then carry the mixture to where the builder (mason) will use it.⁶⁹

Figure 4: A Woman Laborer climbing the ladder to serve mixed concrete to a Mason Man at the ongoing construction of New KpiriKpiri Ultra-Modern Market, Abakaliki. Photo taken by the author during field work on 02/08/2020



Following the easing of the COVID-19 lockdown in October 2020, women laborers now charge between 2,500 NGN and 3,000 NGN per day. As of the interview, they charge 1,000 NGN for a bag of cement during concrete mixing, compared to 500 NGN before the Coronavirus pandemic; 1,200 NGN for the first floor, and 1,300 NGN for the second and upper floors.⁷⁰ On the bricklayers' side, they are paid an average of 3,500 NGN to 4,500 NGN daily and charge 35 NGN to 50 NGN per block, depending on their negotiating power.⁷¹

Many of the laborers use their earnings to support their families. In many cases, women are fully responsible for feeding their families, including their husbands, paying school fees, and ensuring their children's overall well-being. This is so because most often, husbands of such women have no tangible means of livelihood. Some women also use their earnings to pay laborers to work on their husbands' farms. Thanks to the efforts of these women, their children have been able to acquire some level of education, even up to secondary and university levels. One of the

women purchased a cell phone, an item most rural women consider an unaffordable luxury. From their savings, some can cater for themselves during the baby-nursing period following delivery, when they cannot return to their usual jobs.⁷² They also use their earnings to settle their debts, avoiding embarrassment from creditors. Josephine Ngozi Chima, formerly a textile trader who later became a laborer, borrowed 120,000 Naira in 2015 from Microfinance Bank. She used her savings from laboring at a building construction site to settle her debt by the end of 2016.⁷³ From her earnings, another woman laborer could build a mud house (Nkpufuluru).⁷⁴ Chinyere Akpu, also a laborer, said she was following in her mother's footsteps, who had worked as a construction laborer. She gave the following narrative:

My late mother was a laborer in the 1980s. She saved and used her money judiciously. She could pay my school fees from her laborer's proceeds. During my wedding, she gave me a huge sum of money, bought me clothes, and things like a fridge and a bed. She did all these with her laborer's savings.⁷⁵

Women laboring on construction sites in Abakaliki contribute in their own small ways to the town's infrastructure development, particularly in building construction. It should be recalled that, with Abakaliki emerging as an urban center and becoming the state capital, labor demand in building construction became a pressing necessity, driven by population growth. These women responded to this labor demand by offering services in the construction of government-owned, public, and private buildings. In this way, they have contributed their quotas to the development of Abakaliki. Among the notable building projects where some of these women have worked as laborers are: St. Peter's Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, Kpirikpiri, Ebonyi State Government House, Abakaliki International Conference Center, Ebonyi State University Campus (Permanent Site), Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (AE-FUNAI), Oruta Ngele Township Stadium, Margaret Umahi International Market, New Kpirikpiri Ultra-Modern Market (See Figure 5), Ochudo Estate, Ecumenical Center, etc.⁷⁶ For over 30 years, some of these women have worked as laborers on private property construction projects within and outside the Abakaliki metropolis. This implies that, in addition to government buildings, a small number of these women have worked as laborers in private buildings, thereby contributing to the development of Ebonyi State.⁷⁷ However, these benefits are not without their challenges.

Figure 5: Women Laborers mixing concrete in an ongoing construction of the New KpiriKpiri Ultra-Modern Market, Abakaliki. Photo taken by the author during field work on 09/07/2020



Figure 6: Group of Women Laborers fetching concrete at a construction site, Mile 50 Area, Abakaliki. Photo taken by the author during fieldwork on 09/04/2020



CHALLENGES FACED BY THE WOMEN LABORERS

From issues examined so far, it is evident that women laborers in the building construction industry in Abakaliki face challenges that fall into two identifiable categories. First, there are issues of long working hours, poor working conditions/environment, and working during pregnancies, which are social/cultural problems that these laboring women face. Second, there are those facing the job: mixing concrete during the rainy season, awarding contracts for building projects to companies outside the state (Ebonyi), and having difficulty communicating with the women laborers on the building sites. For difficulties facing women, the issue of divorce is a significant obstacle that women laborers in building construction in Abakaliki encounter. For instance, many of these women are married to illiterate men who consider marital relations as merely a source of sexual pleasure with no corresponding responsibilities. As a result, it appears that some men do not cater to these women and their children. Thus, the men prefer to separate from their wives rather than cater to their needs. Inadequate care is another factor that some of the husbands of these women laborers exhibit towards their wives by way of beating and intimidating the wives, even in everyday family conversations, which may finally lead to divorce. The implication is that women who are victims of this circumstance would eventually be left with no option other than to join laborers in building sites, since they are usually not educated enough to have a more decent job.⁷⁸

Generally, most Abakaliki men are polygamous. The men often leave their wives to fend for themselves and their children. To this end, the women resort to intricate work, such as mixing concrete on building sites, to earn badly needed money to care for their families, including their husbands. Polygamy tends to confer scarcity value on a man vis-à-vis his wives, who would compete among themselves for the man's special attention. Thus, the women go the extra mile to make money and make their husbands happy. Whenever this competitive scenario arises among the wives, some husbands exploit it to relax, thereby abdicating their family responsibilities to their wives.⁷⁹ Sometimes, even after providing for their families and fulfilling their marital obligations, some husbands would still take on additional wives, including close friends and relatives. As Maria Bernard lamented:

I do not get anything from my husband whenever I am pregnant, but immediately my baby starts weaning, my husband becomes romantic again. Generally, some of our husbands show love and care mainly to their wives who do not have children, simply because bearing children comes with more responsibility, which they virtually avoid. In

most cases, some of our husbands only care for their wives and avoid responsibilities to avoid having children.⁸⁰

Another challenge facing women is accelerated aging due to job-related stress. Women who engage in physically demanding jobs, such as mixing concrete, lifting head pans, and climbing ladders with buckets of cement on their heads at the construction site, tend to age faster than their biological age would suggest. In addition, daily contact with cement often irritates women's skin. One result is the premature onset of wrinkles, a symptom of early ageing.⁸¹ Protracted working hours: Working an average of eight hours a day for four days a week leaves most of these married women with little or no time to attend to their children's upbringing and other family chores.⁸² It is common knowledge that neglect, lack of attention, and parental care can harm a child, such as leading to delinquency in society. The long, stressful hours at their workplace make it impossible for the women to improve themselves through formal education or skill acquisition.⁸³

Poor and strenuous working conditions are among the challenges faced by women laborers in the building construction industry. For instance, these women are most often not provided with any safety kits, which exposes them to various injuries at the work sites. This challenge is compounded for women by the heavy workloads they face on construction sites. Additionally, close observation reveals that they rarely have a balanced diet. The implication is that poor nutrition will eventually lead to a weakened immune system, increasing susceptibility to illness and disease. On construction sites, many women prefer to eat only "hard food," such as garri and fufu (Akpu), with soup to sustain them while working.⁸⁴ A good number of them have to take analgesics to reduce pain in their head, waist, back, and joints.⁸⁵ Notwithstanding this challenge, they have no regrets about doing this job, as it is preferable to being a beggar or a parasite on their neighbors.

Interestingly, even during pregnancy, whether in the sixth or eighth month, these women continued to work from dawn to dusk, saving money to cover the costs of childbirth and care, as well as antenatal expenses. In less than two months after birth, the women would again return to the building sites to resume their laborious job with the newborn babies strapped to their side. Doing such hard labor during pregnancy could put both the expectant mother and the baby at risk. During nursing, they usually go to the site with an underage daughter to care for the baby while the mother is at work. Some pregnant women laborers are known to have delivered their babies at the construction site. When this happens, out of joy, the owner of the building site would decide to voluntarily take care of the woman's immediate needs and those of the newborn baby.⁸⁶ The

rainy season challenges these women laborers because downpours damage the mixed concrete. In this condition, the site engineer prioritizes the timing of the building project, with no consideration for how these women succeed in mixing the concrete and delivering it to the appropriate floor or decking under the rain. The women are compelled to work under these circumstances because their pay is based on the number of bags of cement mixed into concrete during the concrete flooring and decking.⁸⁷

Another challenge facing women is the recent shift by the state government and other corporate agencies to award building contracts to construction companies outside the state, such as Abuja, Port Harcourt, and Lagos. Construction companies now bring their laborers to their project sites. This reduces the number of manual jobs available to casual laborers, the group to which Abakaliki belongs. In addition, increased state government taxation is reducing the volume of building construction in Ebonyi State, in general, and in Abakaliki in particular. As a result, job opportunities for women are declining.⁸⁸ This makes job creation minimal because prospective landlords are now tactfully suspending their building projects, waiting for the next political dispensation in 2023, when they expect taxation to be reduced.

Controlling these women is often challenging due to a language barrier, especially when the building project supervisor and the masons are not fluent in the Izzi dialect of Igbo. While interrogating one of the mason men about their working relationship with the women laborers, it was observed that the language barrier is a significant challenge on some building sites. Also, some supervisors have witnessed casualties among these women that could have led to fatal injury or death.⁸⁹ This implies that women laborers engaged in building construction have a higher risk of workplace injury due to their fragile nature as women. It was equally observed that the services of women as laborers in building construction are not as fast and reliable as those of men or young boys. This makes the mason men take it easy on them, since they are females who need to be tended to.⁹⁰ Be that as it may, it was observed that these women are easier to manage, less troublesome, less criminally minded, and prepared to accept lower pay than the men.

Job satisfaction is derived from evaluating the job's characteristics as people's feelings about different aspects of their jobs. Job satisfaction expresses the extent to which people like or dislike their job and the degree to which they feel positive or negative about various aspects of their jobs.⁹¹ Job satisfaction among women is of great importance to their families, society, and employers because it helps determine the extent to which employees enjoy their work. When queried if they are satisfied with the job of concrete mixing, it was observed that the majority of these women laborers, if given the opportunity, would prefer to engage in other en-

deavors such as tailoring, hairdressing, commercial farming, and petty trade in garri, grains, groundnut, palm oil, crayfish, etc. It was evident that the women would be willing to leave the concrete-mixing job if they could be aided or sponsored into other positions beyond their current engagement.⁹² Unfortunately, the women lack the educational qualifications to be employed in less arduous and better-paying jobs.

CONCLUSION

Based on its analysis, this paper establishes that female laborers primarily mix concrete and render for masons (bricklayers) at construction projects. It was observed that women in the study area are excluded from certain occupational categories due to both formal and informal barriers to entry. These barriers include a lack of education, inadequate technical training, cultural and traditional constraints, and outdated labor laws. These traditional constraints deny women the educational, economic, and, to some extent, political power necessary to actualize their innate potential. The paper examined the issue of women laborers in building construction in Abakaliki and discussed factors that encouraged women to engage in concrete mixing and rendering for bricklayers. Challenges encountered by women laborers and their implications for women, their families, and the construction industry were also examined. It is observed that most women take up this job due to the state's poor economic conditions and their husbands' inability to provide for their families' basic needs regularly. Interestingly, most of these women seeking jobs on building sites are married, and it is evident that family responsibilities compel them to undertake this arduous task of alleviating the poverty of their various families. This reality could support the claim that most of these married women unavoidably support their husbands and take care of their families, especially in polygamous homes. Many women have learned one skill or another, while a few have acquired no skills. Those who have acquired skills often lack the capital to start businesses or further develop their skills. Hence, they enter the construction industry as concrete mixers to earn and save money.

