RECOLLECTIONS OF CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

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Children caught in war-torn areas the world over are depicted as both victims and perpetrators of violence (Caroll-Abbing 1952; Proud 1995; Cohn and Goodwin-Gill 1994; Werner 2000; Boyden and de Berry 2004). Most commonly they are portrayed as feeble, helpless, neglected and brutalized, with some becoming heads of households or supporters of elderly relatives. In the accounts of Cohn and Goodwin-Gill child recruits are represented as merciless killers and persons ‘whose innocence is exploited’ in the pursuit of war to win emotional support for the cause of warring factions (1994: 23–7). Child victims of the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970) shared experiences comparable to those of children in other war-torn areas who suffered neglect and various degrees of brutality, yet, within the limits of their capabilities, also assisted their families to survive the conflict. Despite the salience of this topic in reportage of recent conflicts in and outside Africa, little is known about the young Nigerians who lived through a civil war about which so much else has been written.¹

This article is about present-day middle-aged people’s memories of that childhood. During the civil war all these narrators were under the age of eighteen.² The focal point of the discussion is the narrators’ recollections and childhood opinions of the war and life during hostilities. Much of the discussion will focus on those in the Igbo section of Biafra, then Eastern Region, the major theatre of the war.³ Others whose opinions and lives during the conflict are recounted were at the time of the events in Anioma – the Igbo homeland west of the River Niger and situated in the old Midwestern State – and in Idoma and Tiv ethnic communities of the old Benue State, then part of Northern Nigeria and Biafra’s northern neighbours.

Oral data for this article were collected between December 2004 and February 2005 from informants between the ages of forty-two and fifty-five: persons who from 1967 to 1970 were between the ages of five and eighteen. A few older persons were also interviewed, mainly


²Children are persons under the age of eighteen according to the Nigerian constitution and the categorization of children by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³Nigeria in 1967 had four regions – Northern, Eastern, Western and Midwestern. Eastern Region comprised five ethnic groups. The Igbo were the dominant group, while the Ijaw (Ijo), Efik, Ekois and Ibibio were the minority groups.

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3. Nigeria in 1967 had four regions – Northern, Eastern, Western and Midwestern. Eastern Region comprised five ethnic groups. The Igbo were the dominant group, while the Ijaw (Ijo), Efik, Ekois and Ibibio were the minority groups.
for verification of information collected. Some who in 1967 were under
the age of seven could hardly remember what happened during the war,
except what they were told afterwards. For this reason, the narratives
used in this work came from individuals who had better recollections
of the crisis. For Anioma, interviews collected from 2000 to 2001 were
also used.

All narrators were exposed to primary education, with quite a good
number going beyond the secondary level. Half belong to the upper
middle class, and include medical doctors, middle-ranking or senior civil
servants and university lecturers. The other half include artisans and the
gainfully self-employed, along with two large-scale farmers. Interviews
were held privately in the narrator’s home. Open-ended questions were
asked, often beginning with what the narrator remembers of the war.
Follow-up questions clarified issues and drew out more detail. In some
cases people walked in on the sessions and, if they showed a desire to
contribute, were scheduled for an interview. Interviews were recorded
on tapes and later transcribed. The discussions were in a mixture of
the vernacular (Igbo and Idoma) and English. Narrators were free to
use the language they preferred. Comments in the vernacular were
translated into English with the help of those narrators proficient in
English who confirmed that the translation was as close as possible.
A student assistant helped translate comments in the Idoma language.
In this text material sourced from the interviews is followed by the
informant’s name in brackets. Fuller descriptions of the informants and
the dates of the interviews are listed at the end of the article.

Memories are part of an individual. They also preserve the past.
Consciously or otherwise they affect actions and attitudes in the present
as well as the future, and can reshape mindsets. Although it is now
accepted that memory and history are mutually constitutive, memories
are not always as trustworthy as may be generally assumed and could
be vulnerable to manipulation (Miller 2005). For this reason only
narrations corroborated by other respondents were used for this article.
Information that could not be verified and which was not corroborated
was not included. From these recollections, some of the events of the
Nigerian civil war have been recreated below from the perspective of
persons who were children at that time.

CONVINCING CHILDREN OF THE WAR

Attempts to make sense of Nigeria’s newly gained independence and
to give structure to the highly multi-ethnic nation soon led to crises,
many of which were ethnically based (Nnoli 1978). The result was a
military purge in 1966 that spiralled into an attempted extermination

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4 All interviewees, most especially the child survivors whose stories are recast here, were
exposed to different levels of education. The only exception is Mrs O. Oguche, who was about
80 years old at the time of interview in December 2004.
of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere, but also mildly affected other ethnic communities in Eastern Region. The Eastern Regional government of Lieutenant-Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu concluded that the lives and property of its citizens could not be guaranteed within Nigeria and threatened secession.

In the course of these events, children in Eastern Region were students in primary or secondary schools, or apprentices learning one trade or another. Many were with their families and relatives, or guardians and master craftsmen. Given the lack of accurate data reflecting various segments of the population, it is assumed that relatively few girls under sixteen were married at this time, especially as the region’s Marriage Act of 1956 pegged the minimum age of marriage for girls at sixteen years (Obi 1966).

Eastern Regional government commenced a sensitization drive as early as March 1967 to update its citizens on events within and outside the region considered of interest to its ambition for independence from Nigeria. Anti-Igbo plots and the possibility of military confrontation were the focus of the teams that toured the region’s educational institutions. Primary school pupils between the ages of six and sixteen were bombarded with stories of the hostility of Nigerians (persons from other sections of Nigeria outside Biafra and Anioma) towards citizens.
of Eastern Region, and shown photographs of Igbo victims of the 1966 massacres in the Northern Region. The most provocative picture showed a headless man. This became a potent propaganda weapon for winning the sympathy of all sections of the Igbo community of Biafra.

Having dispensed their stories of the atrocities against the Igbo, the sensitization teams reassured pupils that the regional government was determined to defend its territory and people. Songs were used to internalize these messages and to stir up sentiments in favour of the region’s quest for independence. The pupils of Oriamaenyi Community School, Umuahia, were taught the following songs in English:

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Eastern Region stands for truth and justice nothing more
We shall never be enslaved nor shall we bow to North
Whatever the result, we shall stand [and] defend the East
Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
Solidarity forever
For our Region must survive
If the East is invaded
We shall roll it over them
We shall roll it over them
We shall roll it over them
If they dare to cross our borders
We shall roll it over them
We shall roll it over them
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Nwocha, a fifty-year-old male physiologist, now feels in retrospect that the goal of the visits was to condition children early to the depth of the hostility towards the Igbo and to introduce the notion that Northern Nigerians were the enemies of Eastern Nigerian citizens, and the Igbo in particular. Tales of such incidents as the sight of a naked woman disembarking from a train from Northern Nigeria clutching the head of her murdered child (Akpan 1972: xii) and the picture of the headless man distressed the pupils. Children reacted differently to what they saw and heard. Some considered the songs very powerful when compared to speeches and pictures, because they easily remembered them, being too young to understand much of the logic in speeches that were rendered in English. Put together, speeches, songs and pictures of victims of the massacre instilled fear, anxiety, anger and panic in children. The prospect of death from federal troops was very frightening to these pupils, but their anger at what their ethnic community had suffered in Northern Nigeria was as strong.

