

## AGBOKIM- OBI (AGBOKIM WATERFALLS) AND THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970

Wisdom, O. ASSAM  
*Department of History and International Studies*  
*University of Calabar*  
*Calabar*  
*assamwisdom002@gmail.com*

### Abstract

The study on “Agbokim and the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970” examined the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on the minority non-Igbo group of the then Eastern Region, the Agbokim waterfalls in Etung Local Government Area of Cross River State. Though the Nigerian Civil War has been extensively studied, the effects of the 30-month war on minority non-Igbo groups remain underexplored, as seen in Agbokim. Hence, there is a need to fill the gap by interrogating the economic, political, and socio-cultural implications of the civil war for Agbokim. It adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on data from both primary and secondary sources. The paper utilises Resource Capture Theory. The Nigerian Civil War was the result of a complex interplay of several factors, including the failure to manage the ethno-religious diversities in the Nigerian State, leading to the 1966 coups, the pogrom in Northern Nigeria, and the declaration of the secessionist Biafran Republic in 1967. Thus, the war highlights some fundamental problems in Nigeria’s national integration, power-sharing arrangements, and inter-ethnic relations. Findings reveal that Agbokim was divided between the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Biafran Republic, with each side offering different incentives. The study concludes that scholarly interest in the non-Igbo minority group is necessary for a balanced narrative on the Nigerian civil war. Also, the study contributes to the discussion of nation-building.

**Keywords:** *Nigerian civil war, Biafra, Agbokim, Resource capture Theory.*

### Introduction

As a nation, Nigeria is made up of vast ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups, operating a federal system of government designed to manage its complex heterogeneity. Upon independence from British colonial rule in 1960, Nigeria was composed of multiple regions, each dominated by major ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo). The federal structure was intended to balance power, but it quickly became strained by political instability, ethnic rivalries, and contested census results<sup>1</sup>. The nation’s structure reflected colonial policies and post-independence politics, which played a significant role in the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, which lasted 30 months (1967-1970). This structure, established by the British, consisted

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<sup>1</sup> E.E. Osaghae “*Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence*”. London: Hurst & Company, 1998), p.9.

of three regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern, creating regional power bases, with the North dominating national politics due to its population size, eventually giving birth to ethnic rivalries.

In the mid-1960s, the country was marked by rising competition among its three largest ethnic blocs: The Hausa-Fulani of the Northern Region, the Yoruba of the Western Region, and the Igbo of the Eastern Region. Although Yoruba politics played key roles in national affairs, the war itself was primarily defined by the confrontation between the Hausa-Fulani-dominated Federal Government and the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region, which declared itself the Republic of Biafra in 1967<sup>2</sup>. This escalation followed a chain of crises revealing the January 1966 coup, the July 1966 counter coup, and widespread anti-Igbo violence in the north, which deepened divisions among Nigeria's major ethnic groups. As trust between regions collapsed, the federal structure itself became strained, setting the stage for open conflict.

Thus, the experience of Agbokim during the Nigerian Civil War reflects both the wider national conflict between the Hausa-Fulani-led federal government and the Igbo-led secessionist movement as well as the localised experiences of smaller ethnic groups such as the Ejagham (which was drawn into a war it neither initiated nor could escape, leading to deep transformations in its socio-economic life).

This study seeks to illuminate the local dynamics of the Nigerian Civil War by examining how Agbokim experienced, responded to, and was shaped by the conflict, highlighting the community's wartime realities, from displacements to cross-border interactions and post-war reconstruction. Also stating the humanitarian international aid from the Red Cross and other religious organisations, while stating how Nigeria's federal structure, ethnic divisions, and economic disparities created an environment ripe for conflict, giving rise to the Nigerian Civil War.

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, focusing on the gathering and analysis of non-numeric data to gain insights into people's experiences. It relies on primary and secondary sources such as academic journals, historical accounts, official reports, government documents, and books. Content analysis is employed to interpret the data, focusing on historical narratives and local accounts related to Agbokim during the Nigerian Civil War.

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<sup>2</sup> K. Omeje. *High Stakes and Stakeholders: Oil Conflict and Security in Nigeria*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing. 2006, p.46.