My findings also reveal that aside from poverty and unemployment, poor or lack of education and necessary skills, family responsibilities are the top primary reasons why females engage as laborers at building sites. The rest, who have no particular skill, have found construction site work in their neighborhoods as a quick way to use their natural strength to earn money, bypassing the need for skill training or education. Some claim it is a fast way to make and save money, enabling them to start a business or acquire new skills. The education gap is not peculiar to Abakaliki women alone; it is a common phenomenon in all states in Igboland.

Obviously, the women laborers face enormous challenges despite the money they make from their laborious engagements. For instance, most women complained of the tedium and stressfulness of the jobs. Some others complain of pain throughout their bodies, especially in their joints, after their day job. Some of these women undertake the arduous jobs even when they are pregnant. In the process, they put their health at serious risk and even that of their unborn babies. Another challenge the women face arose from the former David Umahi administration's government policy of awarding contracts to construction companies outside the state. Such companies bring their workers outside the state, thereby denying local workers employment opportunities. This situation reduces job opportunities for women laborers in Abakaliki, thereby stalling their chances to earn badly needed money for family upkeep. Interestingly, according to local building contractors who employ laborers at the site, these women are easier to manage, less troublesome, less criminally inclined, and more willing to accept lower pay than their male counterparts. The site supervisors who do not speak the Izzi dialect of Igbo have difficulty communicating with the women laborers who speak only Izzi. It was also observed that the language barrier poses a significant challenge for site engineers who do not speak the Izzi dialect, which the women predominantly speak. Aside from this, carrying head pans or buckets of mixed cement to the second, third, and even fourth floors of a building under construction inflicts a heavy physical toll on the women.

The study argues that, in general, all the women involved in this hard labor are very dissatisfied with their work and long to do any job other than laboring on building sites. They are willing to do petty trading, tailoring, and hairdressing. However, financial constraints and the absence of other viable alternatives make it impossible for women to engage in less stressful engagements such as petty trading. Because of this, the women have had to stick to concrete mixing. This job requires young people with appropriate stamina, not ageing persons, as some women are. This study, therefore, emphasizes the need for the government to formulate policies that encourage young women to acquire the necessary education and skills to obtain less-stressful, less physically demanding jobs.

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that the building construction industry, previously a male-dominated sector, is evolving into a more gender-friendly sector in Abakaliki. The creation of Ebonyi State in 1996 has, to a considerable extent, influenced and regulated the conditions under which various forms of labor have emerged and are operating. Women now claim that "what a man can do, a woman can do even better". Although women are entering the building construction industry, they are often assigned to the lowest levels of the job, which presents obvious challenges despite the financial benefits. The amount the women earn

from concrete mixing, paid per bag of cement, appears reasonable because they earn almost the same amount as the bricklayers (mason men) are paid daily. However, despite the reasonable amount these women laborers earn from their engagement in building construction, it is not commensurate with the energy they put into performing their jobs, mixing concrete and rendering services to masons.

Based on the activities of female laborers in Abakaliki, it is persuasive to posit that these women are among the hardest-working groups not just in Ebonyi State, perhaps also in all the Igbo-speaking areas of Eastern Nigeria, if not Nigeria as a whole. Besides, it is essential to note that most of these women laborers are Ezza women from outlying districts of Abakaliki main town, who return home at the end of the day. For instance, as early as 7 am, the women are already seated at their locations, armed with their work tools such as cutlasses, hoes, head pans, shovels, diggers, axes, and more, all waiting anxiously to be hired to work for money with which to feed their families. It is a very pathetic sight to see the women rush towards any car that stops close to them, presuming that it signals the arrival of a prospective hirer. Sadly, some days, some of the women do not find somebody to hire them, and they have to go back to their starving families, empty-handed. Some of them, who come from as far as various Ezza villages and other contiguous areas of Abakaliki town, would have no money for transport back home. Such people are forced to take the most menial job available to earn money for their return journey. Some have to trek home, even when they are very hungry and physically exhausted.

Given the immense contributions of the women in the areas of providing manual labor at building sites and providing physical, psychological, and social comfort to their families, the women can be proudly said to be a key factor in the socio-economic development of the state capital of Abakaliki, with special regard to its infrastructural development. Indeed, as Chioma Agwu puts it,

The Abakaliki woman is industrious and a hustler. The Abakaliki woman is a man. She does not depend on anybody. She would not let her family starve. She is willing to do whatever it takes to feed and care for her family. She is willing to trek from the deepest part of the state to the capital to do menial jobs. She is willing to ride bicycles from whatever distance to get to that job that feeds her family. She is willing to jump onto a truck and sit in the trunk of vehicles, provided she is working and will be paid.⁹³

Additionally, the preference for manual labor over mechanical plants in building construction is likely to persist for some time; therefore, the

challenges identified – education and skill acquisition, stigma and discrimination, and safety and health hazards – must be addressed. The laboring women need to live everyday lives. So long as they work to earn a living and support their families, we must consider how these challenging jobs, such as lifting bags of cement, mixing, and carrying bucket loads of concrete, affect them. The pertinent questions to ask at this point are: First, how does the job affect their childbearing status? Second, how does it affect their ageing? These questions await further research.

Worried by this situation, therefore, it may not be out of place to call on the state government to enact a law to protect women from the hazards of on-site jobs. Since women have broken out of the conventional stereotype and entered the building and engineering industry, deliberate policies and steps must be implemented to address the identified challenges confronting women. Steps should include promoting female education, particularly in professional tertiary courses. Women who have acquired modern skills should be assisted in establishing their businesses through loans and other empowerment programs. Therefore, the government, stakeholders, and concerned individuals need to create inclusive job opportunities for all, especially women, so that they are not left with only the option of taking on hard, punishing jobs. Additionally, skills-acquisition programs should be made available to people, especially women, to mitigate the impact of such laborious work.

In the same vein, in a situation where the Ebonyi State government and corporate agencies decide to award building contracts to construction companies outside the state, there should be an agreement between the State government and the construction companies to use a certain percentage of people of Ebonyi State origin as workers and laborers for the job. With this, female laborers could also participate in the job and earn some money to support their families. There is also a need for the Ebonyi State government to reconsider the high incidence of taxation in the state to avoid its adverse effect on businesses. This would encourage individuals and agencies to pursue various endeavors and take on different roles. This would reduce the scarcity of employment for women laborers and enable them to earn money to meet their basic needs. Finally, these women should be encouraged to establish their productive small-scale enterprises through loans and skill acquisition opportunities. They could contribute more meaningfully to the socio-economic development of Abakaliki and Ebonyi State as a whole. The implementation of these should extend the standard norm of gender reforms in West Africa, where more state-initiated movements are driven by political calculations rather than a sincere effort to reverse gender inequality. In this regard, Ludovic Lado argues that changes are driven by foreign pressure, including adherence to international standards such as the Convention on the Elimination of

All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is misleading; instead, it should be created from below or based on the native meanings of gender relations.⁹⁴ The imposition of Western-derived gender equality ideals risks introducing reforms such as "hegemonic modernity" that overlook local cultural and religious contexts.

NOTES

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⁷ Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*, 34-42. Onwuka N. Njoku, "Women in Traditional Igbo Economy," in *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio Economic Change*, 105-117.

⁷ Onwuka N. Njoku, "Manufacture and Trade in Igbo Culture," in *Topics in Igbo Economic History*, eds. Onwuka Njoku and Obi Iwuagwu (Ikeja: First Academic Publishers, 2008), 47.

⁸ Obona E. Elem, and Nweke N. Eugene, "Women and Socio-Economic Development in Rural Communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria: An Assessment," *Scholarly Journal of Business Administration* 8, no. 2 (2019): 38, www.scholarly-journals.com/SJBA. Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1976), 30.

⁹ Nkiru Nzegwu, "Gender Equality in Dual-Sex System: The Case of Onitsha," *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* 7, no. 1 (1994): 73-95.

¹⁰ Onwuka N. Njoku, *Ohafia: A Heroic Igbo Society* (Okigwe: WHYTEM Publishers), 2000.

¹¹ V. C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), Chpt. 2; Njoku, "Women in Traditional Igbo Economy," 105.

¹² Sylvia Leith-Ross, *African Women: A Study of the Ibo of Nigeria* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1939), 21; Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*, 47.

¹³ Paul U. Mbakwe and Michael A. Chigbo, "Manufacturing Industries and Crafts in Ohaozara, Ebonyi State before 1960," in *Topics in Igbo Economic History*, eds. Onwuka Njoku and Obi Iwuagwu (Ikeja: First Academic Publishers, 2008), 158; Okpan K. Oyeoku, "Igbo Women and the Plastic Arts," in *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio Economic Change*, eds. E. J. Otagburuagu and A. E. Afigbo (Nsukka: Institute of African

Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2008), 125. Abakaliki is an Igbo pottery-producing area alongside other eastern Nigerian towns such as Afikpo, Anambra, Awgu, Awka, Nsukka, Okigwe, Onitsha, and Umuahia. It is interesting to see how he explores the ways these values can be incorporated into modern techniques to enhance the status of the potters, who are all women.

¹⁴ Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*, 58-59; Njoku, "Women in Traditional Igbo Economy," 112. Firstly, only women could fetch and evaporate the brine. Secondly, menstruating women were prevented from fetching the brine. The women had to go nude or almost naked to the lake. Thirdly, only women from the salt-producing communities of Okposi, Uburu, and Enyigba were empowered to fetch salt water. Fourthly, a woman initiated into the association of salt producers was allowed to fetch salt water. The pottery industry was restricted to female slaves or women of servile ancestry, and it was an abomination for a man to engage in pottery making.

¹⁵ Njoku, "Women in Traditional Igbo Economy," 114.

¹⁶ Richard. R. Henderson and Helen K. Henderson, *An Outline of Traditional Onitsha Ibo Socialization* (Occasional Publication No. 5, Institute of Education, University of Ibadan, 1966), 4-5.

¹⁷ Adiele E. Afigbo, "Igbo Women, Colonialism and Socio-Economic Change," in *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*, 1.

¹⁸ George T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (Lagos: University Publishing Co., 1982), 68.

¹⁹ Misty Bastian, "Vultures of the Marketplace: Southeastern Nigerian Women and Discourses of the Ogu Umunwaanyi (Women's War) of 1929," in *Women in African Colonial Histories*, ed. Susan Geiger, Nakanyike Musisi, and Jean Marie Allman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 260-281.

²⁰ Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 67.

²¹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 167.

²² Elizabeth E. Prevost, *The Communion of Women: Missions and Gender in Colonial Africa and the British Metropole* (Oxford University Press, 2010), 45.

²³ Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*, 114 and 115.