In May 1967, Eastern Region declared itself the Republic of Biafra, refusing to accept any concession that would keep it within the Nigerian federation. It immediately commenced preparations for war in response to Lieutenant-Colonel Gowon’s threat that the federal government would use force against any section of the country that seceded (Daily Times, 17 May 1967: 1). The Biafran sensitization teams intensified
their efforts, this time to win support for the war. The plight of the Igbo in Northern Nigeria was represented in very catchy songs sung by all categories of people all over the region. Elementary school pupils marched to classes after the morning’s assembly singing songs laden with the troubles of the Igbo and their determination to fight for survival – songs like those reproduced above. The tactics of teaching songs worked efficiently. It ingrained the Igbo genocide in young minds that concluded, as was intended, that their lives were threatened. Among themselves, children discussed the events in much the same way as adults did.

Children over fourteen years reacted slightly differently. They were more perceptive of what was happening and had little need to be helped to form personal opinions about it. Many among them actually witnessed the massacres and lost friends and siblings in the rampage, fortunately escaping death themselves (Nwandu; Ocha; Kere). Such older children regarded the unfolding events as an overwhelming provocation and experienced their own moments of rage mingled with anxiety and dread at the prospect of war. Their feelings found expression in songs favouring war, many of which were composed when tempers were high, and in their eagerness for mobilization. Ocha (fifty-two years old now, and a businessman) recalls:

I was excited at what was going on and I think other kids of my age felt the same way, too. I was anxious to go and defend my fatherland and protest for what was my right as we were told to do by the leaders of Biafra.

Refusal to renounce secession brought the federal troops into Biafra on 6 July 1967. Anioma was administratively outside Biafra but her joint experience with Biafrans during the 1966 massacres and her support for the Igbo dream for independence led to her occupation by federal troops from September 1967 until January 1970. All through the war, songs were composed and used in telling the story of the fighting, baiting and ridiculing the Nigerian leadership and army, and praising the determination of the Igbo fight for freedom. The wartime strategy of teaching songs to pupils has accomplished more than intended. Storing these songs in individual memories has helped preserve aspects of the history of that period.

REACtIONS TO THE WAR OUTSIDE IGBOLAND

Outside Igboland, reactions to the massacres differed. Ndokwa, an Idoma civil servant, shared his horror at the murder of his Igbo friend by a rampaging mob in a classroom at Zaria Provincial Secondary School in May 1966. He recalls:

5 For a detailed account of the Anioma experience during the civil war, see Uchendu 2007.
The war started gradually in 1966. On 16 May 1966, there was commotion in my school (Zaria Provincial Secondary School). A mob invaded the school... When they entered my classroom, they ordered all of us to lie down with our faces on the floor. Students who were not from Northern Nigeria were dragged out of the room. My friend, from Oji River, was among those slaughtered in full view of other students. I also witnessed the Sunday massacre in which many Igbo were killed, houses burnt and shops looted. In fact it was like an offence to be an Igbo... We tried to hide our friends. We gave them Hausa names and smuggled some away from the neighbourhood. Students formed surveillance groups and manned the entrance to the school until curfew was declared and the school was closed down.

Notwithstanding the trauma of the Igbo, Ndokwa – like the businessman Ameha and the farmer Oja – did not support Eastern Region’s decision to secede. Similarly, if we go by the testimony of Ekpo, a female civil servant, the Efik, Ekoi and Ibibio ethnic communities of the Calabar-Ogoja Rivers of Eastern Region, incorporated into Biafra at secession – though sympathetic to the plight of the Igbo – were unenthusiastic about both secession and war with the federal government. Their disaffection was fuelled by the federal government’s counter-secession move of May 1967, by which Nigeria’s four regions were

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6 Source: The University of Texas at Austin Library Map Collection.
split into twelve states. Eastern Region was split into three: East Central State for the Igbo, retaining Enugu as its capital; Southeastern State for the Eko, Efik and Ibibio, with Calabar as capital; and Rivers State for the Ijaw (Ijo), with Port Harcourt as capital. These groups, not seriously affected by the massacres, did not share the Igbo dream for independence, having been influenced by leaders and spokesmen who held that their rights as minorities would be better guaranteed in Nigeria (Akpan 1972: 152–8; Saro-Wiwa 1989). When effective governments were put in place in the new states, many of their citizens withdrew their support from Biafra. Consequently, their communities were eventually excluded from much of the further prosecution of the war.

RECRUITMENT OF SOLDIERS

There was little need for extensive propaganda in the Igbo section of Biafra when the Biafran army began recruiting volunteer soldiers. From all indications, the authors of the pogrom in the north motivated an impressive turn-out for the Biafran army. Outrage over the killings was enough encouragement for Igbo males to volunteer to fight for their rights, at the time interpreted as including the right to self-determination. Children young and old, rich and poor, were heard chanting in Igbo: ‘Ojukwu give us guns to shoot down Gowon’ (Nwocha) – with Gowon now the symbol of the federal government and its Northern-dominated army. Witness the words of Ocha: ‘I was anxious to go and defend my fatherland and protest for what was my right...’

Male youths, fifteen to seventeen years old, turned out for recruitment. Some, while eager enough to enlist against Gowon, Northern Region and the Middle Belt, were not genuinely interested in actual fighting. They conceived of the army as an alternative home and a career prospect. In this class were homeless youths like Okah, now fifty-three and an engineer. Having no identifiable guardians, these boys expected the army to provide at least shelter and food – necessities not guaranteed in their homeless situation. Eagerly intent on the immediate rewards of military service, they overlooked what the professional soldiers knew; that the army which could assure their survival during hostilities also offered the simplest avenue to death (Madu).

From May to October 1967 enlistment into the Biafran army was by choice and depended on the recruit’s age and potential abilities. Recruiting officers rejected volunteers under the age of eighteen following the established practice at independence of recruiting persons eighteen years and above. Okah, desperate to join the army as a panacea for his homelessness, was repeatedly refused enlistment in 1967 on the grounds of age. Physically under-aged boys were not enlisted, but some
qualified candidates were, as Nwaka puts it, ‘on the small side’. Now this fifty-two-year-old clergyman recalls:

The enlistment officers doubted that I was really of age. So, they asked me and other volunteers to do a hundred metres’ race. I ran with zeal and came first. I was immediately enlisted and I took part in a rigorous exercise...