Moreover, the situation in Agbokim during the war is not merely political or military-based; it encompasses economic, cultural, and social dimensions. By employing qualitative content analysis, this study identifies recurring themes, patterns, and narratives around conflict, community experiences, displacement, and post-war recovery, while also highlighting the perspectives and concerns of the affected populations in the region.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopts the Resource Capture Theory espoused by Le Billon (2001). The resource capture theory focuses on economic factors of instability in a given environment, emphasising how unequal access to resources leads to conflict. Here, we have such situations where powerful or wealthy groups ‘capture’ the best and most productive land and resources, with the poor or minority moving to other lands other than theirs for safety.<sup>3</sup> The case of Agbokim reveals that as rich as the area was in natural resources, including timber and agricultural land, the Biafrans saw the area benefiting them both militarily and economically. The civil war led to the capture of these resources by various armed groups as seen in the case of the Biafran soldiers and the farm lands leading to economic disruption, poverty and displacement in Agbokim.

### **Historical Background of Agbokim**

Agbokim lies within Etung LGA in Cross River State, in the South-South (Niger-Delta) region of Nigeria, and shares an international boundary with the Republic of Cameroon to the east. Geographical boundaries are as follows: To the north of Agbokim is Etomi; to the south are Ajassor, Bendeghe, and Effraya; to the east is the Nigeria–Cameroon border; and to the west is Abia. This area is known to have a small population of about 12,000 people (as at 2006)<sup>4</sup>. The terrain is tropical rainforest, which shapes the ecology, livelihoods (farming, fishing), and culture of people in Agbokim and neighbouring communities.

Agbokim-Obi comprises the settlements of Agbokim Karabot, Akim-Akim, Osarateck (downtown) and Osaobut (uptown). The community is believed to have originated from migrants from the Lake Ejagham region of Bamenda, Cameroon, who initially settled in a mountainous area. Local oral traditions in Agbokim recounts that during the prolonged period

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<sup>3</sup> P. Le Billon. *The Political Ecology of War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflicts*. London: Political Geography, 2001, p. 562.

<sup>4</sup> S. Emmanuel. et al. Porous Borders, Small Arms Proliferation and Socio-Economic Development in Etung L.G.A, Cross River: *Journal of social sciences and humanities*, 2024. p. 29.

of food scarcity, a skilled hunter from this mountainous area ventured into the lowlands of Agbokim characterised by thick forests, flowing rivers and abundant wildlife, upon discovery of the fertile and resource potential of the land, he informed his kin, thereby prompting a gradual migration from the mountains to the lowlands (Agbokim area). This rather small but interesting community in Cross River State was formerly part of the Ikom Local Government Area until the creation of Etung from Ikom in 1996. The area is best known for the Waterfalls, a major natural landmark that symbolises the community's close relationship with its environment. Its geographical location shapes its trade, culture, and politics. Agbokim shares linguistic and cultural traits with other Etung sub-groups (Efraya, Etomi, and 'Ayassor', to mention a few)<sup>5</sup>.

Belonging to the Etung ethnic group, which is one of the minority nationalities in Nigeria's South-South region, the Agbokim people speak the Ejagham language, a language found in both Nigeria and Cameroon. This cross-border linguistic relationship reinforces strong kinship ties and cross-border marriages. Before and after colonial rule, kinship remained the central organising principle of Agbokim social life. Extended family structures determined inheritance, leadership, and community cooperation. Traditional religion in Agbokim centred on ancestor veneration, spirit deities, and nature worship, reflecting the people's close ties to forests and rivers. Shrines and sacred groves were common. However, with missionary activity and colonial education in the early 20th century, Christianity (mainly Catholicism and Presbyterianism) spread widely, leading to a coexistence of Christian and traditional beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

Social life is highly communal with different age-grades (locally called *Nkan*) functioning as mechanisms for social control, labour organisation, and cultural continuity. These groups enforce norms, organise communal labour (e.g., road clearing, farm work), and celebrate initiation rites, which also serve to bring the people together. Cultural festivals, such as the New Yam Festival and the Waterfalls Cultural Day (formerly), celebrate agricultural fertility and unity. These events served both entertainment and religious functions.