²⁴ Ezra Chitando et al. *Gendered Spaces, Religion and Migration in Zimbabwe: Implications for Economic Development*, 1st ed. (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2022).

²⁵ Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation*, 6 and 7.

²⁶ Ndubueze L. Mba, *Emergent Masculinities: Gendered Power and Social Change in the Biafran Atlantic Age* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2011), 9.

²⁷ Ikpeze, "Women in Political Economy of Igboland," 176.

²⁸ Kenneth Omeje, ed., *The Crises of Postcoloniality in Africa* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2018).

²⁹ Felicia Ekejiuba, "Social Capital, Social Mobility and Changing Status of Igbo Women," in *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*, 43.

³⁰ Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2007); Nina Mba, "Igbo Women and Politics (Nationalist and Post Colonial)," in *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*, 94-96.

³¹ This does not intend to give credit to women as breadwinners. Nevertheless, it accounts for the fact that males and females, due to changing economic circumstances of the society, are sharing family responsibilities. Read further to see yearly statistics on how this has increased over time, refer to the Labor Force Survey in the National Bu-

reau of Statistics, Demographic and Health Surveys from 1900 to 2018. Qualitative studies include WIEGO-Women in Informal Employment data.

³² Uchenna Anyanwu, *Treading the Rough and Tumble Field: Oral Tradition and History in Northeastern Igboland* (Enugu: Magnet Business Enterprises, 2005), 17-23; Saul B. Cohen, ed., "Abakaliki," *The Columbia Gazetteer of the World. 1: A to G* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

³³ "Abakaliki," *Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th edition*, ed. Hoiberg, Dale H (Chicago, IL: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 2010), 7.

³⁴ Ononiwu A. Oparah, "Urban Development in Owerri, 1900-1960" (M.A Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 2015, 57.

³⁵ NITP, *The State of Urban and Regional Planning in Nigeria*. (Abuja-FCT: A Publication of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners (NITP), 2014), 12. Quoted in Oparah, "Urban Development in Owerri, 1900-1960".

³⁶ "Abakaliki," *Encyclopedia Britannica, 15th edition*, " 7.

³⁷ Interim Report, *Abakaliki Capital Territory Master Plan*, Section 3, 10-18.

³⁸ Interim Report, *Abakaliki Capital Territory Master Plan*, Section 3, 24-25.

³⁹ Interim Report, *Abakaliki Capital Territory Master Plan*, Section 3, 24-25.

⁴⁰ Esther Nwite, interviewed by author, September 2, 2020, physical interview. Mrs Nwite is a Civil Servant and the current head of the Town Planning, Abakaliki Capital Territory Development Board.

⁴¹ Interim Report, *Abakaliki Capital Territory Master Plan*, Section 3, 10

⁴² U. Idam, interviewed by author, January 13, 2020, physical interview.

⁴³ C. Nwaeze, interviewed by author, January 13, 2020, physical interview.

⁴⁴ Physical interview with Emmanuel Onwe Barr. Onwe has held political positions, including serving as Ebonyi State Commissioner for Finance from 2005-2007.

⁴⁵ Enyinnaya Agwu, interviewed by author, August 21, 2020, physical interview. He has lived in Abakaliki for over thirty years and operates as a cotton Trader.

⁴⁶ Interim Report, *Abakaliki Capital Territory Master Plan*, Section 3, 2.

⁴⁷ Interim Report, *Abakaliki Capital Territory Master Plan*, Section 3, 20-23.

⁴⁸ Field Work, Abakaliki, 31 January 2020.

⁴⁹ Field Work, Abakaliki, 2 November 2019.

⁵⁰ U. Idam, physical interview by the author.

⁵¹ Chioma Agwu, interviewed by author, August 7, 2020, physical interview.

⁵² E. Bbaale. "Female Education, Labor Force Participation and Family Size in Nigeria" (African Economic Research Consortium, Nairobi, Kenya, 2010).

⁵³ Mary Ada Levinus, interviewed by author, November 2, 2019; Maria Bernard, interviewed by author, September 4, 2020; physical interview; Goodness Eze, interviewed by author, August 7, 2020; physical interview; Chioma Agwu and Esther Nwite, physical interview.

⁵⁴ Field Work, August 4, 2020. The author made these observations at the ongoing New Kpirikpiri Ultra-Modern Market.

⁵⁵ Field work, 15 August 2020.

⁵⁶ Cyril Odomanam, quoted in Nabob Ogbonna, "Abakaliki: Where Women Engage in Hard Labour," *Daily Times*, April 24, 2016, 2.

⁵⁷ Mary Ada Levinus, Goodness Eze, Maria Bernard and Esther Nwite. The author conducted all physical interviews.

⁵⁸ Mary Oyinbe, quoted in Nabob Ogbonna, "Abakaliki: Where Women Engage in Hard Labour to Earn a Living," 3.

⁵⁹ In most cases, the condition these women find themselves in by not allowing them to make an informed choice during marriage appears to be more of societal forces than tradition, which is now turning into a culture.

⁶⁰ C. Nwaeze, interviewed by the author, January 16, 2020, physical interview; Blessing Agbo, interviewed by the author, June 26, 2020, physical interview.

⁶¹ Ogechi Igwe, interviewed by the author, June 26, 2020, physical interview.

⁶² Ngozi Okeh, interviewed by the author, September 4, 2020, physical interview; Ego Nwauduma, August 7, 2020, physical interview; Chinyere Onyiro, interviewed by the author, August 4, 2020, physical interview.

⁶³ Edith Okeh, interviewed by the author, January 15, 2020, physical interview; Promise Nweke, interviewed by the author, January 15, 2020, physical interview.

⁶⁴ Josephine Ngozi Chima, interviewed by the author, September 4, 2020, physical interview. She is the Women Leader of the State Women Leader, *Building and Construction Skilled Artisans Association of Nigeria* (BACSAAN), Ebonyi State Chapter.

⁶⁵ Ogechi Igwe, physical interview with the author.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth Nworie, interviewed by the author, January 15, 2020, physical interview.

⁶⁷ Kesiah K. Awosika, "Nigerian Women in the Labour Force: Implications for National Economic Planning," in *Nigerian Women and Development*, eds. F. A. Ogunshye et al (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 2010), 369-383.

⁶⁸ Josephine Ngozi Chima, Maria Bernard and Ego Uwauduma, all physical interviews by the author.

⁶⁹ Ebere Ishiala, interviewed by the author February 8, 2020, physical interview.

⁷⁰ Gerald Nwadike, interviewed by author, October 13, 2020, physical interview.

⁷¹ Martin Idam Ogbonnaya (Mason Man/Brick Layer), interviewed by the author, second physical interview, October 12, 2020.

⁷² Mary Nwibo, interviewed by the author, June 2, 2020, physical interview; Ukamaka Okoh, interviewed by the author, August 7, 2020, and Mary Ada Levinus, physical interview.

⁷³ Physical interview with Josephine Ngozi Chima. In narrating her ordeal, she joined because of an incident in Onitsha where she lost her textiles worth 120,000 NGN, which she had borrowed from the Microfinance bank. She lost the money to a potter (wheelbarrow pusher) who vanished with the goods while crossing the road and couldn't locate the person again.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Omaka, interviewed by the author, was physically interviewed on September 4, 2020.

⁷⁵ Chinyere Akpu, interviewed by the author on June 2, 2020, physical interview.

⁷⁶ All physical interviews by the author of Esther Nwite, Josephine Ngozi Chima, Mary Ada Levinus, Maria Bernard and Enyinnaya Agwu

⁷⁷ Enyinnaya Agwu, physical interview by the author.

⁷⁸ J. P. Nwenu, (Retired Civil Servant), interviewed by the author, January 22, 2020. Physical interview.

⁷⁹ Josephine Ngozi Chima

⁸⁰ Maria Bernard, physical interview by the author.

⁸¹ Goodness Eze, physical interview by the author.

⁸² Chinyere Onyiro, physical interview by the author.

⁸³ The implication is that some of the women laborers in building construction who have acquired skills, in reality, may not have time to devote to it. As it is often said, "practice makes perfect".

⁸⁴ Mary Ada Livinus and Josephine Ngozi Chima, physical interview by the author

⁸⁵ Ebere Ishiala and Blessing Agbo, physical interview by the author

⁸⁶ Augustina Ogeh, interviewed by the author, June 26, 2020, physical interview, and Ebere Ishiala, Blessing Agbo, physical interview by the author.

⁸⁷ Augustina Ogeh and Mary Ada Livinus, physical interview by the author.

⁸⁸ Josephine Ngozi Chima, physical interview by the author.

⁸⁹ Martin Idam Ogbonnaya (Mason Man/Brick Layer), interviewed by the author, February 8, 2020, first physical interview. Most of them don't understand the English language because of their strong affinity with their Izzi native dialect of the Igbo language.

⁹⁰ Martin Idam Ogbonnaya, physical interview by the author. Having worked in Enugu, Aba, Anambra, and Afikpo, Ogbonnaya said seeing women working as laborers in building construction is uncommon in these areas. Hence, to him, women laborers are common in the Abakaliki building construction industry.

⁹¹ A. Aminu, "Determinants of Participation and Earnings in Wage Employment in Nigeria" (A Final Report submitted to African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), Nairobi, Kenya, 2010).

⁹² Chinyere Akpu, Ukamaka Okoh and Chinyere Onyiro, physical interview by the author.

⁹³ Chioma Agwu, physical interview by the author.

⁹⁴ Ludovic Lado, *The Politics of Gender Reform in West Africa: Family, Religion, and the State*, 1st ed (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 39.

AFRICAN ARCHITECTURAL IDENTITY IN THE TIME OF GLOBALIZATION: THE EXAMPLE OF OBI BUILDING STYLE OF SOUTHEAST NIGERIA.

MOSES OÑUGADI NJOKU

Abstract

African traditional architecture has evolved over the years; however, it has retained its social and ecological relevance. This study aims to ascertain the extent of this evolution as it pertains to the obi building style of the Igbo people. The research techniques employed include exploration and qualitative methods of inquiry. Research assistants collected photographs of the obi from various regions of Igbo land; these images were analyzed to provide primary data for the study. Interviews were conducted to obtain information on specific traditional practices related to the obi across different zones within the study area. The findings revealed similarities in design and practice, as well as other peculiarities specific to certain places within the study area. It also shows that there have been many improvements in building techniques and materials; however, there remains a need for architects and builders to be original and to consciously consider climatic conditions and cultural identity, to arrive at a new style of architecture with an authentic regional flavor and identity.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, African traditional architecture has evolved. It continues to undergo various forms of evolution and hybridization as a result of acculturation and cultural mixing, as African societies are exposed to external influences. This has brought about far-reaching, somewhat irreversible changes to norms, identity, and African life in general. These changes affect every sphere of life in Africa, be it religion, government, healthcare, arts and culture, education, trade, environment, and ecology. Socially and politically, contemporary African society is very different from that of the early 19th century onward. The people have learned new habits, met new cultures, traveled, and been educated in foreign lands. Some have gone on to become wealthy and influential, thereby fostering an eclectic, ostentatious attitude that has evolved into an unbridled pursuit of whatever is exotic, regardless of its suitability to the local environment and ecology.

