

## **Nigeria-Biafra War: Interrogating Tribe and Patriotism in John Iwuh's *Birtright***

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### **Abstract**

*Drama recreates history as history provides material for drama on various issues, including war. It performs, documents and creates awareness and experiences for generations unborn. This humanistic service on societal issues underscores the fascinating symbiotic relationship between history and drama. Using library and content analysis, the paper examines hatred, betrayal and ethnic bigotry in the travails of Ndi-ala, a war induced angst-ridden tribe in John Iwuh's treatment of Nigerian/Biafran war in *Birtright*. Findings reveal contrasting views from researchers who did not experience the war, but *Birtright* shows that Ndi-Igbo went through tremendous suffering and deprivation based on ethnic acrimony. The paper recommends deep research and objectivity in writing about the war. Government should adopt equity in the spirit of "No Victor, No Vanquish" slogan, adequate compensation to Ndi-Igbo and a formal apology extended as a means of healing.*

### **Introduction**

Drama, sometimes seen as a smidgen of imagination, creates and recaptures past societal events either as a way of documenting, embellishing, authenticating or refuting history, and sometimes foreshadows the future. Drama as imitation of life is:

Composed to be performed and stands on completely different pedestal because it can communicate without the spoken word.... Drama is the most active of other genres of literature because of the immediate impact it has on the audience. (Jegede 149)

It is a work of art, which projects human life and activity through the presentation of actions by means of dialogue between groups of characters (Nwabueze 15). However, in whatever capacity drama functions, it leaves the rung of mere entertainment and relaxation to reflect issues that plague the human mind; of our collective existence and corporate responsibility. Drama, like literature, "deals with reality – political and economic realities", converting literary images to realistic human actions. Therefore, drama is a very "important weapon ... in the ideological struggle, in the battle for images, a battle for how we perceive ourselves – in the struggle for communal and individual self-definition" (Eyoh 110). According to Duruaku, drama:

Offers itself for study in order for us to better understand who we are, where we are coming from, what we do and how we do them...Drama therefore is the story that is imaginatively created to demonstrate various facets of the human condition. Consequently, we may learn from it in order to change our ways for the better through a critical appraisal of our action or a re-affirmation of our role in society (22).

Drama is purely human oriented and because it is humanistic in nature, it advocates for free, fair and egalitarian society devoid of unnecessary bickering and indeed, "a near utopia society where all men are equal" (Egwuda-Ugbeda 208). Ebo further argues that "drama has always been an integral part of man's existence and like all other art forms, it is humanistic in nature and deals primarily with man, his behaviour, nature, essence, ideas and life generally" (82). It has been argued that man is the architect of his woes and this is predicated on his egoistic tendencies, chauvinistic instincts, quest for materialism, mudslinging and avariciousness, which often lead to unnecessary altercation and war. These form the epicentre and point of attraction for the creative muse of playwrights who imaginatively and creatively paint a graphic picture of societal and historic events for posterity. War of whatever kind, has never benefitted anyone. In the words of Cian O'Driscoll:

Irrespective of whatever anyone might believe, it is certainly tempting to say that there can be no such thing as victory in ...war. It is easy to believe that war is so ghastly and so destructive that it can never result in anything that could

reasonably be called a victory. Any successes achieved on the battlefield, it might be argued are likely to be both so tenuous and bought at such a bloody cost that the mere idea of calling them "victories" appears ironic. (<https://theconversation.com/can-wars-no-longer-be-won-126068>)

The casualties of war include not only those who died in it but include those who are alive with its effects. This view is supported by the trio of Michaela Palmer, Nora Groce and Sophie Mitra when they argue that:

History often focuses on the immediate death toll of war. But hostilities can have longer-term consequences on a population's health. After each war, approximately 8% of the population has a disability based upon an internationally tested measure of disability, including difficulties with seeing, hearing, walking and cognition. However, war may have other, hidden effects on the health of populations, including among people born after the war. The toll of warfare is often assessed in terms of the number of people killed. However, we feel that warfare's lasting and intergenerational consequences on health is an under-acknowledged problem. The ravages of war extend far beyond the years it was waged. (<http://theconversation.com/wars--physical-toll-can-last-for-generations-as-it-has-thechildren-of-the-vietnam-war-119428>).