The Biafran army recruited only males but the paramilitary organization, commonly known as the militia or civil defence, accepted women members. The militia served as a support arm to the regular army, which eventually absorbed its male members. Girls in Anioma who joined the militia did so from a desire for both revenge and adventure, as Nwandu’s story indicates:

I joined the militia to avenge the atrocities on the Igbo in Northern Nigeria but particularly the deaths of my relations in Kano where we lived until October 1966. I would have been killed myself. I was among those pursued by a mob. I was able to reach my father’s house on time. I climbed into the ceiling and hid myself there. That was how I escaped death...

Generally, girls did not feature as combatants in the civil war because of the Igbo view of men as the protectors of women. In this regard, the Nigerian conflict differed markedly from similar conflicts in other parts of Africa, such as Zimbabwe or Eritrea and Tigray in Ethiopia, where female combatants played very obvious military roles in the 1970s (Lyons 2004; Hammond and Druce 1990).

THE CHILD SOLDIERS

There was no public indication from the Biafran leadership prior to the outbreak of hostilities that children would serve in the war. Biafra’s use of antiquated ‘Mark IV’ weapons from the colonial era would seem to have discouraged the incorporation of children into the fighting. Kere, who became a lecturer, joined the army at the age of seventeen and discovered that these weapons were ‘crude, clumsy, inefficient, heavy, and ordinary cock-and-shoot’. The military called them bolt action rifles. Towards the end of 1967, Biafra received a consignment of ‘Mars’ weapons from Haiti. These light and powerful rifles could fire many consecutive rounds. Compared with the Mark IV issue, they were efficient and modern and could be operated by children, but they were in short supply. So Biafra retained most of the Mark IV and other locally available varieties, and, in the early stages of the war, armed only adults (Madiebo 1980: 102).

The first three months of the war saw the Biafrans lose much territory to their better-equipped rivals. The capture of northern Biafran towns

7 Well-built under-age youths were allowed in the Biafran militia—a paramilitary organization formed with the intent of absorbing persons who did not qualify for the regular army.
and the Nsukka campus of the University of Nigeria, the think tank of
Biafra, seriously threatened the young Republic whose original capital,
Enugu, was less than an hour’s drive from the occupied zones. Pushed
to the wall so early in the conflict, the Biafran leader demanded the
dispatch to Enugu within twenty-four hours of a thousand able-bodied
men by each of the new territory's administrative divisions. The order
stipulated that the men should 'come with anything they could lay hands
on, which might kill or wound – dane guns, machetes, clubs, stones,
knives' (Akpan 1972: 94). Warriors were specifically requisitioned
from traditionally warlike Igbo communities. This desperate call for
men could be taken as the first official demand for all classes of
volunteers – irrespective of age, experience and capability – and as a
strategy to harness all available human resources to the war effort.
Igbo community leaders were mandated to ensure that the orders were
obeyed (Eluwa).

Many capable men did not respond to these orders. Knowledge
of Biafra's shortage of arms, which was partly responsible for her
military losses soon after the commencement of hostilities, had spread.
The wording of the order and the request that recruits 'come with
anything they could lay hands on' spoke volumes of Biafra's inadequate
preparation for the war. From this time on, Biafra began to grapple with
desertions from its army. The Biafran leadership, probably forced by
these circumstances, considered other classes of potential fighters not
initially allowed to enlist in its army, and these were men above the age
of forty and children.

From the testimonies collected for this study, conscription drives
commenced in different parts of Igboland from November 1967. The
reconstitution of the minority groups of the defunct Eastern Region
into the Southeast and Rivers states did not permit conscription drives
in their communities. In Igboland, the Biafran army began to conscript
boys under the age of eighteen, preferring physically well-built boys of
sixteen and seventeen years of age. Okosi, now a medical doctor in his
early fifties, was conscripted at the age of sixteen. Below is the story of
Kere's conscription at the age of seventeen:

At the beginning when people started volunteering for the army, I did not
go because I was not of age. My friend Obiesie who volunteered was turned
down. I joined my father at Ohafia where he was in charge of Okagbu
demonstration farm. During a visit to Umuahia, to see my mother, in
October 1967, she warned me to move carefully. I did not take her serious.
One day I strolled out and what I heard was: Hey! Hey!! Don't move. If you
move, I shoot!! . . .

They took me to where other boys they caught were. That was how I
joined the army. My friend Obiesie was also conscripted. . . . We were hastily
trained for three weeks. . . . One night three trucks pulled into our camp and
took us to Biafran tactical headquarters where we received our uniforms and
rifles (the same rifles we used during the training). I received my uniform
but without a belt or helmet. From there we were driven straight to the front...

As the crisis deepened and more hands were needed, fifteen-year-olds were recruited. Towards the end of 1968 a thirteen-year-old child was reported armed and in the company of other soldiers in the front line (St Jorre 1972: 336–7). It was not stated, however, how his age was determined. In Igboland the youth age range is wide and the word ‘youth’ can indicate either social position or specific lifestyle. Males between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five or above made up the workforce under the centuries-old age-grade system (Enenmoh). Consequently, the Igbo customarily did not regard males of fifteen and above as children but as youths. Under this communal system, arming persons below the age of fifteen was certainly abnormal. Age calculations until shortly after independence were often problematic because of the semi-literate status of the society. Births were not always recorded in rural areas and, where they were, the records were sometimes inaccurate, having been collected after the actual birth. For enlistment into the army, dates were based on assumptions. If a child was able to handle a heavy weapon with ease, it was regarded as an indication that he was older than assumed. While it is possible that individual stature and build may have confused the ages of some Biafran soldiers, perhaps including the boy of thirteen mentioned earlier, it is also very probable that some children under fifteen years were consciously drafted into the army. The civil servants Lechie and Nwaka, seventeen and eighteen years respectively at enlistment in 1967, mentioned in their narratives that boys younger than themselves were brought into the army, although they could not give the exact ages of such boys. It was clear from my interviews that if indeed boys under the age of fourteen fought for Biafra, they constituted a small proportion of its army. What was popularly acknowledged – and attested by many child survivors – was Biafra’s use of children between the ages of ten and fourteen as spies.

Access to rifles gave child soldiers a feeling of importance. It felt good, some reported; it evoked confidence and a sense of accomplishment. On the other hand, it stirred feelings of despondency, especially if one’s battalion was outdone by a federal unit. Nwata, who joined the army in his twenties, had this to say about the under-eighteen soldiers:

Sometimes there were not enough rifles for soldiers... but when there were available rifles, younger soldiers were armed. Many boys who were conscripted lost their lives from overzealousness and inexperience. When armed, they lacked knowledge on when to withdraw and some were very heartless. We warned each other of danger with ‘who no fast na him lost’ and ‘Mugu fall, guy wack.’ We were simply calling for caution. The older soldiers would respond to this warning to withdraw tactfully more readily than the younger soldiers.8

Most under-eighteen soldiers who fought in the Biafran army were

8 ‘Who no fast na him lost’ and ‘Mugu fall, guy wack’ imply ‘Be very tactically aware and know when to withdraw’ and ‘The fool dies, the tactically aware survive’.
conscripted, while others, like the businessman Keze, volunteered after seeing school mates and peers in military uniform, issuing orders and molesting civilians. After exposure – often more than once – to the front line, some were sent home with post-traumatic stress syndrome, which during the Nigeria civil war was popularly called ‘shell shock’. Some pretended to suffer from this condition in order to induce their demobilization. For the real victims of ‘shell shock’ in Biafra (but also in the Idoma and Tiv communities), it manifested in temporary deafness and displays of violent behaviour.