Economically, the community's fertile soil and heavy rainfall favour crops such as cocoa, oil palm, cassava, yams, plantain, and banana. Many households maintain small farms

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<sup>5</sup> M. E. Okon. "Traditional Authority and Development in Etung Local Government". Nigeria: *African Research Review*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2014, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> O. O. Ewah. "Culture and Identity in Cross River State: Essays on the Minorities of Southern Nigeria". Lagos: Kraft Books, 2015. p. 5.

for food crops and plantations for cocoa and palm produce. In the 1950's, when cocoa was introduced, the people even fared better economically. Because of its forested location, hunting, fishing, and the collection of forest products such as bush mango and kola were also found in the area. Agbokim's geographical location on the border with Cameroon makes it a cross-border trade hub. Locals trade agricultural products, palm oil, and timber with Cameroonian communities such as Akwaya and Mamfe, fostering cultural exchange but also presenting challenges, including smuggling and border insecurity<sup>7</sup>. The brighter side of this economic development is that, in recent decades, the Agbokim Waterfalls have drawn attention as a tourism destination, thereby encouraging tourism. At the same time, in the same effort, bring in cash flow or finance from these tourists who visit the area, sometimes in the form of a fee for access and other times as an investment in the area.

The traditional Political Structure of Agbokim helped her navigate her day-to-day activities and the running of the community by certain bodies, ranging from what would be seen as the head down to the commoner, since history should also reflect the commoner, not princes and kings (great men). In contrast to the case under British indirect rule, Agbokim was incorporated into the administrative structure of the Eastern Region. Colonial officers recognised existing chiefs but subordinated them to district officers, altering local authority systems. This introduced bureaucratic governance and new hierarchies that sometimes conflicted with traditional values.<sup>8</sup>Traditionally, Agbokim practised a decentralised political system based on lineage and village councils. The village head (Ntufam or Chief) presides over community affairs, assisted by elders and heads of families. Decision-making was consensus-based, ensuring community participation. Dispute resolution was handled through customary courts (Okwa), rooted in kinship ethics and spiritual authority; the age grade served as the community's army, especially the youths who belonged to different age grades.

### **The Nigerian Civil War**

The Nigerian Civil War was not merely a secessionist rebellion but a symptom of deeper structural and identity crises within the Nigerian federation. Several interlinked causes necessitated the war. Having in mind the fact that wars are forms of interactions known to and

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<sup>7</sup> F. E. Ojong. *Cross-Border Relations and Trade between Nigeria and Cameroon*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2017, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> E. O. Ekpe. "Rural Economies of Cross River State: A Study of Agrarian Change in Etung Local Government Area". *Calabar: University of Calabar Press*, 2018, p. 15.

exploited by man over time, with reasons such as territorial, economic or self-determination<sup>9</sup>. Key among them are Ethnic and regional tensions; Nigeria was composed of three dominant ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East. Colonial policies and post-independence power struggles intensified ethnic rivalry. The fear of domination by any one group created deep distrust among regions. Upon withdrawing from her West African colony, Britain left behind a fragile federation composed of over 260 ethnic groups, unevenly distributed across three dominant regions: the Northern, Western, and Eastern regions (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups), respectively<sup>10</sup>.

The immediate background to the war can be traced to the power struggles, political instability, and coups. The January 1966 military coup, led mostly by Igbo officers, resulted in the assassination of key northern and western leaders. This was perceived as an Igbo attempt to dominate national politics. The July 1966 counter-coup, led by northern officers, saw the murder of General Aguiyi-Ironsi (an Igbo man), heightening ethnic tensions by sparking mass killings of Igbos in northern Nigeria. The first coup fuelled suspicions of ethnic favouritism<sup>11</sup>. A counter-coup in July brought Northern officers to power, notably General Yakubu Gowon, and triggered widespread anti-Igbo activities in the North, leading to the death of thousands and the mass return of Igbos to the Eastern Region.<sup>12</sup> These events deepened ethnic disparities and undermined confidence in a united Nigeria. Attempts at reconciliation, including the Aburi Accord held in Ghana in 1967, ultimately failed due to mutual distrust and differing interpretations of the agreement.<sup>13</sup> On May 30, 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, military governor of the Eastern Region, declared the independence of the Republic of Biafra. The federal government rejected the secession, and war officially broke out in July 1967.

However, factors such as personality clashes between Ojukwu and Gowon should not be ignored; similarly, the economic interest factor cannot go unmentioned, as the Eastern Region was rich in oil. Control of this resource became a major factor because the federal government knew that should the Biafran troops secede, they would regret it, knowing they

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<sup>9</sup> P. O Odey. "Women as Preys and Predators; Reflections on the Yala Women Experience". Port Harcourt: *Port Harcourt Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies (PJHDS)* Volume 5, 2018, p.324.