*Birthright* as a war drama clearly gives credence to Palmer, Groce and Mitra's view on the long-term consequences of war on health, regarding various forms of disability, starvation and extended effects beyond the end of war. For instance, after the war, Iwuh had observed through one of the characters (Nwaka), echoing the hopelessness to the point of questioning God's promises, "That is Maduabu in clutches and Ejikeme without arm, supported by walking stick. What else does the lord want to say?" (44). After the war, the people display some measure of happiness. Here is the reason:

Narrator: They are defeated, annihilated yet they dance. There is hunger, there is starvation yet they dance. The people have lost every; wives, husbands, children, they have lost jobs and houses yet they dance. Do you ask why? No more deaths,

sufferings and further loses, that's why. It has paralysed economic activities and development" (39).

Indeed, the agonies and excruciating deprivations of those who witnessed war(s) can be better imagined than described. According to Iwuh, "the war that researchers read and write from various subjective angles of history took place around people's homes and villages" (v). This calls for caution, since even the least informed among opinion pundits could differ to aggravate latent tensions. Ogbonna Nogozi's observation on political and artistic inventiveness, while noteworthy, could be speculative:

The scourge that followed the Nigerian civil war and the manifold human experiences that gave birth to socio-political brouhaha provided a base from which Nigerian artists and intellectuals could speculate about the past, the present and the future of Nigeria (109).

The emphasis here is the Nigerian/Biafran war, typified in the use of words such as Ndi-Ala, Ndi-Ugwu, Umuala, Umumili, Ndi-Nda and Obodonile which represents the major and minor ethnic groups in Nigeria; and John Iwuh's *Birthright* provides the raw material for this examination. However, it has to be pointed out that nearly fifty years of annihilation of a defenseless people, most families are yet to recover from the traumatic experience. A handful who came back returned sick or wounded physically and mentally. And those at home had known the war not only in its military dimensions, but also the ordeal of waiting and worrying, and constantly dreading the worst. Even after the war had ended, many were kept in a condition of mental agony. Some were hardly able to realize that the fearful times through which they had been through are now over. The agonies of the loss of those who did not return still linger in their memories. To recapture these memories, the playwright avers that:

Forty years after the material execution of the war, the mental agonies and the new destinies of survivors have received discourses at various levels. In all these, it appears that the

role of drama in telling the story of the war and its unending impacts on Ndi-Igbo has not fully been explored if it has been explored at all. If not, it means that the role of drama as history,

history as drama is not clear to many, hence the need to use it as a tool to penetrate the minds of people especially the youth (Iwuh 58)

Perhaps, the travails of Ijeogu in the play will help to reinvent these memories and place them in proper perspective.

### ***Birthright: A Breakdown***

The play tells the story of the Nigerian/Biafran war of 1967-1970 in a fictitious land called Ndi-Ala. It recaptures in dramatic form the agonies and traumas of a dehumanized tribe who for no fault of theirs suffer excruciating pains in the hands of Obodonile soldiers who goes beyond the battle fields to bombard the homes of innocent villagers. When the war breaks out, people are conscripted and forced to join the army. That was the fate of Ijeogu's two sons who never came back. They are consumed by the war. As a concerned father, Ijeogu made efforts to hide the third and the last of his male children from becoming another victim with the hope that when he (Ijeogu) dies, there would still be one son left to bury him. But typical of war situations, betrayal, slander, intrigues and other social vices reign supreme. His third son is betrayed by Nwaka, the head of a deposed ruling family into joining the next batch of recruits. Ijeogu is devastated and demands a "refund" of one son from him. Nwaka never takes him serious but capitalizing on Nwaka's political engagements, Ijeogu impregnates Nwaka's wife. To make matters worse, two of Ijeogu's daughters, for want of what to eat, visit army training camp begging for water, milk and sardine. In the process, one of them gets pregnant and dies. He becomes mentally unstable due to grief and eventually hangs himself.