In this cornucopia, identities are lost, and new ones are taken up, while some are upcycled to assume new functions and appearances. Con-

sequently, African art and architecture are not left untouched by the myriad changes sweeping across the African continent. In the arts, the appeal of traditional art has waned considerably, giving way to a form of modernism most closely associated with Westernization. In art, although the Cultural Revolution that greeted the independence of several African States gave birth to the development of an artistic style that reaches back to the traditional art and culture of the pre-colonial African society for inspiration and guidance, the force of globalization has continued to whittle down the early success achieved by the pioneer nationalists. At present, architects are seeking to return to building styles most suitable for the African environment and ecology; however, the results of these concerted efforts remain to be seen on a widespread scale. Architects and builders in Africa continue to borrow and integrate mostly foreign architectural elements into building projects, some of which are considered purely cultural in function and symbolism. This, therefore, is the current state of the practice of designing and constructing the Obi building type in South-Eastern Nigeria.

The architectural style of *obi*, as found in Southeast Nigeria, has undergone several changes in both design and relevance and has received little scholarly attention. A few writers have also written about this type of building. Several regions/areas in Igbo have different approaches to the design, location, and construction of the *obi*, and these differences carry different cultural implications. As crucial as the *obi* is to the Igbo worldview and identity, it has undergone several modifications over the years. These changes have not been documented chronologically, especially given the several regional differences in design, location, and tradition. Nonetheless, the resilience of this cultural practice in the face of sweeping globalization is worth studying.

The challenges posed by globalization are among the formidable obstacles facing African traditional architecture; these challenges have impeded its ability to assert its identity, hindering further development and refinement. This study, therefore, examines the problem posed by the concept of the Universality of Modernist Ideology, which led to the export of the International Style of architecture to the developing world in the 20th century. Globalization and universalism in architecture could be argued to have merits and demerits, in African traditional architecture and culture, it has had significant impacts some of which have been negative however there remains the problem of historical documentation of this impact and how the African culture especially the Igbo culture has been holding up the last line of self-identity and originality which is a chief component of regionalism as an architectural paradigm.

STUDY AREA

Southeastern Nigeria is one of Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The Zone comprises five states: Anambra, Abia, Imo, Ebonyi, and Enugu. Climatically, the area lies within the tropical rainforest biome, characterized by dense vegetation. The zone has two seasons: wet (March-October) and dry (November-February). Demographically, the zone has a total population size of sixteen million, three hundred and eighty-one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-nine (16,381,729), approximately twelve percent (12%) of the overall population of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, according to the 2006 National Population Census in Nigeria. Southeast Nigeria is the centre of the Igbo cultural area, where Igbo language and culture predominate, with minor but similar cultural attributes. The choice of the study area is based on the uniformity in cultural practices around the area and the prevalence of the *Obi* within the zone.

The methods employed for this research are both historical and qualitative. To gather information, several sources, including literature, catalogs, journals, books, and other publications and archives, are consulted; both online and offline, these constitute secondary sources. The primary sources are oral interviews and photographs taken directly by the researcher and his assistants. Purposive sampling was employed to select the study sample. The information gathered is analyzed using the qualitative methods of inquiry – formalism and contextualism – as applied in art-historical inquiry.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ikebude described the *obi* as “domestic architecture for a male head of Igbo compound” (Ikebude, 12) Also, quoting Aniakor and Cole (1984), The writer went further to “describe *obi* as the male meeting house of an extended family, which is the conceptual and, often, the physical centre of a domestic Igbo architecture” (Ikebude, 31) The *Obi* is a simple building type, usually rectangular with free access entrances most times flanking the façade. Although the design may vary, the *Obi* is intended to facilitate the free flow of traffic and ventilation. This is achieved through large windows and, at times, dwarf walls, which create open spaces just before the eaves. The grandeur and ornamentation of the *Obi* depend on the owner's social and economic status. Lexically, the *Obi* is also taken to mean the house built solely as the abode of the male owner of the Igbo compound. A typical example of this appears in Ikebude's review of *Obi Nwandu*, a wealthy chief in Nimo, a style popular in the 1970s.

The many changes in the design and style of the *Obi* over the years are a consequence of the improvement in the economic fortunes of the Igbo

people following the end of the civil war. Ikebude explicitly puts it this way. Modern *obi* has undergone remarkable transformations, although history is ever-present. These transformations, which Okoye (2002) attributes to strong influences from foreign contexts (European, Arabian, and Igbo sculpture), render *obi* a multicultural cartography (Okoye, 2002). While independence from the British colonial system in 1960 provided impetus for the development of modern “functionalist” *obi*, an oil boom in the 1970s was responsible for the aesthetically driven nature of their designs. The oil boom, in particular, was responsible for the emergence of nouveau riche Igbo who embarked on massive building projects to reconstruct the war-ravaged region (the Nigerian-Biafran War of 1967–1970 destroyed a majority of the buildings in Igboland) and to signal new social status. Stressing the overarching importance of the oil boom to modern Igbo (domestic) architecture, Cosentino (1991) states that money from the “Udoji economy” (or oil economy) found its way from the big cities to the villages, where the new rich constructed “villas” and “lodges”. “Udoji economy” is a phrase that described the Nigerian economy of the 1970s. Due to the enormous revenue from crude oil sales, the Federal Government of Nigeria established the Udoji Civil Service Commission in 1973 to recommend changes to civil servants' salaries. The commission recommended an across-the-board pay rise for federal workers, which increased consumer expenditure levels (Okoye, 2002; Ikebude, 56-57).

Madukasi (2021) wrote extensively on *Obi*, focusing on its use as a sacred homestead for ancestor veneration in Igboland. He described it thus:

The *Obu* or *Obi* has a conical shape and is open in the middle. The *Obu* appears in a great variety of sizes. The *Obu* is evidently widespread in parts of Igbo land but is most prominent in Anambra State (467).

This assertion is faulty in two instances. First, as can be ascertained from the earliest forms of *Obi* recorded by scholars such as Dmochoschi, *Obi* is more commonly rectangular than conical. The findings of this present study also prove this point. Secondly, it appears that Madukasi concentrated his study on the Anambra area, as there is currently no statistical evidence of a higher prevalence of this building style in Anambra State.

Industrialization, a precursor to the birth of modern architecture and, in turn, to Universalism, has been noted as the breaking point of Western “vernacular” traditions (Curtis, 1996). Western architectural traditions also experienced the consequences of industrialization, leading to the abandonment of traditional styles and the adoption of a new paradigm suited to the needs of the machine age. Walker S. and Giard J. edit. *Handbook of Design for Sustainability* (2013) traced the origins of unsustainability to

the emergence of modernism and the destruction of the traditional worldview. Noting that the key point of departure for modernism started around the 16th century, following the growth of reason and scientific rationalism. Consequently, Walker and Giard (2013) agreed with Mathews (2006, p. 86) that “the philosophy of materialism that developed assumes that physical matter is the whole of existence and reality, and does not recognize inner principles, attributes or deeper meanings” (p.3), also quoting Talor (1990, p. 4). The writers noted that “this period was accompanied by a change from the traditional to the modern worldview, a worldview that was shallower and flatter than its predecessor.”

On sustainability, Walker S. and Giard J. opined that sustainability emerged as an idea amid the erosion of the certainties promised by science, industrialization, and modernism, amid fears and evidence of an uncertain future and an ill-fated ecosystem for man.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Theory of Traditional Systems is categorized into Instrumental Value Systems and Consummatory Value Systems. Not every scholar believes in the outright breakdown of the norms and value system of traditional Igbo society. Dike A. (1985) employed David Apter’s theory, which categorizes traditional systems into two: those with “Instrumental” values and those with “Consummatory” values. Both scholars argue that the Igbos are capable of traditionalizing Western Values. Therefore, the present research will be conducted with the hope of either refuting or lending credence to David Apter’s cultural categorization theory.

Several writers have sought to define the concept and theory of Regionalism as they pertain to their respective areas of interest, whether in the arts, politics, government, or the economy. However, the current research examines regionalism as an architectural paradigm, even though it could also be applied to other aspects of human engagement. Therefore, Leen, Meganck, et al. capture this most appropriately by viewing regionalism not as a well-defined concept.

Style or stylistic issues, but, as a broad concept, an underlying idea that promotes the use of local architectural vocabulary and local building materials: regionalism as an attitude that strives for close interaction with the perception of the ‘genius loci’, the ‘spirit of the place’.

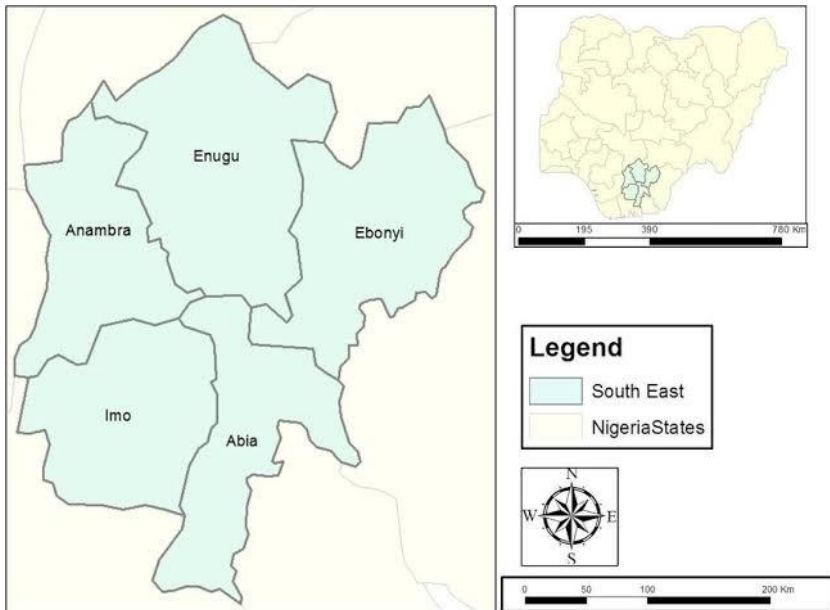
The above understanding of regionalism supports the present study, which emphasizes the ideational powers of the *obi* as an architectural language and archetype that contemporary Igbo architects must further develop to achieve an effect or result most appropriate to the local environment and culture.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Dmoschowski's *Art Introduction to Nigerian Traditional Architecture, South-Eastern Nigeria, the Igbo-Speaking Areas* contains several detailed sections on Igbo architecture, building plans, technology, embellishments, and materials. Dmoschowski provided valuable insights into the designs of the *Obi* (*Obu*) across different regions of the Igbo-speaking area; however, he did not make it the focus of his investigations and therefore included only a few instances in the study's population.

So far, little attention has been paid to documenting differences in the design and use of the *Obi*, particularly across Igbo areas. This gap is addressed in the present study.