Youths unwilling to fight tried desperately to escape conscription. They hid in water tanks, roofs, caves and bunkers. Most influential persons at all social levels in Biafra prevented their close relatives from being conscripted or involved in combat, finding them alternative positions in other arms of the government. Relocation and redeployment to less life-threatening jobs, especially to the military police and refugee centres, temporarily guaranteed the safety of many boys like Kere and Diele (the latter now a forty-eight-year-old salesman). Cases of familial interference were common and earned the Biafran army the nickname of the ‘brother’s army’.9

MILITARY EXPERIENCE

The humiliation and physical abuse to which unwilling draftees were subjected made conscription unpleasant for child soldiers. Kere, who did not resist capture, was simply relieved of his shirt before he was taken to a training camp. Resistance could result in a serious beating, after which the victim was sent to a training centre where he remained under strict observation in case he attempted to abscond (Kere; Nwata). A recaptured deserter was severely punished and received a nasty haircut, given with a piece of broken bottle. It was an indication that he was unwilling to fight for the survival of his homeland. These acts of humiliation checked anti-military responses from many draftees, although it did not completely put a stop to them. Boys above fourteen years of age knew that it was better to volunteer than to be caught and forced to take up arms.

Thoughts of military service evoked different reactions in young soldiers. The most commonly reported feeling was fear. Kere narrated his confused emotions over conscription and military service: first, there was his surprise at being halted by conscripting agents and threatened with death if he attempted to run away. Second, there was his amusement at the sight of his mother and female relatives crying over his capture (gender considerations were in play here: their presence reminded him of the need to live up to social expectations of himself as the protector of women and not vice versa). And, third, there was the crippling fear that followed the fierce battle between his battalion and

9 Interviews with Okosi, Diele, Veronica and Kere.
federal troops in his first exposure to warfare. His emotional state was such that watching the speed with which his mates were mowed down by bullets he drenched himself with his own urine.

From July 1968 onwards, most soldiers dressed and fought in rags, and some had no weapons at all. Biafran military uniforms, when available, were of very inferior quality (they were made from salt bags) and tore easily, earning them the nickname 'win-the-war'. Child soldiers were lucky to receive necessary items for combat duty. While the basic body coverings were sometimes provided, helmets, boots and belts were commonly in short supply, resulting in soldiers supplementing their supplies with what they divested from dead Nigerian soldiers after a successful confrontation.

Insufficient arms for prosecuting the war led to conscripted youths being taught to fight without arms. A nineteen-year-old Biafran naval

![Figure 3: Igboland, east and west of the River Niger](image)
officer told how his team, equipped with machetes and a few guns, battled a Nigerian ship fitted with machine guns and automatic rifles. Towards the end of the hostilities the Biafran army had little time to offer its recruits any training at all.

Feeding the soldiers was problematic all through the war but worsened as the crisis deepened from mid-1968. At the onset of the hostilities women assisted the war effort by contributing food. Their donations, as well as items procured by Biafra's Food and Transport Directorate, were prepared in snack form and conveniently carried by soldiers in their snack bags. Nevertheless, there was never enough food to go round, and the production effort was not sustained throughout the crisis. Thus, within a year of the commencement of hostilities, hunger was already a feature of the Biafran army. Biafran soldiers on occasion fought on empty stomachs, sometimes going for days without food. With the knowledge of unit commanders, they seized civilians’ domestic animals and raided farms for food. Commanders sometimes coordinated the search for food: while teams of soldiers went food raiding, other teams prepared the loot for consumption. To combat the threat of starvation, soldiers ate raw and sometimes poisonous foods; soon they were reduced to begging for such humble fare as palm nuts to assuage their hunger.10 In peacetime these acts might have provoked mockery, but the widespread starvation stirred civilian sympathy, making them willing to help soldiers when possible. Nevertheless, Biafran soldiers’ raids on farms and domestic animals triggered many soldier–civilian clashes and civilian hostility to soldiers.11

Survival in the Biafran army was a purely individual affair. This contrasted markedly with the situation on the federal side. Food supplies for federal soldiers were not only regular but also extravagant, making it possible for federal units to assist civilians with food in areas under their control. This was especially obvious in Anioma, which for a much longer period was under federal military control. In spite of the huge investment in their feeding, federal troops confiscated civilian domestic animals and destroyed farms, sometimes setting them ablaze.

The menace of hunger for Biafran child soldiers was compounded by the absence of any remuneration for the rank and file, although the officers’ cadre was paid. In instances where the Biafran leader desired to raise morale, he released money to be shared among frontline soldiers, usually at the rate of one (Biafran) pound per man. Even these rare allowances were never sufficient (Kere; Nwata). Hunger, which killed many civilians in Biafra, certainly dealt as severe a blow to the Biafran army as the battles did. Besides soldiers dying from exhaustion compounded by hunger, the Biafran army suffered massive desertions all through the war because of starvation within its ranks.

10 Interviews with Eluwa, Nwata, Kere, Madu, Keze, Nwocha, Eziuzor and Obasi.
11 Interviews with Nwocha, Chinemelu, Okpalani and Enyiinta.
CHILD SPIES

Mostly, boys below the age of fifteen remained outside the army except for those who were used as spies by the Reconnaissance Battalion, popularly called the ‘reccy battalion’. The ‘reccy boys’, between the ages of ten and fourteen, were selected from among children who flocked to the military camps and those living in the refugee centres. Very often these children went to ‘the military garrisons to watch parades and drill sessions’ (Eluwa). Most often the military camps and refugee centres were in the same location and many boys had their military heroes who dispensed titbits to them. The boys picked for reccy battalion were trained to penetrate federal zones for information on federal troops’ movements and combat plans. They drifted into these zones, their intentions disguised by their age. In their target communities they mixed with other kids their age for a couple of weeks or more before returning to Biafran zones to report their findings to their mentors. About the reccy in the environs of Umuahia, Eluwa shared the following:

Boys in my age group who were drafted in the army were used for reccy. They did not carry arms. They were sent to places where there was combat to spy on the enemy, identify their locations and sieve out information on their strategies. While on assignment, they looked tattered so that they will not be noticed. They carry on as normal children, playing football and other games to disguise their mission. After collecting information, they returned to the Biafran side . . .