The play has three basic divisions. Act One deals with the issues of the war; Act Two is captioned "vanquish" while Act Three talks about "Retribution". In Act One, the events of the war take a toll on the village as we see dead bodies and deserted homes. These dead bodies include men, women, fathers, bothers, uncles, and youths. The elders gather to discuss issues of importance especially the vacuum created by the dead king. Nze, the leader of *Aladinma*, bemoans their fate as most of their sons go into the war without seeking permission from parents. He agrees that the period in which they are in is a tempting one but believes that with unity and togetherness, they can surmount the difficult situation. He goes further to argue that betrayal is a strategy of war and appeals

that people should not betray one another because each time one betrays, one destroys. This is captured thus:

Nze: Ndi-Ala kwenu! Kwezuo nu! My son went even without seeking my opinion. What opinion is there to give anyway? This is a tempting period. It is not easy to keep obodo together, especially one with disgruntled people. But let us continue to be one even in the face of temptations to betray ourselves. It is a strategy in war. Let us not be confused like women being wooed by many suitors. Let us not fall, we know where we belong, don't we? Each time you betray, you destroy."  
(15)

He wonders whether differences in language and complexion promotes these challenges. He asks if giving women the chance to lead could be the answer to their present predicament. Nwaka retorts by saying that a woman cannot rule them when there are still men standing. The meeting is going on when Ijeogu saunters in angrily and reports that Nwaka betrayed his son into joining the war. When he said Nwaka owes him one son, people laughed not knowing that he means it.

Scene Two examines the altercation between Akalefu and Okehi who wants to kill Akalefu's wife because she is from Ndi-Ugwu. While the fight ensues, the elders arrive to bring sanity. They unanimously agree that the woman has lived with them for years and that she has not been found wanting in any way. According to Nze, she has no hands in what is happening between Ndi-Ugwu and Ndi-Ala. Using *ofo* and ancestral guidance spirits, he dispatched the case with traditional wisdom and commonsense. One question is enough to dispense justice:

Nze: (*calls for order with his staff*). This woman has lived among us for ten years, and she has three children by our kinsman. Has any of you ever had problems with her?

All: Baaa!!! I mandate *ofo* against anyone who kills unjustly. This is not the government war (*exit elders*). (2324).

A messenger brings a report that the people of Umuala have pledged allegiance to Obodonile. The people of Ndi-Ala argue that they have stood together all these while without them and that they have the right to selfdetermination. Scene Three centres on the meeting between Nze and Owolawa, wherein Owolawa advises that Ndi-Ala should end their

quest. In the midst of their discussion, a bomb drops and Owolawa is visibly shaken. The blast sounded so close and deafening that Owolawa asks if it is coming from Nze's bedroom. Nze tells him that it was one mile away, saying that Ndi-Ala are endangered but prepared. This can be gleaned from the following conversation:

Nze: Straight to business then. Your fighter jets fly over our houses dropping bombs. What we bury after such massacre are women and children because our army does not sleep in the bosoms of their wives.

Owolawa: Doesn't it all point to one direction? It's time to end your quest?

Nze: I would rather you don't get chopped because propaganda will garnish it in a most distasteful manner.

Owolawa: Not while I'm with you (*just then a fighter drops bombs, Owolawa docks; scampers but returns visibly shaken*).

Was that from your inner room, the bang was deafening?

Nze: (*docks but keeps courage*) that was one mile away.

Owolawa: (*picking up his cap*) I'd be damned. This thing is different at close range you know?

Nze: My people are endangered species; we're prepared as well. But are you? (27-28).

Nze not only tells him how treacherous his people have been to Ndi-Ala, advising that the best way to support their course is to declare independence for Ndi-Nda.

Act Two Scene One takes place in the training camp. Ijeogu rushes in and pulls a young man, his son, out of the line. A soldier sees it as an affront, confronts and kicks him mercilessly for arguing with him after which he pushes him away from the line. Ijeogu persists, but they bundle him out.

In Act Two Scene Two, Ijeogu breaks through the guard in Nze's house and laments that out of his five children, two are dead and out of the remaining three, two are girls and that the surviving son is betrayed to join the war. He wonders if he his destiny was to live the true meaning of his name (*Ijeogu*). Stating his plight:

Ijeogu: I have five children, two have died already, and the war is still on. Out of the remaining three, two are girls. The remaining boy was betrayed until he volunteered to join the army. Is that why my name is Ijeogu? (34).