Fig. I: Map of South-Eastern Nigeria showing the study areas



RESEARCH FINDINGS

The researcher sampled 39 obi images from different parts of Southeastern Nigeria, including Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States. Out of the total, 22 were from Imo, 13 from Anambra, two from Enugu, and two from Abia States. They are further subcategorized into families (23), kindred (4), village (7), and town (3). The locations are as follows: Igbo-ukwu

(2), Nnewi (6), Orlu (2), Ngor-okpala (3), Ukwulu (2), Mbaise (8), Awgbu (1), Nike (2), Mbanjo (1), Amaigbo (3), Owerri (5), Ibeku (2). Unknown (2)



Plates 1: Ogbunugwo Uzochukwu
2022 Obi samples from Okwuorji
Village, Owerri-Ebeiri, Orlu, Imo



Plates 2: Njoku Onyeka 2022. Obi
Denka, Obi Onuaju, and Obi Anaka



Plate 3: Obi houses from Nnewi,
Anambra State
Anekwe Chinedu 2022



Plate 4: Some Obi samples from Eziana,
Logara, and Ngor-Okpala, Imo State.
Esogwa Chidimma, 2022.



Plate 5: Obi houses from Ukwulu, in Njikoka L.G.A, Anambra State. Obinani Chidimma, 2022



Plate 6: Obi from Obetiti Nguru in Aboh Mbaise L.G.A, Imo State. Anyanwu C, 2022



Plate 7: Christian Okpala, 2022 Entrance to the compound of Awgbu an 18th-century Warrant Chief; Chief Mmadiadichie and his obi, in Anambra State.



Plate 8: Okpaleke Nnenna, 2022 Obi HRH Kanu Okpaleke, Ndiokpaleke Town, Orumba North L.G.A, Anambra State



Plate 9: Parts of the Obi at Umuchigbolji Nike, Enugu State. Nwabueze Ebere 2022.



Plate 10: Nworah Uche, 2020. The interior of an Obi with many traditional objects and title symbols.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The *obi* is not only a room where the male head of the family receives his guests; it is also the spiritual abode of the family's ancestors. Therefore, special attention is given to specific elements of the building type in order to accommodate the spirits of the departed. Nworah (2020). It is passed down from the male head of the family to his firstborn male child, and then through succeeding generations. A man cannot build an *Obi* in his father's house unless he goes out to purchase his own land and starts his own family. When such happens, the father's *Obi* becomes a bigger *Obi*, and all the male children still gather in it to discuss family affairs.

COMMON FEATURES

Here are some of the shared features noticed in most of the samples studied. They are usually rectangular in shape, with a few that still mimic the old hut-like pattern with thatch roofs. There are large windows, most of which are permanently open.

Usually built with double entrances and exits at both ends of the building. In the interiors, animal skulls and other bones are usually hung as trophies. (This is noticed in fewer instances) Nworah (2020) describes these as things that show the owner's bush adventures and his earthly material conquests. Other everyday objects found include various traditional paraphernalia such as *Nze*, *Ozo*, and chieftaincy title staff (*ngwua-giriga*), *ikenga*, *okpesi*, *arobunagu*, red caps, and other traditional hats, including *okpunkata ozo* title seats, etc.

Presence of small rooms/stores adjoining the main lounge. This is usually prominent in kindred and community-owned *Obi*. Designs also vary according to the owner's wealth, social standing, and title.

Widespread use of modern building materials. Clay bricks and mortar have been predominantly replaced with concrete blocks and cement.

Complete absence of seats in many instances, while many also had concrete/mud mastabas, built to follow the internal space right onto the walls—chip-carved wooden window panels and screens, especially among the older ones, or some communally owned ones.

Many low-budget versions feature dwarf walls, creating a rectangular formation from which metal poles rise as pillars at the four ends to support the roof. There have been a few attempts at modernizing the old system of thatched roofs. Some owners incorporate the *obi* into their main building, making it part of a balcony or extension. Those owned by kindred, villages, and towns are more ambitious and grandiose in style and size, probably to make some communal statements and accommodate

more people. This was evident in the design of the *Obi* at Enugu-Ukwu, which resembled a mini-stadium.

Among the Owerri areas, the *Obi* is predominantly located at the entrance to the compound, forming a kind of gateway or isle that ushers incoming guests, with seats usually made of concrete flanking both ends of the space.

The use of cement plaster to cover the surface of the mud walls of old versions, giving them a facelift

STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES AND PECULIARITIES

Several structural elements distinguish some *Obi* designs from others. Although there are a few rigid regional peculiarities in the designs, there are pockets of uniqueness in the random selection of *Obi* from different areas. Most *Obi* that are communally owned exhibit a stronger affinity for some form of miniature basilica. The examples are those of Umudim, Awgbu, Abubor, and Enugu-Ukwu communities. That of Enugu-Ukwu reminds one of Roman amphitheaters, with its stadium-like stands, seating for spectators, and a stage for public performances.

Some *obi* also exhibit structural forms of uniqueness that may reflect underlying traditional ritual connotations and purposes. This is most evident in the presence of four unusual steel columns arranged symmetrically to form a square at ground level at the front of the *Obi* at Umuchigbolji Nike. This particular *Obi* has an appearance further emphasized by the generous application of red pigment throughout its structure. The entire facade of the *Obi* is entirely open, left for the tall steel columns at the center, right in front. Behind it is a giant phallus-like pillar holding the central beam of the roof. Both sides of the structure and the rear have walls built up to the eaves, with two small windows on each side. At the rear is a small door that probably leads to a storeroom or a secret chamber/altar. At the rear end is a small door and three small windows set into the walls. Concrete mastabas run all the way round the interior of the *Obi*, including the frontal area. At the base of the large central column, a distinctive, neatly constructed socket system features a unique geometric configuration. This slab may be assumed to have been specifically designed to receive and hold the community's *ozo*-titled men's staff and paraphernalia. Outside, at the front of the building, is a small hut with a concrete roof and an open screen, secured with steel bars, that houses the community's large ceremonial wooden gong.

In Awgbu, at the house of the 18th-century colonial Warrant chief, Chief Mmadiadichie, one encounters a monument of historical significance. The entrance to this compound is enclosed by a mud fence with beautifully rendered *uli* paintings on the walls. The walls are protected

from direct rain by corrugated roofing sheets. The *Obi* has a single-step high stylobate, with tall, massive square columns spanning the building's length and breadth. With a high-set, simplified entablature that mimics the Parthenon's Greek temple. These massive square pillars, 16 in number, serve both structural and aesthetic, as well as social functions. Socially, it displays the warrant chief's towering, exalted position in the community. The columns are roughly horizontally connected at the center by a long beam that pauses only to allow for the position of the doors. The smaller part of the space created by these beams (the lower part) is closed up by the use of wooden screens carved in the Awka style. The upper limits are left free for lighting and ventilation.

Although small in size, especially compared to the previously reviewed *Obi* houses, the two *Obi* houses that the researcher obtained from Ukwulu in Njikoka L.G.A of Anambra State are. Both share similar yet distinct features that set them apart from the rest. They are built with the usual rectangular shape but differ sharply in their single-sided inclination, in which most of the structural/functional parts are accessed through a single side of the rectangle; this side has three members. The two entrances are positioned: first, at the end of the wall, interjected by a screened wall almost as wide as the entrance; then another entrance, followed by a single window at the center of the other end. Traditionally, the left-hand entrance when facing the building serves as the entrance, while the other serves as the exit, even though they are both on the same plane. (This is most practiced in areas around Amaigbo and Orlu in Imo State). This practice is strictly adhered to and could attract the wrath of titled men, such as the Nze, when broken. The screened wall at the center between the two doors serves as the seat of the ancestors. (Around Amaigbo areas, it is called (anyandimụọ), the eyes of the ancestors. Egbuogu (2022) stated that, traditionally, there are lands or locations where, when a man wishes to erect a compound, he must place the eyes of the ancestors using fancy blocks or a screen at specific points along the fence for their entrance and exit. He also stated that, in the case of *Obi*, especially contemporary ones with windows and doors closed with glass or wood, there is usually a need to place the 'anya ndị Mmụọ' at both the entrance and exit points. At Ukwulu, the entrance is known as "Oze"; the screen of this central part is made with fancy blocks, with carved screen doors positioned in the middle of one of the Ukwulu *Obis*. Right behind the screen is a chamber of about 2 feet, built up from the ground, where the *ọfo*, *ọzọ* staffs, and other instruments are positioned. Close to this chamber is a table containing a wooden plate with Chalk (nzu). During ceremonies, animal blood is sprinkled in this chamber to appease the ancestors or gods.

DIFFERENCES IN NOMENCLATURE

There are multiple names by which the Obi is addressed across Igboland. The variance in local dialects primarily necessitates these differences. Okafor opines that *Obu* comes in various sizes and is referred to by different folk terms. Sometimes the folk terminology is determined by size and others by usage" (183)

It is called Onọkọrọ in Umuchigbo Iji Nike; the Mbaise people call it *Ovu*; in some parts, it is also known as Obiriama (Eziama, Ngor-okpala). In Mbieri, near Owerri, it is called Obuma; in other parts of Owerri, it is also known as *Obiri*. Awka people know it as *Obu*. According to Madukasi, "the Igbo community on the Omambala River Basin of Southeast Nigeria calls such houses *Obu*, while communities in the Awka axis equally call it *Obu* too. However, other communities around the Aguata and Nnewi axis refer to it as *Obi*, while the indigenous people of Onitsha refer to it as *Iba*" (467).

CONCLUSION

The *obi* is an architectural and cultural heritage that is universal among the Igbo-speaking areas of South-Eastern Nigeria. It is one of the few cultural landmarks that identify the Igbo race as a unique and resilient homogeneous group on the global cultural map, with its own identity and social constructs. It is one of the few cultural heritages of the Igbo that have survived the onslaught of westernization and globalization. Its continuous adaptation and reintegration into contemporary contexts provide evidence that Igbo culture exhibits instrumental rather than consummatory values, as Apter's theory espouses. The presence of *Obi* houses in towns, villages, kindreds, and Igbo families continues to fuel communal living, echoing the concepts of 'onyeaghana nwanneya' and 'igwebuiké', which are core principles of the global call for sustainable practices. Remodeling of *obi* houses to meet the needs of contemporary Igbo life is an inevitable phenomenon that has led to the Igbo archetype's metamorphosis, further crediting the concept of regionalism in architecture.

The rapid development in Igbo land sometimes does not permit proper documentation and conservation of cultural heritage. Scholars and historians must understand the urgency of preserving and securing today's events and objects, because tomorrow's history depends on the present. More effort and investment must be made in documenting today's, that is, contemporary, happenings, for the simple fact that they shall, in no distant future, become history. This will ensure that Africa does not repeat the mistake of allowing others (foreigners) to write its history or to claim that it has no history. The present study is only a small effort within a

broader set of needs to properly document the cultural heritage of the Igbo, especially in its contemporary State. Architects and builders of African descent, especially Igbo building for the Igbo ecological and social climate must look back inwards and draw inspiration from the ideals that birthed the classical era of African art and architecture in order to forge an identity that is globally exceptional and locally sustainable; for this singular need, the obi architectural style, with its numerous positive attributes, lends itself, readily, as a good reference point and source of inspiration.