<sup>10</sup> T. Falola and M. H. Matthew. "*A History of Nigeria*". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> S. Akinrinade. "*Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804–1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies*". London: Longman, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> C. Achebe. "*There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*". New York: Penguin Press, 2012, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Achebe. "*There Was a Country...*", p. 27.

would have no control over the oil wells; hence, the federal government was determined not to lose access to vital oil revenues from the secessionist region. The causes of this war can be mostly seen in: ethnic and regional tensions with emphasis on Hausa and Igbo clash, political instabilities, the failure of federalism, personality clash (Ojukwu and Gowon), competition over oil wealth in the Niger Delta and the secession of Biafra demonstrating Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu's (the military governor of the Eastern Region) response to the insecurity and political marginalization, when he declared the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. These factors converged to plunge Nigeria into a brutal thirty-month conflict, resulting in deaths, unrest and displacement of people.

### **Agbokim and the Nigerian Civil War**

As a community, the Nigerian civil war had no direct impact on the Agbokim people, as they were never a majority group. Regardless, the continuous movement of Biafran soldiers in search of safe locations to establish an operational base led to their spread into the community's interior. One could say they established a base in Agbokim to aid their quest for control of Ikom, which was more economically strategic. It has to be said that the Nigerian civil war did not reach Agbokim at the same period as when it began, but instead took a slow but steady course into the area in the later part of 1967 and early 1968. It's also on record that some communities used this period as an excuse to carry out their crusade of internal clashes over land disputes, and not necessarily the effect of the war<sup>14</sup> (as Agbokim was not an actual battlefield during the war).

Mention must be made that the Ikom people gave the Biafrans a truly welcoming atmosphere due to existing relations and proximity, as was the case with most of their neighbours. In Etomi, Agbokim Waterfalls, and Ajassor villages, the forest and cocoa estates served as hide-outs and operational bases for the Biafran soldiers. In line with resource capture theory and the activities of the occupation force (Biafra) regarding the plantations (the farm settlements), it was commonly held that, after the war, survivors (indigenes) would become slaves and labourers to the Igbo. Ambitious Igbo in the plantations were already allocating portions of the plantations to themselves<sup>15</sup>. Some were even bold enough to affirm that it is either you become an Igbo slave, run to Cameroon, or be killed, thus supporting the resource

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<sup>14</sup> O.A. Otor. *et al.* "Ethnicity and Civil War in Ikom Area of the Nigeria-Cameroon Border: Interrogating a Minority Perspective" *African Renaissance* Vol. 22, No.4, December 2025, p. 381

<sup>15</sup>O.A. Otor. *et al.* "Ethnicity and Civil...", p. 396.

capture theory. This led to a shift in support for the Agbokim toward the Federal Troops. In Bendeghe Ekiem, Agbokim Waterfalls and Etomi area, Nigerian forces were led through the forests to Igbo hiding camps and plantations in the Ikom, Agbokim and Bendeghe cocoa estates. For example, burrow pits, trenches, and swamps served as mass graves for the Igbo and fleeing Biafran soldiers who died like flies in the hands of the advancing Nigerian troops<sup>16</sup>. Commenting on how and when the Nigerian civil war got into the Agbokim community, Attali Ayuk recounted thus:

The war got into Agbokim slowly and steadily from Bekwarra area to the Ogoja region before the eventual entry into Ikom and as it turned out, to Agbokim in the late 1967 and early 1968 and eventually spread throughout the village making the indigenes to run to Cameroon and the waterfalls and the cave in the waterfalls area to seek refuge from the Biafran soldiers who used violent measures to occupy their lands. Some indigenes had to shift their alliance to the Federal troops due to threats of enslavement of indigenes by the Igbos during and after the war.<sup>17</sup>

As is generally the case during wartime, even for areas not directly in the conflict or not an actual theatre of war, there are far-reaching effects, yet on some areas and people more than others within the same cosmos. Though the schools, hospitals, and churches became barracks for the Biafrans during the civil war, the farmlands used as hideouts by the soldiers were the most inconvenient for the citizens, as they are and remain an agrarian society, thus leading to conflicts between the Biafran soldiers and the indigenous farmers. Cognisance has to be given to the geographical advantage the area possesses, with consideration of the waterfall and the cave beneath it, where most indigenes hide during the Civil War. Commenting on where the war hit the Agbokim people the most, Agbor Achima states: Though the war hit the Agbokim community, the farming areas were the most affected (due to their advantages in times of war), which made most of the farmers migrate to the Waterfalls for protection, with eventual migration to Cameroon.<sup>18</sup>