Ijeogu has as many as five different interpretations pointing to war. In fact, *the* name Ijeogu literarily means embarking, or meddling with war. It indirectly points to the consequence and after effect of such an adventure. It is however important to note that *Ijeogu* had the name decades before the war broke out. So it is prophetic and appears to be his destiny. Going further down the scene, He laments that two boneless girls cannot bury him when he dies. He asks for a rope to hang himself and further informs the gathering that his two daughters have volunteered to serve at the training camp for some morsels of bread. He fears that they might get pregnant in the process. While the meeting is going on, Okorie rushes in to announce that the meeting should be disbanded because Obodonile knows their location. To break the wings of Ndi-Ala, it is reported that Obodonile have granted autonomy to Enumili and Umuala. Suddenly, soldiers pounce on them, beating Nze to a pulp. He did not survive the attack.

Scene three shows that even in the midst of defeat, people can still find joy in celebration. In the midst of the women celebration, the men wonder why they did not realize in time that Ojei and Okoro are spies. They argue that even though they are vanquished, that they are not wiped out. As such, they should take pride in their spirit of industry to forge ahead and rebuild. In Act Three Scene One, funeral rites are performed for the dead. Uredia tells the women that the men have disappointed them, suggests its time women aspire to lead the men. Nwaka gets wind of this and braces up for a showdown with Uredia and Yagazie. In Scene Two, Nwaka goes to Reverend's office to lobby for support. He offers to donate money to his mission. He then proceeds to tell Uredia that it is his right to rule the community and that she should back off. The men have a different opinion as they believe anybody can aspire to rule them, whether man or woman. This does not go down well with Nwaka who threatens fire and brimstone. In Scene Three, Reverend encourages Uredia not to relent in her effort to better the lots of her people. He speaks thus:

Reverend: Don't be deterred by threats. The village needs mother figures like you two. But you must hold firmly to God. Some of



the aspirants are drawing power from the oracle against their opponents (67).

Maradie, Nwaka's wife bandies words with him and gets beaten in the process. She tells him that his second wife, Nwanyinma is not well and that he should live up to his manly responsibility. Nwanyinma confides in Maradie that she is pregnant and says the child belongs to Ijeogu. Nwaka gets wind of it. He tries to kill Nwanyinma and Ijeogu but the people prevent him. Unable to bear the loss of yet another child, Ijeogu hangs himself.

### **Tribe and Patriotism in *Birtright***

Ethic pride and patriotism spurs the characters in *Birtright*. The best examples come from Obidike the hunter who alerted the villagers of the war. His was one of the early volunteers, got wounded and remained bedridden but hopeful. But he died on hearing that the Ndi-Ala lost the war. His wife Yagazie said "In the midst of excruciating pains, you kept faith until the news that Ndi-Ala has lost the war. And in single gulp of breath, a life of fifty years comes to an end" (48). The second example is Nwaka who feels alone; lost his children and lost the war. Suicide was a way of concluding that war is a conglomeration of events of losses (78).

It is no longer a refutable truism that the Nigerian civil war was between Ndi-Igbo (Ndi-Ala) and the rest of Nigeria (Obodonile). *Birtright* is a commentary on the situation Ndi-Igbo faced during the war, angst, frustration and predicaments. Literally, angst is "an emotional feeling of anxiety or worry about a situation or one's life. It belongs to one of the fundamental and universal human feelings and is marked by a general state of unease or apprehension" (97). Ijeogu's travails in the play represent the agony and frustrations of an average Igbo man who took part or witnessed the war. First, his fellow kinsman, Nwaka reported to the commander that his third and remaining son has not joined the war. This necessitated the conscription of Ijeogu's son who indeed was willingness to join. This intention of this internal betrayal differs from that exhibited by the people of Umumili and Umuala, who withdraws support from Biafra, and presumably connived with the federal troop to annihilate Ndi-Igbo. This is typified in the actions and utterances of Owolawa who feels that there is no justification for the agitation of self-determination by Ndi-Igbo and advised him to abandon the idea quest. By engaging in dialogue with neighbouring tribes, Ndi-