Another disclosure on the reccy, this time from the Abakaliki front:

Most of my mates were in reccy. They were between the ages of ten and fourteen. They were very sharp boys and Biafran soldiers taught them how to handle grenades. By evening, when the day’s combat had subsided, they would steal into the federal side, looking hungry and haggard. The Nigerian soldiers would take them in and feed them. The reccy boys in turn would work for them. After some time the soldiers would relax their guard. Later, these boys would return to the Biafran side with what information they sifted. The federal soldiers later solved that puzzle and some reccy boys never returned . . . (Enyinta, fifty-year-old business executive).

Since the federal-held war fronts were in Igboland, it was easy for the reccy boys to mix with the core Igbo inhabitants of these places to avoid detection and capture. Some reccy boys were uniformed and had ranks in the Reconnaissance Battalion that depended on how successful they were in their assignments. Evidence of connection with the Biafran army was disguised when on an assignment, of course. Within the first year of the war, Biafran officers found it very rewarding using children instead of older boys to spy on federal troops in Biafra. The latter triggered suspicion and did not record the degree of success that the small boys did, except where they succeeded in faking mental illness and abnormality to diffuse suspicion (Nwata). In the second year of the war, the federal troops, suspicious of these clandestine visits, made some arrests. The disappearance of some reccy boys
caused Biafra to abandon the use of boy spies. Other sections of the Biafran army besides the Reconnaissance Battalion used boys in the prosecution of the war. Jo Boyden and Joanna de Berry (2004: xii) have written that the involvement of boys in quasi-military roles confuses the distinction between civilians and combatants. While Biafra’s **reccy** boys were exempted from actual combat, they nonetheless participated actively in the war effort.

**LIVING UNDER MILITARY HOSTILITY**

The civil war altered the lives of children. Eziuzor and Onu (both traders; the former a woman) were among those who observed that the major disruptions were the cessation of school activities in the first quarter of 1968; insecurity from the fighting; federal air raids on civilian positions, schools and hospitals; and constant displacement. Hunger, starvation and disease were rampant from 1968 until the end of hostilities. Children were unkempt, some dressing in improvised clothes made from salt bags and polythene materials. Fear was the common destabilising emotion they reported. Sounds of various descriptions and cries of human beings in distress, pain and hunger, with the noise of shelling and the anguish of persons affected, characterized a typical day. From waking to bedtime, gunshots and bomb blasts instilled fear in children. For Enyinta, ‘it was only at night that there was calm, except of course among families who recently lost a member’.

The closure of schools gave children more time for leisure until military activities halted such liberties. Children under ten years depended on their parents and extended family members for sustenance but teenagers assisted adults in life-sustaining activities. Boys between the ages of nine and fourteen formed the **Boys’ Company**. In a sense, the Boys’ Company developed as a variant of the **reccy** boys. Children living in the refugee centres who were not in **reccy** organized themselves as the Boys’ Company. It was an unofficial establishment with no direct link to the Biafran military, although some soldiers took an interest in the groups that existed within the refugee centres, occasionally drilling members in simple military activities. Members of the Boys’ Company within the refugee centres exploited this attention. Some attached themselves to soldiers, acting as their batmen. Their military heroes rewarded their zeal with meals and sometimes food items, which went to their families. The Boys’ Company thus achieved a symbiotic rapport with the army and immensely benefited refugee boys whose parents were hard-pressed. From the refugee centres the Boys’ Company spread to the villages. Units were found in many parts of Igboland and were popular for the sheer entertainment they offered. The Boys’ Company was one of few child-focused developments triggered by the war. It was

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12 Interviews with Nwocha, Kere, Enyinta, Eluwa, Nwata and Madu.
13 Interviews with Nwatu, Adiele, Okpalaugo, Eluwa and Nwata.
a healthy distraction for children and relieved the tension of the war. Eluwa, who was active in the Boys’ Company and led one of the groups in his town, recalls:

Most groups had about ten to fourteen boys. We practised what we saw soldiers doing. We had our own commanders. Sometimes we went from village to village to show off our military skills. I joined as many Boys’ Company [groups] as possible. Once a group is complete, members decide when to meet for parades. We had no uniform and we had no shoes. Our guns were made with sticks and our helmets were calabashes.

July 1967 until April 1968 saw older children of both sexes farming and trading, and sometimes being paid for their services. When from mid-1968 survival became a serious challenge in Biafra, girls and boys not threatened by conscription played more active roles in their own and their families’ sustenance. Enyinta, who was twelve in 1967, says: ‘When school stopped we were idle. When hunger became severe, I went hunting for food with my friends. We hunted lizards, rats and picked wild vegetables.’ Nwocha, who was thirteen in 1967, did farming work, the proceeds of which he gave to his surrogate mother.

Older children took part in the ‘attack trade’.14 Attack trade refers to various types of war-related, difficult, and dangerous forms of trade carried out between Biafrans and Nigerians across front lines or in other areas of active militarization. Items of trade included all scarce commodities needed in Biafra. Biafran boys were not very visible in this trade because of fear of conscription. The exception was those whose stature permitted their participation without the possibility of conscription (Chinemelu). In Anioma both girls and boys participated actively in the trade between August 1967 and May 1968, after which federal troops’ brutal reprisals made it impossible for girls in particular to continue (Uchendu 2007).

The challenges posed by the war differed according to age and gender. As boys were threatened with conscription and military service, so girls of fifteen and upwards faced sexual harassment from federal and Biafran soldiers.15 An appreciable number survived the challenges of the war through prostitution or cohabitation with soldiers. Female sexual exploitation occurred within and outside military circles. The militia had female members who worked as troops’ comforters. Women and girls from the refugee camps also worked as sexual entertainers (Kere; Nwata). Outside military and paramilitary circles, girls commonly befriended Biafran, and later federal, soldiers. The latter had more money and food items to dispense than their Biafran rivals. From 1969 onwards, federal soldiers and Biafran officers were preferred

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14 Dr Gloria Chuku’s PhD dissertation (1995) discussed Biafran women’s involvement in this wartime trade. The present writer has also analysed Anioma women’s role in the trade, in a study that shows the widespread participation of Biafran youths of fifteen to seventeen years of age.

15 Interviews with Chinemelu, Okpalani, Okeke and Ekpo; also Enyinta and Agu Ocha.
lovers because they had more to spend than the ordinary Biafran soldier. Biafran officers were not as numerous, nor as materially well-off, as the federal soldiers, making the latter more popular as male consorts to Biafran girls in federal-controlled areas. In Anioma, the material benefits from liaisons with federal soldiers induced girls to encourage their friends into having soldier consorts (Uchendu 2007). Most acts of prostitution and cohabitation were not initiated by the girls. There were many cases of abduction by federal soldiers in Biafra and Anioma. In instances where soldiers directly approached girls, resistance could result in death. A number of victims were killed in full view of their parents, spouses and siblings.\(^\text{16}\) The society regarded voluntary relationships with distaste, however, blaming the war and personal greed for them and for the general moral decadence of their youths during the war. It pitied those forcefully abused who, nonetheless, became socially tainted as a result. One way through which the federal soldiers celebrated their victory at the end of the hostilities was to abduct Biafran girls \textit{en masse}, with some seizures ending in forced marriages. Parents also encouraged their daughters to marry to ease the strain on the family (Okaleri). Narrators were silent on homosexual activities and the sexual exploitation of young boys within the army. The few to whom this question was posed denied knowledge of such practices. Nwata and Kere felt that the availability of female sexual entertainers made child soldiers' sexual exploitation unnecessary. This issue, however, requires further investigation.