Commenting on Agbokim's response, there were instances of traditional institutions, the Red Cross Society, and Church aid, based on accounts of the war by elders and church archives from the Agbokim region. It can be seen that during the Nigerian Civil War, NGO and church missions were lifelines for Agbokim. Through cross-border humanitarian operations, the Red Cross and church missions provided food, medicine, and shelter to

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<sup>16</sup> O.A. Otor. *et al.* "Ethnicity and Civil War in Ikom Area of the Nigeria-Cameroon Border: Interrogating a Minority Perspective" *African Renaissance* Vol. 22, No.4, December 2025, p. 398.

<sup>17</sup> A. Ayuk. 60, Businessman, Personal interview, Agbokim, 18/09/2024.

<sup>18</sup> A. Achima. 50+, Business Man, Personal Interview, Agbokim, 17/09/2022.

thousands of displaced people. The collaboration between local churches and international agencies helped prevent total humanitarian collapse in that region and left a lasting legacy of faith-based community support. Responding to these war impacts, Agbokim's community leaders and traditional institutions mobilised to sustain morale and coordinate relief efforts as most of these relief materials from the NGO, church groups and even the federal troops in 1969 were stored in the houses and sections of caves belonging to chiefs who later encouraged the sharing or hoarding of the relief materials. As accounted by Mkpe Ekuri in line with the response of traditional institutions,

The cave beneath the waterfalls became a central refuge where social organisation was maintained, albeit in limited form. The cave was divided into two sections, with the village head having one and the citizens having the other (The people were able to maintain a society from this cave, though limited). It is believed that the entrance to the cave did not admit visitors or strangers, offering spiritual protection to the indigenes. (The area providing food throughout wartime).<sup>19</sup>

Eventually, this communal solidarity was vital for survival during the prolonged conflict, though they carried out most of these acts under limited circumstances. At the end of the war, the waterfalls became a tourist attraction centre, which has generally helped popularise the area among the public, thus encouraging the area's development and urbanisation. After the war, this area has been developed not just to attract tourists but also to attract foreign investment and drive economic growth, with fees from tourist visits and other investments.

Religious leaders and the Red Cross played a critical role in maintaining social cohesion and providing humanitarian assistance amid the chaos.<sup>20</sup> Although planes didn't land in Agbokim, supplies reached the area through Catholic and Protestant mission networks, helping displaced families and refugees moving toward Cameroon. Missionaries and local catechists helped organise caravan lifts through small truck or lorry movements taking women, children, and orphans to the Agbokim–Cameroon border, from where Cameroon's Catholic missions received them.

Corroborating these accounts, Agbor Achima states that:

The presence of the Red Cross Society and the missionaries was felt, as evidenced by the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria, which mobilised congregations to transport food and refugees by bicycle and canoe through forest routes to Cameroon. Cameroonian

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<sup>19</sup> M. Ekuri. 40, Tour-guide, Personal interview, Agbokim, 18/09/2022.

<sup>20</sup> E. Onyeka. "Religious Institutions and Social Cohesion during the Nigerian Civil War". *Ibadan: Journal of African Studies*, 1999, p. 215.

missions (such as St. Joseph's Parish, Mamfe) and Catholic Relief teams received these refugees upon their crossing of the border (Caritas). He also stated that the male youths and farmers of the community suffered most before the arrival of the Federal troops for liberation purposes around early September (4th September) of 1969. The liberation was further commemorated with the celebration of the New Year's festival, thereby presenting a dual memory as an annual event<sup>21</sup>.

However, the Agbokim people and the area were liberated eventually in 1969 from the Biafrans by the National Federal Troops, marking the end of the war in the area of Agbokim and in 1970, the war officially came to an end.