Igbo had a false hope that they had allies. They never had any inkling that it was a “dialogue of the deaf demanding a great deal of shouting, a great deal of gesticulation and a great deal of repetitions; a dialogue which, despite all efforts, often ends in a misunderstanding – a most frustrating dialogue” (Odumegwu-Ojukwu ix). Though Owolawa later saw tangible reasons for Ndi-Igbo’s agitation and promised to talk to his people. This was not to be, as Owolawa believes that the deal with Obodoni holds better attraction (30). Of course, when the chips were finally down, those who gave Ndi-Igbo false hope and deceitful alliance Okoro and Ojei typifies fell for pseudo independence. The implication is oil, and with a proverb, Iwuh’s makes a prediction, “an adult who helps a child to recover his pear from a stronger child will collect his share. Let us leave stupid child with his chosen brute.” (Iwuh 42)

Ijeogu complained to the Aladinma people’s forum, but it did not yield any positive result. He was frustrated and desperate to save his son’s life. That desperation saw him enter the training camp in a last attempt to forcefully rescue his last surviving son. He wanted to die in the place of his son. Of course, he did not find it funny as he was cajoled, humiliated and kicked mercilessly out of the camp. He goes home more devastated and heartbroken than before. Indeed, the war brought excruciating agonies to most families whose wards were forcefully asked to join the war. Some did unthinkable things in order to save their wards such as building trenches, sleeping inside the bushes and on top of trees. As if he was destined for suffering and heartbreak, Ijeogu’s two daughters now visit army training camp in search of morsel of bread and he fears that they will get pregnant. He laments that:

I don’t even have money to purchase a rope to commit suicide... Please come along with a good rope for me, I must do what I have to do. My two girls have volunteered to serve at the training camp for some morsel of bread; I don’t want them to get pregnant there. That is not why my name is Ijeogu (35).

To him, since happiness has refused to be his birthright, death may as well be a better alternative. He eventually committed suicide so as to save his face from the impending disaster. Ndi-Igbo’s birthright, from their perspective, eluded them in a place they called their own and the quest to become independent manifested itself. The war led to the downfall of great men; men who were enthusiastic about the future and what it holds for them. It cuts short the lives of both the young and old in

their prime and rendered most families childless and hopeless. Records show that close to two million Igbo died in the war.

Apart from death, most families suffered physical disabilities such as loss of arm, leg, ear, eye or a combination of all these. As a matter of fact, surviving after the war was such a herculean task and the few who eventually made it still could not recount how it happened. It was an experience no sane human being would want to undergo. *Birthright* is a recreation of history that can be better imagined than described, thus being true to history means that it would best for those who experienced to tell the story. According to Iwuh, "Anyone under the age of 45 by 2016 (even academic researchers) who lived outside Igbo land during the war cannot reasonably and objectively argue about the civil war and its psychological effect" (v). This is because it will be discussed from second hand, prejudiced and sentimental point of view. Although *Birthright* is a fictional work borne out of creative instinct and imagination, the dramatic historicisation of the war calls to mind the monumental impact of the war as expressed by Palmer, Groce and Mitra that there is no absolute freedom between the victor in war and the supposed vanquish (insert the date pls).

Ijeogu typifies the true picture of how an average Igbo man suffered during the course of the war. He hanged himself not because he enjoys dying but because of the situation he found himself. Living, when everything he owns (children) are gradually disappearing from the face of the earth, would be of no value to him. This is the situation some Igbo men and women found themselves. During that period, tales abound in Igbo land of fathers and mothers, who on hearing that their wards have been conscripted into the war, committed suicide or become demented. As a matter of fact, there is no level of image painting whether in concrete or abstract form that will convey the true picture of how Ndi-Igbo fared during the war. It is indeed disheartening therefore, and a mark of further injustice when humanity is ignored for political and economic advantage. Humanity calls for inclusion through objectivity and fairness national unity.