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THE SANCTITY OF THE KOLA NUT RITUAL AS A SYMBOL OF COMMUNION OF SAINTS IN IGBO TRADITION

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Abstract

At the heart of every religion and tradition in the world lies the recourse to using ordinary materials common to the people and conventionally accepted as a viable means to convey profound spiritual realities. This underscores that religion is inherent to human nature and must develop within the context of human relations with the physical and natural world. The sanctity and dignity of the kola nut in Igbo traditional society merit its recognition as a sacred symbol that transcends Igbo communities and through which the indigenous people commune with the ancestral world in a reciprocal relationship, among other spiritual significances. Although this unique phenomenon has attracted the attention of researchers and scholars across various disciplines, further exploration is needed, particularly in light of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints in Christianity, to deepen its sanctity and dignity. Communion of Saints in Christianity is the belief in the perpetual union of all the faithful, the living and the dead, as one body under Christ the head, through the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. This is no less true in the Igbo African version, where the Kola nut ritual, like the sacraments, unites the living and ancestral worlds of Igbo and African society. A conscious effort to preserve the rich heritage of the Igbo-speaking people is therefore recommended to perpetuate their customs and traditions.

Keywords: *Kola nut, Communion of Saints, Ancestors, Igbo Tradition, Sacrament, Eucharist, Igbo cosmology, Sacredness*

INTRODUCTION

All religions commonly use matter as symbols to express unseen or invisible realities. In religion, articles, objects, and even animals are examined as sacred vehicles that convey spiritual effects. Although it may be difficult to trace the origin of the use of matter as religious symbols, it is valid to assert that the use of materials as religious symbols is as old as the religion itself, on the premise that religion is a relationship between man and the Supreme Being, and many scholars have seen it as a distinguishing

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part of the nature of man; the former being composed of matter, while the latter is divine. Hence, for the part composed of matter to glimpse the divine, there must be the use of materials to which man, limited by his humanness, can relate. These sacred materials, however, are not capable of independent existence to attain religious significance; they are objects of intention and adhesion, and the choice of these materials is conventional and historical.¹ This buttresses Obiefuna's point that in the traditional Igbo setting, there is no distinction made between the sacred and the profane, fact and fiction, history and poetry; all these, according to him, have been present over time to assume equal height and the same purpose in a world where it is crystal clear that the natural and the supernatural exchange hands.²

The dignity of the kola nut in Igbo traditional society aligns with the above description. The kola nut holds a prominent place in Igbo tradition as the king of all seeds and fruits. It holds immense value for the Igbo people and is featured in nearly all their affairs. For this reason, it is revered by the Igbo people as a sacred seed that defines their identity and, above all, helps them maintain a cordial relationship with their world of spirits. There is a wealth of research and scholarship on the origin, benefits, significance, and cultural importance of the kola nut in Igbo land and across Africa, which this paper does not intend to restate. However, it is the objective of this work to appraise the sanctity of the kola nut and its numerous significance in the Igbo tradition, with particular attention on the spiritual importance of maintaining a relationship with the ancestral world in comparison with the doctrine of Communion of Saint in Christianity; thereby raising this African phenomenon to the dignity of the Igbo Africans significant means of communion between the living and the dead.

THE IGBO-SPEAKING PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

In identifying the areas of Igbo domicile, Oguagha and Okpokpo illustrated that the Igbo people inhabit a stretch of territory between latitudes 5° and 7° north and longitudes 6° and 8° east. The area is bound on the north by the Igala, Idoma, and Ogoja people, on the east by the Ibibio and Efik people, on the south by the Ijo of the Delta region, and on the west by the Edo-speaking people.³ It covers an area of 40,922 square kilometers, with a total population of approximately 9,246,413 in 1963, and currently stands at between 35 and 37 million.⁴ Most Igbo people reside in the present-day Southeast geopolitical zone, with many Igbo-speaking people also found in the contiguous states of Rivers, Delta, Benue, Kogi, Edo, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River States.⁵ The Igbo people are predominant in the forest belt of the savannah south of Nigeria. The archaeological excavation

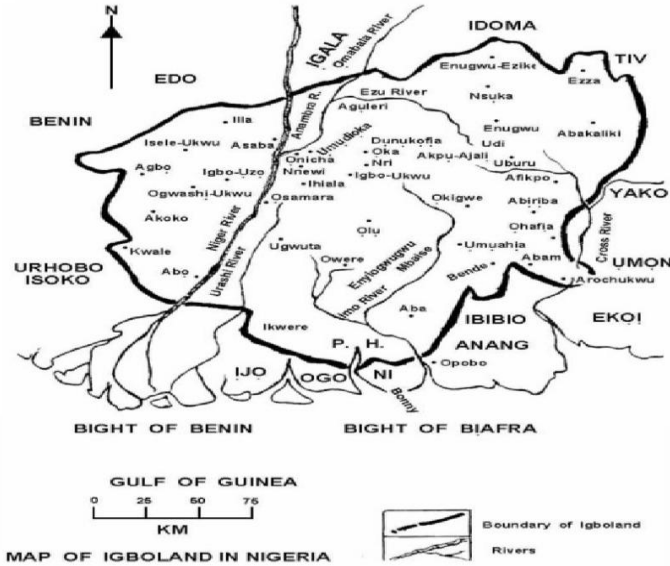
at Igbo-Ukwu, 25 miles southeast of Onitsha, led to the discovery of the Igbo-Ukwu bronze, which demonstrated that the Igbo people had been living there since the 9th century AD.⁶

It should be noted that Igbo-speaking people residing on the western bank of the Niger have been referred to by various names, including Western Niger Igbo, Midwest Igbo, Bendel Igbo, later Delta Igbo, and most recently, the Anioma People. The Anioma people are found in the areas of Aniocha, Ika, Ndokwa, Oshimili, and Ukwuani.⁷ Also, Elizabeth Isichei, Don Ohadike, Okoro Ijomah, and Herbert Igboanusu equally located the Anioma people within the Igbo-speaking family tree.⁸

The homeland of the Igbo-speaking people is located in the South-eastern part of Nigeria. The Igbo homeland covers present-day Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and parts of Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Edo, Kogi, and Benue States. For instance, the Igbo-speaking people are found in four local government areas in Benue State: Ado, Oju, Obi, and Okpoku. The Igbo are the third-largest ethnic group in Nigeria, after the Hausa and the Yoruba.⁹

Linguistically, Igbo is one of the languages designated as “kwa,” a subgroup of the Niger-Congo group of Negro languages. Nonetheless, other Kwa groups, such as the Yoruba, Edo, Igala, and Idoma, dominate the south. R.G. Armstrong believed that glottochronological evidence had demonstrated that languages in the “Kwa” subgroup must have started diverging into distinct forms at least 6000 years ago.¹⁰ Based on this assertion, it could also be suggested that the Igbo emerged as a distinct people in southern Nigeria approximately 6,000 years ago.

An early study by G.I. Jones suggested that Awka and Orlu are Igbo core centers of dispersion, from which the Igbo people dispersed mainly to the South, the Benue Valley, and the East.¹¹ He further indicated that one could assume an early dispersion from this centre to the Nsukka-Udi highland in the East and an early drift southward towards the coast. The descendants of the latter are known as the Oratta (Owerri), Ikwerre, Etche, Asa, and Ndoki Clans. Like the communities of the centre, they have lost any traditions they had of migration from elsewhere.¹² Jones further elaborated that there was massive dispersal, mainly southeastward from the Igbo centre into the Eastern Isuama area. From this subsidiary dispersion area, there was one movement south-southeast into the Aba Division to form the Ngwa group, and another movement east into the Umuahia area, thence to the Ohafia-Arochukwu ridge, with an offshoot that struck north to become isolated in the heart of the eastern plains and to develop into the Northeastern Igbo.¹³ For this study, the sanctity of the kola nut in the Igbo-speaking areas of present-day southeastern Nigeria will be our primary focus, but it will not be limited to that.



Source: *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, edited by Obaro Ikime, (Ibadan: HEB, 2012).

DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT: KOLA NUT

Kola nut is the seed or kernel of a large African tree cultivated in commercial quantities in tropical areas like Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Brazil, and some parts of South America. The common species of kola nut is said to have originated in tropical West Africa but is now found worldwide.¹⁴

Botanically, the Kola nut, as a fruit, is the bitter caffeine-containing chestnut-sized seed of a kola tree used primarily as a masticator and in beverages. In the context of Igbo cosmology, the Kola nut can be conceptualized as the agent or ritual symbol through which Igbo-speaking people transmit and receive prayers, and commune with their ancestors and the supernatural, ultimately connecting with God. In a traditional Igbo society, no prayers are offered to God without the kola nut.¹⁵ According to Adibe, the Oji (kola nut) is a uniting force of the living, the dead, and the supernatural forces, and it is the easiest and most handy object for daily, seasonal, ceremonial, religious, social, and political rituals, for spiritual, mystical unification between the Igbo traditionalists and the supernatural.¹⁶ D. N. Opatá posits that not only is the instrument of prayer used as an offering, but it is also a factor for forging a continuing link between the dead and the living, as well as an avenue of invoking abstract forces, deities, and divinities.¹⁷ Additionally, Oji (kola nut) is used in ritual prayers to consecrate the day. It is also used at the beginning of kinship gatherings, communal meetings, and other ritual purposes.¹⁸ The implication is

that offering kola nuts at all indicates the presenter's willingness to pray to God in Igbo tradition, without compulsion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF KOLA NUT LOBES OR COTYLEDONS IN OJI IGBO

The number of lobes in each Oji Igbo (*cola acuminata* or *cola nitida*) has significant meaning and interpretation in Igbo land. *Cola acuminata* (Oji Igbo) usually has one lobe, two lobes, three lobes, four lobes, five lobes, six lobes, seven lobes, and more than seven lobes. As Onyesoh outlined, the following are major significances of Oji Igbo:

- (a) Kola nut with One Lobe: a kola nut that is round with no lobe or cotyledon or has no breakable mark, known as Oji filifili, cannot be eaten or used for any ritual. It signifies social and ritual anomalies. Breaking such a kola is taboo; therefore, it is thrown away.
- (b) Two lobes of a Kola nut: a type of Igbo kola nut called *Oji okala nabuo*. It is considered ominous and thrown away. If it must be eaten, women and titled men do not. The *dibia* (traditional medicine man) may use it to prepare his medicine (*ogwu*).
- (c) Three lobes Kola nut: this type of Igbo kola nut is called *Oji Ikenga*. It is regarded as a symbol of good fortune, strength, and self-reliance. It is believed that *Oji Ikenga* brings success to those who pray and consume it. *Oji Ikenga* is carefully handled to expose the smooth side when the Kola nut is broken. If it has a line that runs from the head of the lobe to the tail, it is regarded as the male lobe or cotyledon. If it has two lines parallel to the lobes, it is viewed as the female and signifies celebration and is called *akwukwa nato* (a tripod for cooking). It means a reliable balance of strength. If it contains two males and a female, it signifies a balanced family. However, if it includes two females and a male, it means a polygamous balance. However, variants of this interpretation occur in other parts of Igbo land, despite the Nri version.
- (d) Four lobes Kola nut: the four cotyledons of the Kola nut have two males and two females; it represents the four market days in Igbo land (*Eke, Orié/Oye, Afo, and Nkwo*). This is generally regarded as a robust blessing for the occasion and a sign of the ancestors' approval. Also, it is believed that the message or prayer to Chukwu (God) through the ancestors and *Arushi/Alusi* has been received and fulfilled. Hence, the four-cotyledon Kola nut is a good omen in Igbo land. Additionally, the lobe is used by those knowledgeable in mysticism for divination (*igba afa*).