As girls entered into relationships with soldiers or acted as troop comforters, boys took to stealing, sometimes in the company of girls. Some invaded evacuated communities soon after the federal advance and carted away people’s property; others robbed farms, harvesting people’s crops. The hardship of the war distorted, particularly among the younger generation, communal concepts of right and wrong conduct as necessary for peaceful social existence. Stealing during the war was a widespread vice and was as common in refugee centres as in the villages. Adults also robbed farms in the company of children, using the latter as alibis for their actions. The menace of thieves led to the conclusion that ‘the war made people into thieves and burglars’ (Okodike; Nkwo).

Stealing was, for children, one means of coping with starvation. Various communities devised strategies for dealing with thieves. In Umuahia, Ovim and Nkpa, all in Abia State, communal remedies were similar. Youths caught stealing were stripped naked, adorned with a necklace of small shells, and dragged round their towns accompanied by a throng singing defamatory songs. The excursion ended with the thief being dumped in the public toilet, which was an open space designed for defecation, in a manner that ensured he was properly covered with excreta. As soon as he could extricate himself from the mire, he rushed to a nearby stream for a bath. Girls received similar treatment but were

\(^{16}\) Interviews with Opkalani, Eluwa, Agu Ocha and Ofoemezie.
not dumped in the public toilet. This method of dealing with thieves only intermittently checked it.

The disadvantage of the practice was the use of streams by thieves after the tumble in the public toilet. Hostilities hampered the provision of social amenities, while concentrating the population in places without the basic necessities of life. In the absence of pipe-borne water in the rural areas during the conflict, water for all purposes came from the streams. Stream water was used for cooking and drinking, and also for laundry and bathing. Undoubtedly levels of contamination were high and they became media for the spread of disease, contributing to the decimation of the younger population in particular. Cholera, for instance, was widespread in Biafra. Children, already weakened by starvation, were also prone to tuberculosis, whooping cough, measles and kwashiorkor (Nwata; Keze). Kwashiorkor was characterized by swollen stomach and feet, cachexia and general debility. Its clinical manifestations were first observed about the middle of 1968. The disease claimed the lives of many children. It made them vulnerable to other disease pathogens and infections that weakened their natural immune systems. The swollen feet were so pronounced that this symptom was nicknamed ‘Gowon boots’ (Nwocha). Malaria and mycotic infections, especially scabies and mange, also affected children more than adults. The hygienic level of the society was very low and basic supplies for healthcare were lacking; children suffered immensely.

The concentration of the population and the lack of essential supplies promoted outbreaks of epidemics in the refugee centres and within the villages. Starvation and improper feeding weakened children’s resistance to various diseases, leading to massive death tolls, mainly of those under the age of six. Even in Anioma, where federal aggression was not as pronounced as in Biafra, the civil war years saw a high infant mortality rate. An official report with respect to Agbor stated that about eighty infants out of 420 registered births died from lack of proper healthcare between January and May 1968 (The Nigerian Observer, 29 May 1968: 2). Child mortality was higher in Biafra than in Anioma, but no exact statistical data on war casualties from Biafra survived the crisis.

In a way, the war enhanced the usefulness of the extended family system. Some parents intentionally split their children and wards among members of their extended families to enhance the chances of more people surviving military operations. This created room within the extended family for cooperation in the search for survival. Children utilized this communal institution for their families’ good. Where parents were loath to impose on other relatives for assistance, children, lacking adult inhibitions, acted as bridges between their parents and better-placed relatives by calling on the assistance of the extended family when their parents could not extract similar aid. In the case of Eluwa and his cousins, they visited those relatives in a position to help. The benefits included the feeding of the children, coming home with news of how other relatives fared, and, most importantly, with food gifts for the family. For many families, coping with the war was a joint activity in which parents and children played different but complementary roles.
In Idoma and Tiv ethnic communities of northern Nigeria, close neighbours of Biafra, and in Anioma in the south-west, children were challenged by the war even though these areas were outside the war theatre. The Anioma were subjected to military brutality by federal troops, both for being Igbo and for supporting Biafra’s independence from Nigeria. The massacre of civilians in Asaba in October 1967 was indiscriminate and involved male children and adults (St Jorre 1972: 162). Isheagu and Okpanam experienced the execution by federal troops of male children under the age of fourteen. The militarization of Anioma led to displacements and the establishment of temporary homes in the bush under very harsh conditions and extreme deprivation (Uchendu 2002: 445–62).

The Anioma struggled mainly with federal soldiers’ hostility, while the Idoma and Igala battled Biafran hostility. For much of 1967, Biafran bombing of Idoma and Tiv towns put children at great risk. There were many deaths from bombs and survivors spent most of each day hiding in communally built bunkers to contain Biafran aggression and air raids. Ameha tells about Oturkpo:

Oturkpo was frequently bombed by Biafran soldiers until federal soldiers were despatched to the town. The Biafran attacks sometimes killed up to ten people, destroying buildings and property. When federal soldiers came, there were destructions, too. My father’s farms were destroyed. The farms were close to the location from where federal soldiers launched their attacks on Biafra . . .

When in 1968 the Nigerian army established a firm presence in Oturkpo, Biafran aggression was minimized. However, federal military presence exposed Idoma and Igala children to other war-related problems, especially famine. Federal soldiers repeatedly compelled older boys to donate blood for the treatment of wounded soldiers. Having donated blood, some were drafted into the federal army. Those unqualified for military service were co-opted as servants by federal military officers.

The recollections of Ekpo reveal the ambiguous situation of the Efik and Ibibio during the war. At first they suffered Biafran military aggression for their failure to share the Biafran dream. Later, when the federal troops took over those areas, they constituted another menace:

My father’s house was burnt by Biafran soldiers who regarded us as anti-Biafra. My family migrated to Adiasim to escape Biafran harassments. The presence of the Nigerian army did not serve as antidote to our problem. They

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17 Interviews with Oguche, Ameha, Onoja and Ndokwa.
cashed in on the situation and were sexually harassing girls unperturbed that anybody may be aggrieved by that.