### **Tribe, Betrayal and Genocide**

Ndi-Igbo as represented by Ndi-Ala in the play seem not to know what caused the war apart from the few educated ones in their midst. However, what they seem to be aware of is the fact that they have a right for selfdetermination; a right to decide where to belong and whom to pay allegiance. Achumba captured it thus: "Have we not stood our ground

this long without them? It means that Obasi no na elu supports our course. We have a right to SELF-DETERMINATION (emphasis mine 25).

They believed in their abilities to manage their resources for selfdevelopment. They erroneously believed that their neighbours from Umumili and Umuala are truly their neighbours without any inkling that they may be a spanner in their wheel of progress. They threw caution to the wind and suffered untold hardship. Like the playwrights of his generation and those before him, Iwuh "deals with urgent, particular, topical, contemporary social problems with the aim of raising popular awareness of a positive revolutionary alternative" (Obafemi 118-119). One would be forced to argue that the war in question took place some fifty years ago and as such, should be laid to rest. Ironically, the victor of the war of Nigeria (Obodonile) is less bothered that Ndi-Igbo faced genocide, and rather deserve to be treated like a conquered territory. One therefore wonders, as did Achumba (25) if it is a crime to aspire self-rule; forced amalgamation has never worked, metaphorically, Obodonile typifies this view.

In the light of the above, Ndi-Ala wondered what their offence was to warrant the level of destruction and annihilation. One may be forced to infer that part of their offence is being fearless in the face of oppression in demanding for self-rule; in saying enough is enough and making determined effort to be heard. They believed in the sanctity of one united nation but when they felt their interest could no longer be accommodated, they voluntarily decided to pull out. The offence could include offering their productive youth to the development of the nation like Ijeogu did but got impunity, deprivation and gang-up in return. They asked for development in areas that produce the resources with which they used in developing other states but ended up being pounded with grenades and ammunitions. Ndi-Ala fought gallantly, defended its territory; surviving on corn-meal and vegetables. They were inventive and channelled their creative spirit into manufacturing weapons of mass destruction to hold opponents.

### **Pains of the Vanquished**

Only partakers truly appreciate the impact of war, others would trivialize it. In the case of the Nigerian/Biafran war, bias and ethnic sentiment, have prevented many to objectively dissect the monumental injustice done to a tribe. They see it as a misunderstanding of a sort between the Nigerian government and Ndi-Igbo. Doing so leads to "dislocation in mental reasoning that beclouds their true perception"

(Ezenwanebe 99) of what actually happened during the period and its impact on the people.

A war fought between two known persons may not portend more danger to the warring parties but when a third or unknown ally joins the race, the one at the receiving end suffers excruciatingly. Ndi-Ala suffered not necessarily because they fought a war, but rather, gang-up and alliance with the trusted neighbours and enemies within. *Birthright* proves that even in village meetings, which took place at secret venues, enemies infiltrate through saboteurs and disgruntled elements seeking for recognition and acceptance from the enemies. Boundaries and borders between neighbouring tribes were used as bargaining for betrayal. For instance, the following conversations ensued between Ndi-Ala, Umumili and Umuala.

Nze: Report reaching us says there has been a great massacre in Okuani and the people of Umumili blame us for each of their children who died.

Nwaka: They have never been steadfast in their relationship with us. Have they not always obliged our enemies the access to penetrate us. They have always been saboteurs.

Okorie: My name is Okorie from the first infantry battalion in

Abangwa. (*Brings out map*) Okoro and Ojei, please let

this be properly understood. These are the locations of your tribes in the map of Obodonile. You are at the fringes and therefore serve as doors into and out of Ndi-Ala. Umumili and Umuala are between the left and right of our ribs. So understand our sentiments (2526).

This made Ndi-Ala endangered species during the war.

During the course of the war, as it is normal with people living outside their homes, the desire to run home where they will be safe is usually strong. Those who left the shores of the Ndi-Ala got home safely with some of their personal belongings without any molestation. However,

the reverse was the case with Ndi-Ala who were coming back from NdiUgwu. For instance, in the play, Nze and Achumba argue thus:

Nze: ... I am told that over twenty Lorries full of our people arrived this morning.

Achumba: It is true, over 100 families were squeezed together like goats stacked for sale. No family returned complete. My brother was one of them; his wife and three children were beheaded by Ndi-Ugwu; civilians like us not soldiers (19).