- (e) Five lobes Kola nut: When an Igbo Kola nut lobe appears five in number, it is a good sign because it contains two males and three females.
- (f) Six-lobed Kola nut: this Igbo Kola nut with six cotyledons is not commonly seen. Nevertheless, when found, it is generally regarded as a bad omen. If it contains three males and three females, one female lobe is thrown away, and the others are used. However, if it includes four males and two females, it is considered a good omen and is eaten. The implication is that the latter one, with more males, has obeyed the law of male domination and, hence, is acceptable to the Igbo mind.
- (g) Seven lobes Kola nut: this is common with a Kola nut with four females and three males; it signifies a large family (*omumu*) and prosperity (*uba*). In this case, everyone celebrates, and a small feast of yams, fowl, and drink is held. The four female lobes signify family increase, and the three males are regarded as *Oji Ikenga*.
- (h) Igbo Kola nut with more than seven lobes: The phenomenon always generates curiosity when the Kola nut lobes are more than seven. In this scenario, efforts are made to find out its meaning from the outside world of human beings through divination.¹⁹

A SURVEY OF THE DENOTATION OF KOLA NUT IN IGBO TRADITION

Kola nut means more than just a seed to the Igbo communities across Nigeria. It is the most dignified gift of God, after human life, to the Igbo; this is true because other things, such as animals, totems, and physical features, may exist and are highly revered in some Igbo societies. Still, the kola nut stands out on this list for its widespread acceptance and use across all Igbo communities. This, therefore, explains why it is referred to as the source of life and a mark of unity. There are approximately 25 species of kola nuts in Nigeria, but only one species, *Cola acuminata*, is significant to the Igbo ethnic group. However, two major species are commonly used or eaten in Southern Nigeria. Therefore, it is essential for the Igbo always to make a distinction between the two basic kinds of kola nut, *Oji Igbo* with the botanical name *Cola Acuminate* or *Atrophora*, and 'Oji Awusa' or 'Gworo' called *Cola nitida*.²⁰ They are different in appearance, as the Oji Igbo has multiple cotyledons. In contrast, 'Oji Awusa' has only two cotyledons and cannot be used instead of the Oji Igbo without due ritual observance. There is also a type of Kola nut known as *Oji ugo*, which is bright (white) in color and used in some rituals, such as the ritual cleansing of an individual believed to be suffering from an *Ogbanje* (*Abiku* in Yoruba land) spirit.

The kola nut, by its nature, has distinguished itself in a unique way in the case of Nigeria by having national recognition, especially among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria; it is cultivated in good commercial quantity by the Yoruba, eaten most by the Hausa and some others in Northern Nigeria, and most estimably revered by the Igbo.²¹ The value of the kola nut to the Igbo people is inestimable; it is the trademark of a typical Igbo ceremony of any magnitude, which is evident in the fact that the four cotyledons of the "Oji Igbo" represent the four traditional market days of the Igbo people.²² Kola nut has several uses as the central element of traditional events in Igbo society, but some basic occasions are worth noting here. The Kola nut is regarded as the first fruit of the earth from the infinitely merciful creator; hence, the Igbo fondly refer to it as the source of life, "*onye wetara Oji, wetara ndu*," and this means "he who brings kola nut brings life." To this effect, kola nuts are used in the typical gathering of the Igbo people to express gratitude to the benevolent creator of the universe for the gift of life. This celebration radiates genuine merriment and joy among the people. This is reflected in the fact that people usually accompany the breaking and sharing of the kola nut with palm wine, which is then consumed with relish. The respect accorded to the kola nut is further observed because it is taboo in the Igbo land to use the dry kola nut tree as firewood.²³

Due to its dignity as the first and king of fruits, the kola nut symbolizes charity, hospitality, and love. In traditional Igbo society, whenever a wayfarer or sojourner comes to any community, they are first welcomed with a kola nut to demonstrate the people's spirit of hospitality and acceptance of the person; with this act of charity, the sojourner begins to feel at home.²⁴ This gesture is extended to every guest and even those from the close kindred such that in events where there is an absence of kola nut, the head of the home visited will always refer to whatever is presented to the guest as kola nut, and also accompany such gift with the common line "*akonam onu oji*" meaning "do not spite me for the absence of kola nut." It is also observed that the guest will reserve at least a piece of the kola nut offered to them as evidence of acceptance, which is somewhat akin to immunity from harm or attack. One pious Igbo traditional myth has it that the reason women do not pray over or break kola nut is to forestall adultery, on the ground that when the man who is the head of the house is not around, another man cannot visit his home and remain there with his wife, because without being offered kola nut he is not welcome in the house. However, it is now common knowledge that in some parts of Igbo-speaking areas, such as the Igbo on the Niger, women of some classes do break kola nuts for their fellow women. What should be noted here is that this preference for women in this area is not anchored in general privilege or rights for women, but in the specificity of women, such as the Omu in

Okpanam (Oshimili South) in present-day Delta State. The *Omu* (Queen Mother of Anioma-Delta State), *Eze Nwanyi*, a traditional woman leader in charge of women and children, breaks a kola nut without interference or contravening any customary law.²⁵

Similarly, the kola nut ritual is central to and the rallying point of all ceremonies in the Igbo society. Just as the opening, praise, and worship are essential to commencing a Christian gathering, nothing serious can be done on any occasion in many parts of Igboland without observing and performing the kola nut rite. Besides, the Ohafia area of Igboland emphasizes libation at gatherings of relatives before breaking the kola nut.²⁶ While in many other parts of Igboland, pouring libation follows immediately after breaking the kola nut. Breaking the kola nut with prayer is ideally the exclusive duty of the oldest man or a male from the eldest community in the gathering. Before this prayer is made, the pieces of the kola nut are first shared with some male adults, following the directives of the one to pray over the kola nut. It must be noted that the prayer over the kola nut must take the tone of adoration, thanksgiving, and petitions to the creator and must be made in the indigenous language. On this point of language, the Igbo usually say, "*Oji anaaghi anu bekee*," meaning "kola nut does not understand a foreign language." This explains why, at events such as traditional marriage ceremonies, village assemblies, and festivals, among others, the kola nut is first presented before any discussion can commence.

Following the unique nature of the kola nut discussed thus far, of particular significance is the use of the kola nut as a symbol of acceptance (in the form of a welcome), togetherness, communal integration, reconciliation of communal differences, and strong instrument of interaction with the ancestral world; this qualifies the kola nut to be seen as communion by some scholars. Kola nut is used for peaceful events, as identified above, as well as in situations of conflict. When people intend to reconcile or pacify an aggrieved party, they take kola nut to the event, "*ha chigara h'oji*," meaning "they took kola nut to them." The communal integration and peaceful coexistence of the people are values that the Igbo society holds in high esteem and is proactive in addressing any situation that threatens them. Another remarkable benefit of the kola nut in the Igbo tradition is its role in maintaining relations with the ancestral world, which is the primary focus of this work.

KOLA NUT RITUAL AS A COMMUNION WITH ANCESTORS

Ancestral veneration is a common feature of most African societies. African people firmly believe that the dead are still part of their society in an invincible form; hence, they often have recourse to their good spirits in

times of need. This is a glimpse of communion with ancestors in the indigenous Igbo society. Mbiti refers to this category of beings as the “Living Dead.”²⁷ In the Igbo religious worldview, ancestors are referred to as “Nd’ichie” or “Ndibunze,” and the dead are accepted into the ancestral world based on the lives they led in the physical world and the impact they had on others.²⁸ The “living dead” are still active embodiments of the people’s affairs in the physical world and the fold of the ancestors or the spirit world. Mbiti describes them as speaking two languages: the language of men to whom they belonged a short time past, and the language of the spirits and God to whom they continue to move closer in spirituality.²⁹

These “living dead” are believed to constantly intervene in the affairs of their families and communities, especially when invoked, because people think nothing happens or befalls the community by chance without the spirit world’s knowledge. With this African ontology, Igbo cosmology, and the recognition of the place of the “living dead,” the Igbo explores the kola nut ritual, established earlier as the crux of the people’s ceremony for maintaining a cordial relationship with the ancestral world. Whenever the kola nut is to be eaten, due acknowledgment is given to the ancestors. An individual performing the kola nut ritual or blessing must remember to drop on the ground the nut’s *radicle* (the embryonic root of the kola nut seedling) and, in most cases, with some bits for the ancestors to partake in the communion.³⁰

In a core Igbo traditional setting, the veneration of the ancestors and the spirit world mark the beginning of the day for the people, often done with the use of the kola nut, which is the people’s most esteemed gift to the spirits. Typical poetry proudly recited by the people to break kola nut for the day is as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>’Eze kere elu, kee ala, taa oji-</i> | king and creator of heaven and earth, |
| eat kola nut | |
| <i>Ndi Ichie bia ta oji-</i> | Ancestors, come and eat kola nut |
| <i>Amadioha bia taa oji -</i> | Amadioha, come and eat kola nut |
| <i>Ala Ezuhu taa oji -</i> | Ezuhu land, come and eat kola nuts |
| <i>Ndi nwe ezi bia taa oji -</i> | founders of the habitat, come and eat |
| kola nuts | |
| <i>Agwuisi bia taa oji-</i> | Agwuisi, come and eat kola nut. ³¹ |

This reflects the kind of link the physical and spiritual worlds share in the Igbo tradition. This veneration is performed at public ceremonies, especially during events of pestilence and other afflictions. The African people believe that when due honour is not accorded to the ancestors, it may mar the relationship and sever the link between the living and the dead.

In the Owerri area, the Kola nut is not just a fruit but a sacred one. In every gathering of *Umunna* (relatives), whether small or large, for that gathering to appear real and acceptable to the relatives, the convener must present the Kola nut. In this way, the assembly of kinsmen has been legitimised and consolidated. For instance, on the day of the New Yam Festival in Umuoma Nekede, there is a compulsory and unavoidable ritual known as *Ipu Oji*. The Obilobi (head of every family) performs with Kola nuts by reciting some incantations in the form of prayers with the clay saucer (kola nut bowl) in which the Kola nuts are placed. To demonstrate the significance of *Ipu Oji*, on the day of the new yam (Odu) festival, the ceremony begins with the *Ipu Oji* ritual, performed by every head of the family, known as the Obilobi. The ritual of *Ipu Oji* ushers in the Nkwa Dance, and then the eating of the new yams begins. At the beginning, the family members qualified to perform the *Ipu Oji* ceremony usually form a circle in a seated position. On the proper ritual day, the early hour of New Yam Festival Day, the Obilobi begin the ritual by forming a circle in a seated position.