IMPACT OF THE WAR

The war period was generally a difficult one for Biafran children but it also had a not-too-unpleasant side. Returnees whose pre-war residence outside Igoland isolated them from rural activities used that period to catch up on communal ways of life, as can be gleaned from this testimony:

My family came back from Lagos during the massacres. I did not know how to do most things done in the village. I eventually learnt from other boys and started doing them myself. I learnt how to fish and hunt crabs and how to weave different types of mats. I became very good in the latter, so that even after the war it became my source of pocket money. (Nwocha)

Boys acquired skills in different crafts, including iron mongering. Some learned rodent hunting, fishing and farming; building houses with fibre roofing; and tending and exploiting economic trees. Skill in house construction became useful after the war, when survivors commenced the restoration of their damaged and dilapidated homes. As boys developed gender-governed skills, so did girls. The acquisition of new skills was made possible by communities in their various places of refuge. Nearly all children who acquired a new skill during the war reported doing so in a refuge community, and mostly under tuition from children in their own age category. The exceptions include the blacksmith Orinwaonu and the businesswoman Polonia, who learned iron mongering and cloth weaving respectively from adult relatives.

To some degree, strict distinctions in gender roles fell away during the hostilities. Boys and girls took part in similar activities. Mba, a male civil servant who was fifteen in 1968, says:

We moved from Ekpurumu to Imilike where my mother made a living from frying and selling bean cakes. When we left Imilike and settled at Orba, my mother changed to garri processing. My job was to help her with whatever she did and in the process I learnt both to fry bean cakes and to fry garri. I also looked after the younger ones.

As for Eluwa, whose father died in 1966, he helped his mother by ‘following her to the farm, running errands for her, and helping with cooking’. As boys learnt to do designated feminine chores, girls also took part in some masculine tasks, like climbing economic trees to harvest fruits. According to the boys, taking up female jobs was to lighten the burden on female parents caused by the absence of adult males through military service, death or displacement. For girls, doing boys’ work was the result of the absence of boys and men who should have done those things.

Many interviewees maintained that children suffered more than any other group during the civil war. One impact was the corruption of
morals through exposure to camp life. Refugee centres indiscriminately juxtaposed children with adults and civilians with military personnel. In Ofoemezie’s opinion, ‘The camps were morally unhealthy for children; there was no privacy. Most of the adult activities were fully observed by children.’

The Igbo communal attitude to death and dead bodies was disoriented by the war. Where previously dead bodies were treated with dignity and buried soon after death, with children shielded from the surrounding rites and often prohibited from gazing at dead bodies, Enyinta remembers that in Abakaliki ‘the sight of corpses was something many children were no longer frightened of or wailed over because they littered all corners of the town’. Ugwuogwu the carpenter agrees, adding that the war diminished the value of life. Frequent encounters with dead bodies forced children to grapple with issues of life and death at an early age. While it terrorised some mentally and emotionally, it caused in others some degree of indifference to the sanctity of human life. These impacts were carried over to peacetime and were blamed for manifestations of violent behaviour by young people immediately after the war (Eluwa).

Child widows emerged with the war. These were young girls whose husbands died in the conflict. Polonia was betrothed before the age of fifteen. In her narrative, she states:

I was visiting his family but did not know that I was his bride. When the war started, he joined the army and his mother took me to live with her. The war, you know, was a lion that swallowed many souls. My husband died in the war. My family agreed that I remain with his family as his wife... When my children were in school, they would return home upset that their mates called them bastards...

The extinction of families because of the absence of male children troubled the Igbo. When the survival of a family is threatened by deaths or social disasters, the practice is for widowed wives to be married into such a family in the memory of a dead male, to continue that family line. The tragedy of the civil war, which left many families without male offspring, saw recourse to this remedy for lineage survival. Child widows were in two categories. One group comprised girls who remained married to their dead husbands and bore children in his name, though biologically fathered by a close male relative of the dead man; others became the wives of a male kin of the dead husband and bore children for the new husband. While girls in the first category did not remarry, those in the second group remarried to partners who were regarded as substitutes for the dead husband.

The war weakened friendship ties among children across ethnic boundaries. Within the old Eastern Region, the anti-Biafran sentiments of the Efik, EkoI, Ibibio and Ijaw degenerated into mutual hostility between all these groups, on the one hand, and the Igbo on the other, both during and then after the war. Older children in the Biafran army were in battalions that killed civilians in Ibibio villages for aiding federal troops against Biafrans. Similarly, Ibibio youths were among local bands
which, with the help of federal soldiers, avenged themselves on the Igbo immediately after the war (Kere). Inter-ethnic hostility within Biafra had a resonance in the wider Nigerian polity. Ndokwa mentioned the deep suspicion towards people of other ethnic groups in interactions among children of his age in northern Nigeria.

The huge human and material losses from the war made post-war adaptation difficult for older children. Some could not continue disrupted education because of abject poverty. In Abakaliki, boys in Enyinta’s age group had to ‘fend for themselves and their families as most bread winners were dead’. Enyinta considers this a setback to both his education and his subsequent career. He makes the important observation that the schools, when they resumed, were populated mostly by girls, since the boys had to stay out to earn money. Most other interviewees remember the war with bitterness, especially for the loss of opportunities, prospects and talents. But, again, it was not all gloom. Some who fought in the war joined the Nigerian army after the hostilities, thus making a career in the military and enjoying faster rehabilitation than others. Persons who in the course of the conflict learnt new skills like house building and cloth production continued them after the hostilities, initially as a temporary engagement. In some cases, long-term careers and alternative jobs were the outcome.

REMEMBERING THE WAR

Recalling aspects of the civil war was not difficult for most narrators. Some needed no external stimulation to reminisce on the war. It was clear, however, that the political situation in the country, especially when not favouring the Igbo, was often a trigger for reminiscing. Memories of a family member who died during the crisis would also set the recollections flowing. It was not uncommon for individuals to recall aspects of the war through songs composed about it for self entertainment (Kere; Nwocha). Entertainment-oriented retelling sessions appear not to be specifically geared to evoke the tragedies or traumas of people, even though they occasionally and inevitably do so. Sometimes, they serve either to refresh memories of the exploits and heroism of Biafrans during the conflict, or to shore up morale. When this is the case, songs like the following are sung:

Jisike n’olu anyi ga enwe mmeri
Jisike n’olu anyi ga enwe mmeri
Do not give up we will have victory
Do not give up we will have victory
Umu m oo, iyo
Umu m oo
Umu bu umu
Anyi bu agu
Agu baa ohia
Mgbada ariwa elu.
My children,
Yes
My children
You are worthy children
We are tigers
When tigers go hunting
The gazelle is frightened into flight.