These were the ordeals of an average Ndi-Ala man returning from any part of the Obodonile during the war. Commenting on the events of the war and the level of massacre meted out to Ndi-Igbo, Ademoyega (119) informs that:

The massacre continues to sweep away more and more officers and men from the east and Ibo speaking parts of the MidWest...the victims had either fallen or had run away from their stations and were finding their way back to their home towns and villages.

Perhaps, more illuminating is Madiebo's account:

The...killing brought with it an influx of refugees into eastern Nigerian from all over the federation of Nigeria. They came back by air, land and sea in pathetic and shocking conditions. Most of them had one or the other part of their bodies either broken or completely missing. Thousands of children arrived, some with severed limbs and many others emasculated. The adults bore the full brunt of the killing and very few arrived from the north unharmed. Those whose limbs were not severed, brought them back shattered and had to be amputated anyway. Many had their eyes, nose, ears and tongues plucked out. The highlight of this horror was the arrival in Enugu of the headless corpse of an Ibo man. Women above the age of ten were raped and many of them came back in stretchers... others came back either naked or in underpants and the big gashes on their bodies showed they had been thoroughly beaten and tortured. There was hardly a single

family in Eastern Nigeria which did not suffer a loss through these massacres (84).

When the war finally came to an end, Ndi-Igbo had high hopes of regaining part of what they lost. It ended up being a mirage for a dream; they never got anything back. They never regained their jobs, and those who had money in the bank got a stipend in return. Those in the army were either summarily dismissed or demoted. They were practically made to start from the scratch. They had kwashiorkor ridden children in their midst and death meant nothing to them as they ate and dined with decomposed human beings. Leaves in the bush, whether edible or not becomes a source of food for them. As it was the case with Ijeogu in the play, it was better to die than to continue to suffer. Yet, those who orchestrated the war and enjoyed its spoils never felt their pains but continue to play politics with it. Did anybody at any time reflect on some of the difficulties they were made to pass through? The deafening sound of grenades and bombs had ugly consequences. Owolawa's experience (p. 27) proves this. Some actually became perpetually deaf through such sounds, while some were left with physical disabilities such as broken arms and legs, swollen tummies from Kwashiokor, and loss of eyesight. This can be inferred from the following extracts from the play.

Ichie: (*coming in*) Ndi-Ala Kwenu. Nze pardon me for coming late. We are still searching for body parts from the bomb that dropped between the stream and market square yesterday (17).

Nze: Survivors? Women and children die more from starvation and lack of medical supplies than gunshots. Whose handiwork is that? (p. 28).

Thus proving that insensitivity, desire for power, domination and control is the reason for less humanity.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored Iwuh's *Birthright*, a dramatic re-enactment of the Nigerian/Biafran war, which draws attention to important issues raised by the war. Although many of this generation did not experience the war, *Birthright* provides a mental picture, which reinforces its historical authenticity. The ability of dramatic genre to achieve this kind

of re-enactment is underscored by Nwosu and Onwusoanya in their observation that drama's punchy message has proved effective that:

Generations after generations of playwrights have consistently relied on the realities of their societies and an urge to correct societal improprieties and leadership misfeasance as major spurs to their muse (199).

Incidentally, each time the issue of Nigerian/Biafran war is mentioned in prose or drama, it leaves a sad feeling on both readers and viewers of its performance. It thus re-echoes drama's responsibility of documenting history. Indeed, this function is "comprehensive, rewarding, engaging and also a window into the world... which unravel mysteries, expand knowledge, and make clearer, somewhat abstract issues and situations" (Ogbonna, Kelechi 141).

The war has come and gone and it is obvious that lessons have been learnt and unarguably, nobody would want a repeat of that experience. It is therefore important that people make efforts to desist from fanning the embers of discord that will generate conflict. Good writing is anchored on objectivity and anybody wishing to write about the war should be objective. It should no longer be politicized. Rather, conscious efforts should be made to ascertain the remote and immediate causes of the war and how to avert future occurrence. There is therefore the dire need for proper reconciliation at least to justify the "No Victor No Vanquish" position of the Federal Government. This will give Igbo sense of belonging and work toward forgetting some agonies of the war.

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