### **Impact of the Civil War on Agbokim**

Though much emphasis is placed on the negative aspects of the Civil War in Agbokim, with such impacts being felt economically, socially and politically, the bright side of this war is seen in the economic dynamics, commercial expansion and market integration in which local markets expanded due to Igbo participation in distant and cross-border trade this made Agbokim producers (farmers, artisans) gain better access to buyers and distribution networks leading to an increase in cash circulation. While this benefited the wider community economically, culturally, a whole lot had to be put on hold or done in secret (even up to the aspect of worship), this was same in the economic sector as most of the farm lands were taken by these Biafran soldiers some as hide-out and others for out-right occupation and ownership and this did not sit well with the indigenes., it also led to believe of economic dominance by the Igbo (though a low scale trade), as revealed by the resource capture theory (when a group successfully controls key economic niches). It brought about unhealthy competition and perceived economic marginalisation (trade and intermediary roles), a situation in which the Igbos benefited more. Resource capture theory explains this as asymmetrical access to resources, where skills, networks, and mobility allowed the Igbo to outcompete locals, generating tensions. Only the political aspects were left to indigenes, as the Igbo only had economic influence, not direct political control or engagement, though limited, during the war.

### **Socio-Cultural Impacts**

The civil war had many socio-cultural effects on the masses in Agbokim, as it eventually disorganised this society (even as it brought its advantages), leading to several

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<sup>21</sup> A. Achima. 50+, Business Man, Personal Interview, Agbokim, 17/09/2022.

mishaps, the loss of lives and property, spousal separation, and the distortion of festivities in the area during the war. As stated by Albert Ntui:

Agbokim society experienced cultural pluralism, but also little social boundaries between indigenes and settlers. The Igbo strategy of peaceful coexistence reduced open conflict, leading to intermarriage (though these marriages, which were supposed to be carried out in the evenings from 5 pm by indigenes, were often distorted or conducted in secrecy), daily market interaction, and shared economic interests, which fostered tolerance. Be that as it may, strong Igbo ethnic networks sometimes limited deep social integration. It also placed the educational aspect of the people on pause as schools (St. Gregory, Government primary and secondary school Agbokim) were used as barracks for the Biafran soldiers.<sup>22</sup>

In the words of Attali Ayuk:

Many planned marriages were delayed or disrupted by war, and couples postponed weddings until after the war. During the war, sex was exchanged for survival (the Biafran soldiers took the women voluntarily or through coercion), and relationships between Igbo women and non-Igbo soldiers led to informal unions, with a few of these formalised into marriage under traditional customs. Immediately after the War, marriages between Igbo girls and Agbokim men were arranged based on relationships established during the war. This was also applicable to Igbo men, who married some Agbokim women and raised children with ties to both the Igbo and Ejagham groups.<sup>23</sup>

Cultural or group meetings or gatherings were put on hold, as one could easily be seized or killed during this period; the best option was to remain in their hideouts. Upon being caught, some of these men were recruited into the army to assist in digging trenches, evacuating war casualties, or carrying out civil defence activities. Most of the women became more attached to their soldier friends than to their husbands, thereby contributing to the disintegration of marriages. Agbor Achima reveals that:

Due largely to how unstable the environment was academically and considering the health sector, many indigenes had to migrate thus becoming refugees in *Mamfe* leading to a decline in the demographic setting of Agbokim and her indigenes. Data relating to the number of Agbokim indigenes who fled into Cameroon during this war is largely relative as a proper refugee account was not kept but be that as it may, so many youths, men, women and children migrated to the Cameroons for safety, some through the church (Caritas) umbrella and others independently or in small groups this period with most of these indigenes returning after the war and a few residing permanently in Cameroon.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A. Ntui. 80, Village Chief, Personal interview, Agbokim, 17/09/2022.

<sup>23</sup> A. Ayuk. 60, Business man, Personal interview, Agbokim, 18/09/2024.

<sup>24</sup> A. Achima. 50+, Business Man, Personal Interview, Agbokim. 17/09/2022.

The consequences of the war on Agbokim women were similar to those of the Yala women, presented with fractured family structures, strained spousal relationships, with sons being separated from their mothers, whom they have more connections to from cradle to grave (though the Agbokim case presents more patrilineal ties)<sup>25</sup>. This does not go without mentioning the cases of rape and eventual dissolution of previously existing families, the military men took wives from their civilian husbands.