Going by the interview sessions that produced this article, child survivors of the Biafran war do not, decades afterwards, recall it as a unified narrative. Their renditions came in episodic form and dealt with specific incidents, apparently those that left a deeper mark on them or which they have had to dwell on longer. Further probing was necessary to nudge other events out of their memory banks and to induce a sequential arrangement of the events. While some have come to terms with the war and moved on with life – Nwocha observes that the war happened when he ‘was quite young with a mind that was open to all kinds of experiences and not yet shaped in any specific direction’ – others continue to blame some of their problems on the war. This latter group is composed of persons who lost fathers or sponsors in the crisis; those whose career dreams were truncated by factors linked to the war; and former child widows whose spouses died in the crisis. Enyinta, who lost his father during the war, blames it for affecting his education and his career, although he was able many years later to resume his studies up to university level and to build up a flourishing business. Polonia regrets that her children were taunted and called bastards.

CONCLUSION

The recollections of child survivors of the Nigerian civil war portray war both as a continuous phenomenon whose impacts may persist long after the cessation of hostilities and as an incident whose impact, many years after, may cease to hurt its victims very deeply. It is obvious that children within Biafra were conscious of events that occurred during the war. They were also as susceptible to propaganda as adults. However, their opinions, which they often discussed among themselves, were not publicly expressed at any time during the crisis because they were never sought. In this aspect, the Nigerian civil war may be seen as setting the pattern for subsequent conflicts, especially in Africa, in which adult perpetrators ignore the thoughts and fears of children when contemplating, or engaging in, military aggression. In the Nigerian experience, the civil war frightened many Biafran children, most of whom did not appreciate the full implications of a military confrontation with Nigeria before it broke out.

Though this is not an issue I have addressed here, the occurrence of the Nigerian civil war in an earlier period of the twentieth-century history may partly explain why male children were not as excessively abused through military service as in such later conflicts as Liberia
and Sierra Leone. While the sentiments of Biafran children initially favoured hostility, most probably because of the Region’s official stand and extensive propaganda, at different stages in the conflict they reconsidered their views following massive human and material losses and the wretchedness caused by the war. Nevertheless, older children in particular still hold that the war was necessary, although they do not wish to experience such a conflict again.

By keeping alive their memories of the war, these child survivors have served as repositories of an aspect of Nigeria’s history, and at the same time as its disseminators.

THE INTERVIEWS

Oral information for this article came from interviews with the following, whose real names have been withheld:
Mr U. Ameha, 55 years, businessman, Ojakpa-Adoka, Benue State, 12 December 2004
Mr. O. Chinemelu, 52 years, trader, Alor, 19 December 2004
Mr Diele, 48 years, salesman, Achalla, 30 December 2004
Mrs Ekpo, 55 years, civil servant, Nto-otong, Cross River State, 8 February 2005
Mr Eluwa, 48 years, chauffeur, Umuahia, 16 January 2005
Mr M. Enyinta, 50 years, business executive, Abakaliki, 8 January 2005
Mrs Eziuzor, 50 years, trader, Umudioka-Neni, 17 December 2004
Dr Ezue, 55 years, medical doctor, Osumenyi, 21 December 2004
Mrs Theresa Ife, 48 years, Nnewi, 30 December 2004
Mr C. Kere, 55 years, lecturer, Umuahia, 23 February 2005
Mr E. Keze, 52 years, businessman, Nsukka, 14 December 2004
Mr C. Lechie, 54 years, civil servant, Oheme, 18 December 2004
Mr A. Madu, 57 years, retired military officer, Oji-River, 10 January 2005
Mr Mba, 51 years, civil servant, Orba, 21 December 2004
Mr F. Ndokwa, 53 years, civil servant, Ojakpama-Adoka, 16 December 2004
Mr M. Njoku, 50 years, civil servant, Mbano, 1 January 2005
Mrs A. Nkwo, 55 years, businesswoman, Nsukka, 15 December 2004
Rev. (Fr) Dr Nwaka, 52 years, lecturer/clergyman, Amagunze, 21 December 2004
Mr Nwata, 58 years, chauffeur, Umuahia, 16 January 2005
Dr C. Nwocha, 50 years, physiologist, Umuahia, 21 February 2005
Mrs B. Obasi, 54 years, Ihechiowa, 18 December 2004
Rev. (Fr) Dr Obi, 54 years, clergyman, Ide-alor, 8 January 2005
Mr Agu Ocha, 52 years, businessman, Nnewi, 20 December 2004
Mrs Ofoemezie, 59 years, school vice-principal, Adazi-enu, 26 December 2004
Mrs O. Oguche, 80 years, Ojakpama-Adoka, Benue State, 13 December 2004
Mr S. Oja, 55 years, farmer, Ojokwu, Kogi State, 12 December 2004
Mr L. Okah, 53 years, engineer, Oji River, 10 December 2004
Mrs Okaleri, 55 years, trader, Amagunze, 1 January 2005
Dr Veronica Okechukwu, 46 years, civil servant, Awka-etiti, 18 December 2004
Mrs I. Okeke, 50 years, businesswoman, Nnewi, 22 December 2004
Mr E. Oko, 56 years, retired military officer, Ondo-Ugboja, Benue State, 3 January 2005
Dr E. Okosi, 51 years, medical doctor, Onitsha, 5 January 2005
Mr C. Okpalaugo, 47 years, businessman, Achina, 19 December 2004
Mrs P. Okwo, 50 years, businesswoman, Orba, 2 January 2005
Mr I. Onu, 47 years, trader, Agbogugu, Agwu, 21 January 2005
Mrs C. Opkalani, 56 years, businesswoman, Amagunze, 1 January 2005
Mr Orinwaonu, 54 years, blacksmith, Eha-Alumona, 5 January 2005
Mrs Osuji, 47 years, trader, Mgbidi, 9 January 2005
Mr C. Ugwuogwu, 53 years, carpenter, Eha-Alumona, 3 January 2005

References were made to earlier interviews and discussions with the following:

Mrs Dibie, 48 years, civil servant, Onicha-ugbo, 7 July 2000
Chief Enenmoh, 77 years, retired school principal, Asaba, 9 January 2000
Mrs Nwandu, 50 years, civil servant, Asaba, 17 February 2000
Mrs Okodike, 77 years, retired accountant and Omu of Akwukwu-Igbo, 7 February 2000

REFERENCES

During the three decades following the end of the Nigerian civil war little attention has been given to the children who lived through the hostilities. This article on the recollections of present-day adults who experienced the crisis in their childhood, gathered by means of a qualitative research methodology, tells the story of the Nigerian civil war as the narrators perceived it in their childhoods. It probes their feelings and responses to the conflict, their lives under hostilities and some of the effects of the war on child survivors.

Au cours des trois décennies qui ont suivi la fin de la guerre civile nigériane, peu d'attention a été accordée aux enfants qui ont grandi pendant les hostilités. Cet article, qui s'intéresse aux souvenirs d'adultes d'aujourd'hui qui ont connu la crise pendant leur enfance, recueillis au moyen d'une méthodologie de recherche qualitative, raconte l'histoire de la guerre civile nigériane telle que les narrateurs l’ont perçue dans leur enfance. Il explore leurs sentiments et réactions face au conflit, leur existence sous les hostilités et certains des effets de la guerre sur des enfants survivants.