The clay saucer where the Kola nuts are placed is never lifted when passed to the next person; instead, it is pushed anticlockwise on the ground. It is believed that if any participant commits an error by misquoting any parts of his incantations or oblations or pushing the clay saucer clockwise, he may not live to witness the next Odu Festival³².

At the high point of the ritual, each Obilobi recites some incantations at will and does this without any time limit, offering prayers for the benefit of his family members, kindred, and well-wishers for the remaining year. At the turn of any Obilobi, he will not be interrupted until he exhausts his incantations and oblations. The story of two elders who committed an error during the *Ipu Oji* ritual and, as a result, did not witness the next new yam festival is well known among the locals. Their deaths before the next New Year's festival were attributed to a lack of spiritual purification, which would have been carried out immediately after the errors had been committed. Also, before the day of the ritual proper, those whose turn it is in their family to perform *Ipu Oji* for any particular year are usually advised to re-examine themselves spiritually before the performance of *Ipu Oji* and recitation of the incantations and oblations.³³

THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF COMMUNION OF SAINTS

One of the rich traditions and teachings of the Christian faith is the Communion of Saints. In Latin, the Communion of Saints is called "Commune Sanctorum," meaning "fellowship with the saints."³⁴ This teaching is evi-

dent in the epistles of Peter and Paul in the New Testament, as well as in the teachings of the church fathers. The Christian teaching of the communion of saints follows from the very meaning of the church as the assembly of saints. This doctrine of the Communion of Saints is proudly articulated in the latter part of the ninth article of the Apostles' (Nicene) Creed, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints." The earliest recorded origin of the belief in the Communion of Saints in Christianity dates back to the era of persecution faced by the early church. Early Christian believers took refuge in the catacombs due to fear of hostility from Roman authorities. There, in the catacombs, they used the graves of the martyrs as altars and worshipped around them. Several signs and wonders were recounted, gradually introducing the tradition of relics to the church.³⁵

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches the following:

Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the other. We must, therefore, believe that there exists a communion of good in the church, but the most important member is Christ since he is the head. Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members through the sacraments.³⁶

As noted, the faithful of the church are categorized into three broad levels: the church triumphant (all in heaven), the church militant (the pilgrims on earth), and the church suffering (those in purgatory). Purgatory refers to the place where souls are purged of sins before being admitted into heaven; it is a dogma of the Catholic Church.³⁷ The sacraments sustain the link between these three categories of church faithful. The church's life is a sacrament in itself, in that it is the mystical body of Christ; as St. Paul puts it in his epistle, the faithful, though many, are one body in Christ.³⁸ Sacrament, a visible expression of the communion the faithful share with Christ, the head, is also how the faithful obtain graces and assurance of paradise. The Roman Catechism describes it thus,

All the sacraments are sacred links uniting the faithful with one another and binding them to Christ, and above all, Baptism, the gate we enter into the church... The name communion can be applied to all the sacraments, for they unite us to God... but it is better suited for the Eucharist because it is primarily the Eucharist that brings this communion about³⁹.

The Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion, is the Church's source and summit. It is considered the sacrament of sacraments, as other sacraments are mostly celebrated. It is commonly defined as

the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ, together with his soul and divinity, under the appearance of bread and wine.⁴⁰ This, as ordained by Christ, forms the center of the Christian act of worship. Celebrated within the Holy Mass, which is offered for both the living and the dead, the Holy Eucharist is regarded as the food of angels and saints, as well as communion with the triumphant Church. Therefore, when the community of believers celebrates the Holy Eucharist at mass, it is done in union with the host of heaven, and to all who worthily receive the Holy Eucharist, the communion of the saints is made manifest in that singular act. The relation of different levels of the faithful of the church in the communion of saints is further concretized by the chain of intercession; the triumphant church intercedes for the pilgrim church; the church venerates the triumphant and, at the same time, offers up prayers and good works for the sweet repose of the suffering church in the kingdom of God.

KOLA NUT RITUAL IN RELATION TO COMMUNION OF SAINTS

It is granted from the discussion thus far that the dignity accorded to the kola nut ritual and the whole aura attached to the celebration of the kola nut in the Igbo tradition is no less than what obtains in Christianity in celebration of the Communion of Saints. Both practices are rooted in rich traditions and heritage, which adherents take pride in as sacred traditions integral to the core of their religion's creed. As noted earlier, the kola nut celebration (ritual) is not merely a social event where people make merry; it has profound spiritual implications for the people, especially in their relationship with the ancestral world. The significance of the kola nut ritual lies in its relation to the theological importance of the communion of saints in Christianity, which represents spiritual solidarity that binds together the earth, heaven, and the souls in purgatory as an organic, mystical body, with Christ as its head, and in a constant interchange of supernatural offices.⁴¹ For example, in a typical Igbo ceremony or in the kola nut poetry that breaks the day, one observes a communion of solidarity between the living and the dead. Nwafor presents a form of veneration of saints evident in the kola nut ritual in the Igbo traditional society as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>Chukwu biko bia taa oji-</i> | God, please come and eat kola nut |
| <i>Chineke biko bia taa oji-</i> | Creator, please come and eat kola nut |
| <i>Ala biko taa oji-</i> | Earth deity, please come and eat kola nut |
| <i>Nnaanyi ha biko bia taanu oji-</i> | Our forefathers, please come and eat kola nut |
| <i>Ndimbundi egede bia taanu oji-</i> | Those who were at the beginning of time come and eat kola nut ⁴² |

Similarly, as noted in the tradition of the church, the communion of saints dates back to the era of great persecution of the believers under the Roman Empire, when the people resorted to the catacombs to commune with the heroes of the faith and several wonders recorded; the kola nut ritual is also an avenue of petition to the ancestral world, who are believed to be active members of the society. In his epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul refers to the church as one body, animated by the virtue of love, comprising saints in this world and in the life to come, with Christ as its head.⁴³ This spiritual solidarity in both traditions is somewhat mutually beneficial. Through the interrelation in the communion of saints, there is a mutual exchange of examples, prayers, merits, and satisfaction between the Churches on earth and those in purgatory and heaven, accompanied by suffrages, invocations, intercession, and veneration.⁴⁴ Although it may be argued that belief in the communion of saints is well-established in Christianity and is held to be the same in the universal church, this is not so stated in Igbo or African tradition. However, the Igbo tradition cannot be stripped of the belief and acknowledgment of the communion of saints, also known as ancestral veneration, which is an integral part of the people's religious tradition.

CONCLUSION

Generally, in Igboland, breaking a Kola nut during a burial ceremony does not involve any ritual, as the common belief among the Igbo-speaking people is that the ancestors are present to receive the spirit of the deceased. This is regarded as *Oji Okwukwu*. As a result, the atmosphere and mood of the mourners do not require such elaborate rituals. Again, it is a widely held belief that women neither pluck fruits nor climb trees, such as coconuts, kola nuts, or palm trees, for any purpose. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this is not an attempt to discriminate against women; rather, it is a matter of respect and preservation of dignity for womanhood. The study reveals that the generally held position that women are not supposed to be shown or presented with the Kola nut in the presence of men is not entirely correct in every Igbo-speaking area. For instance, in the Igbo-speaking regions on the Niger River, the *Om* (Queen Mother) and *Eze Nwany* (chief priestess) do break Kola nuts in the presence of both men and women. It has been commonly observed that after the traditional prayer/blessing of the Kola nut has been carried out, the eldest man usually mandates the youngest man in the gathering to break the Kola nut. However, when the Kola nut is broken for a deity in a shrine, the priest of that shrine does the breaking. Thereafter, libation follows.

To show the importance of Kola nut rituals, it must be distributed appropriately while sharing the revered fruit at any gathering (excluding a burial ceremony). For example, it causes annoyances and quarrels whenever

er the seniority of lineages and individuals with titles or age grades is not observed while sharing Kola nuts. For this reason, the Kola nut must be shared according to the prescribed rules to avoid unnecessary squabbles. In Igbo society, kola nuts are used in prayer to God, as a means of communion between the living and the living-dead (ancestors), for oath-taking, to establish alliances and treaties, during social gatherings, for sacrifices and offerings, in divination and prediction, and as a symbol of hospitality and appreciation.

The dignity accorded to the kola nut by the Igbo people of Nigeria is rooted in their shared worldview and value system, as well as in the sense of divinity and sacredness they have held for time immemorial. That the kola nut is not disregarded stems from the heart of gratitude of the people to the benevolent God, who, in his wisdom, has deemed it fit to make the kola nut the first fruit of the earth. This point replicates the dignity of the species (bread and wine or wafer and chalice) used in the Eucharistic celebration. One of the pre-consecration prayers in the Sacramentary of the Catholic Church gives thanks to God for offering the fruit of the earth through the work of human hands as bread and wine. The dignity of these phenomena of the kola nut and the Eucharist as means of the communion of saints is further made sacred by the fact that, despite the formidable wave of dynamism in religion, they appear to have remained unchanged and, at the same time, are increasing in acceptance and significance in the two religious traditions.

ENDNOTES

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⁴ Oguagha & Okpoko, "The Igbo People," 103. See: Nkem Hyginus Chigere, *Foreign Missionary Background and Indigenous Evangelisation in Iboland: Iboland and the Ibo People of Nigeria* (Transaction Publishers, USA, 2000), 17; Watimagbo Sare, "2020 Population of South Eastern Nigeria," www.researchgate.net; and Joshua Project, *Igbo in Nigeria*, www.joshuaoproject.net

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¹⁵ P. C. I. Onyesoh (Agbalanze Na Nri), *Iwa Oji in Igbo Cosmology*, (Abia State University, Uturu: Centre for Igbo Studies, 2014), 69.

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²⁵ HRM Obi Martha Dunkwu, Omu (Queen Mother) of Anioma. *Facebook Account*, 2021. The Omu Martha Dunkwu was the Omu of Okpanam in Oshimili South LGA of Delta State and the head of Omu in Anioma, Igbo-speaking areas of Delta State. The Omu heads a parallel female government alongside the male Traditional Ruler, the Obi. The Omu majorly leads and coordinates the women, children and markets. She appoints her own chiefs and helps in advising the Obi.

²⁶ Oral interview with Onwuka N. Njoku, (Professor of Economic & Technology History) DOB: 1943, Place of Interview: Evangel University Akaeze (Okpoto Take-off-Campus), Date: 13/12/2019.

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²⁹ Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 83-275.

³⁰ Onyesoh (Agbalanze Na Nri), *Iwa Oji in Igbo Cosmology*, 65.

³¹ Nwachukwu. "What is this about Kolanut in Igboland?" Note that the deities called upon to eat the kola nut depend on the ones the people worship or venerate in the environment where the kola nut prayers are offered.

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³³ Onyewuchi, *Odu Mystique*, 12

³⁴ J. F. Sollier, *Catholic Encyclopedia: Communion of Saints*, Trans. William G. Bilton, (External Word Television Network: Manassas, 1978)

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³⁷ "Catechism of the Catholic Church," *Editio Typica*

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

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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 Timo-

thy 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 offic-

ers, 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 Shelling 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.

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

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

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 com-

pels 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 "Pre-colonial Politics and Governance." Osuigwe also highlighted *Ubuntu*, *Nwanna*, 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 con-

tended 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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