### **Economic Impact**

The Nigerian civil war led to a drastic transformation in the economic setting of the Agbokim people, both positively and negatively. As an agrarian community, the Agbokim people's economic life was destroyed by the outbreak of the war and the ills it brought. This war disrupted hunting activities, market and local industries, leading to a shortage of food, congested homes and a serious refugee and humanitarian problem, bringing about an increased mortality rate of both children and adults. According to Pascal Agbor:

The civil war led to a scarcity of essential items; the economy was completely disorganised; farming was scarce due to the destruction and capture of farmland by rampaging Biafran soldiers; farmers abandoned their farms, and many fled to caves and to some asylum in the Republic of Cameroon. During the war, food scarcity was widespread. Igbo traders served as middlemen in small-scale trade in salt and palm oil (items obtained from captured sites), mostly with other Biafran states.<sup>26</sup>

According to Attali Ayuk:

Further compounding the situation, hungry soldiers from the war front invaded and destroyed farmlands, harvesting crops for consumption even before they were mature, and they also killed livestock found within the village. Trade, which was an important aspect of the Agbokim community, both with their neighbours and the coastal area, mostly between Nigeria and Cameroon, was disrupted during the war, as the Agbokim indigenes experienced resource capture.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> P. O. Odey. "Women and war: Deconstructing the impact of the Civil War on the Yala women of Cross River State" *Calabar: The Calabar Historical Journal*. Vol. 10, 2021, p. 16.

<sup>26</sup> P. Agbor. 48, Farmer, Personal interview, Agbokim, 25/09/2022.

<sup>27</sup> A. Ayuk. 60, Businessman, Personal interview, Agbokim, 18/09/2024.

## Political Impact

During the war, cognisance is hardly given to the political gathering of a people (instead thereof, there is distortion) except such a group serves the purpose of those with the hegemony. The traditional system of government was affected, as major decisions could not be taken largely due to the absence of the Ntufam, who was, in most cases, hidden for safety reasons, thereby leaving society with limited leadership. According to Felix Okorn:

The Biafran soldiers targeted very prominent men in Agbokim (stakeholders) and invited them for a peace meeting, where they were seated, they opened fire on them, and one significant figure in Agbokim, Mr Ekuri Aniche, amongst others, was killed. They shattered the fragile peace and left the Agbokim people and their neighbours with the option of turning to the Federal troops.<sup>28</sup>

As stated by Pascal Agbor:

Politically, the wartime summoning of the Ntufam by the war troops or his concealment for protection by the indigenes reduced his role to that of a 'mere figurehead'. Key indigenous institutions such as the Mgbe society, the Okwa Court and the age grade were rendered inactive during this war period. Despite this, political institutions in Agbokim largely remained under indigenous control, with Igbo influence being informal through economic leverage rather than direct political control, thereby limiting open political confrontation.<sup>29</sup>

The indigenes of Agbokim had to endure all of this between late 1967 and early 1968, through late 1969, and this experience has marred Agbokim's relations with its non-indigenous residents, especially those from the Eastern states (perceived as Biafra).

## Conclusion

July 6<sup>th</sup> 1967, remains a remarkable date in Nigerian history, as the Nigerian civil war broke out on that date. This war was the nexus of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued the nation since its independence in 1960. Although the Civil War has come and gone, the sad memories of that time remain. Since the war and up to date, Nigeria has ceased to be the same, as there is still mutual suspicion on both sides, not forgetting the underlying ethnic rivalry,

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<sup>28</sup> F. Okorn. 50+, Lecturer, Personal interview, Calabar, 22/09/2022.

<sup>29</sup> P. Agbor. 48, Farmer, Personal interview, Agbokim, 25/09/2022.

personality clash, Aburi Accord and revenue allocation. For the Agbokim people, the said stories of their heroes who were massacred, wives and sisters raped, and the negative impacts of this war politically, economically and socio-culturally would have been averted.

Between the years that the Agbokim community had the presence of the Biafran soldiers which was not at the early stage of the war but at a later stage and the eventual end of the war in the area upon liberation of the area by the Federal troops in late 1969, the area witnessed several negative effects of the war ( leading to response from Red Cross, Caritas and the indigenes) and this culminates in the socio-cultural aspects which involves both festivities, marriages, burial rites and even the religious setting of the area being put on halt by the presence of the civil war effect and the Biafran soldiers occupation of the area. Economically, the war led to a distortion in the food supply chain: the area, though agrarian, could not gain full access to its farmland and could not even hunt during this period (at strategic locations taken by Biafran soldiers), and this had an impact not worthy of memory. Politically, the community plunged into a situation where the rulers (Ntufam, the age grade, and Okwa) had limited or no control in the area, instead being controlled by the army (as was the case by the Biafran soldiers and later the Federal troops). The factors that led to the Nigerian civil war should be addressed to prevent such effects as were seen on a larger scale and from a minority lens.

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