

**RETHINKING THE IMPACT OF NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR: COMMERCE IN THE POST CIVIL WAR NNEWI AND ITS CHALLENGES, 1970-2000**

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**Abstract**

There is no doubt that the impact of Nigerian Civil War has constituted one of the burning issues in post-war discourse of Nigeria even as Nigeria grapples with the challenge of nation building since the end the War in 1970. Indeed, while the War is currently consigned to histories, its “traces and legacies” still live on. Opinions and perspectives with regards to the impact of the War have emerged in several forms, mostly with intense political undertones, stressing the ugly side of the impact arising from the War. This perspective makes the narrative a-one-way-traffic discourse. In view of this foregoing, this paper argues that the Nigerian Civil War with its attendant hardship rather spurred Nnewi peoples to action by stirring their finest potentials through ingenuity and innovation towards commerce in the post-war Nigeria. The paper further interrogates the emergence of large scale commerce at the post-war Nnewi. This fresh perspective on the impact of the Nigerian Civil War as presented in this paper, examines the various coping mechanisms and factors or “secrets” that led to the economic prosperity of Nnewi in the post Nigerian Civil War. On the whole, the paper attempts to examine the positive impact of the Nigerian Civil War on Nnewi and its influence on the evolvement of commerce up to year 2000 when the Shari’a law sage further led to the relocation of Igbo to their region in a bid to avoid the reoccurrence of another round of victimization. The work acknowledges the pains inflicted on the peoples of Nnewi following the 1966 pogrom and the eventual Civil War but majorly concentrates on how such challenges stirred up their potentials as well as initiated the localizing of commercial activities in Nnewi in the post-war Nigeria. In addition, the paper also examines the various challenges that confronted Nnewi community in the post Nigerian Civil War years based on the period covered in this study. The methodology of the research is qualitative. The findings indicate that the adversity created by the 1966/Civil War was explored and turned into great opportunity which resulted in commerce.

**Introduction**

On the heels of Biafran defeat in 1970, commerce became a child of necessity in Nnewi<sup>1</sup> sweeping across the landscape of the area with active involvement of most Nnewi indigenes. What started as mere trading centres with few individuals who had financial wherewithal, snowballed into a national cum international market. At the immediate post war era, most of the people involved in commerce simply held on by sheer will power following the hard times occasioned by the Nigerian Civil War. What attended the period was severe trying period for the people of defunct Biafra. Interestingly, it was on this background that all kinds of ingenuity emerged in Nnewi. Thus, this economic revival fervently re-kindled the spirit of entrepreneurship in newer dimension as well as birthed commerce in a larger scale at the post war era. Other scholars on the Nigerian Civil War have so far dealt mostly with other aspects of the War such as; the consequences of the War on Nigerian politics,<sup>2</sup> humanitarian crisis associated with the War,<sup>3</sup> military operation during the War<sup>4</sup>, foreign intervention, poor execution of the War and its excesses among other issues<sup>5</sup>. In another vein, scholars on economic history have not equally sufficiently interrogated the

“positive impact” of the War or how it triggered commerce in the post war Nnewi and its challenges as examined in this study.<sup>6</sup> This study, therefore, contributes to this effort by examining the positive impact of the War with regards to commerce in the post war era and its challenges to Nnewi as a city. The study is important as its findings inject more vistas to the meager body of literature in this direction. The study raises awareness on the viability of commerce in Nnewi in the post war era as a big booster to the national economy of Nigeria. It also draws the attention of government and other well-meaning Nigerians to the developmental stride of commerce in Nnewi at the post war era which by implication could be replicated in other regions of Nigeria if the wisdom exhibited in Nnewi is followed appropriately.

### **A historical peep on the background of commerce in Nnewi**

In history world over, it is a well-established fact that humanity originated in Africa and Africans<sup>7</sup> have been deeply involved in various forms of trade and commercial activities at different stages of evolution of human society. Africa as a continent had in the past experienced vigorous and fervent economic activities which attracted people of different races to this continent. Without gainsaying any fact, as indicated above, trade is recognized as one of the most legendary human activities in Africa which later developed into what is now known as commerce.

In Nigeria, however, commerce had been one of the most dependable sources of livelihood for virtually all the ethnic groups since the pre-colonial era. The trade routes dotting the landscapes of all the regions in Nigeria provided the necessary links and enabling environment for interaction and economic cooperation. This very tendency no doubt brought about the emergence of great commercial cities like Kano, Onitsha, Lagos etc.<sup>8</sup> The interaction became effective in the colonial era with the aid of other branches of commerce, especially the transport sector which greatly promoted movement across different parts of Nigeria.<sup>9</sup> It has been observed that one of the most important factors contributing to the growth of modern commerce is the parallel development of an efficient transport system.<sup>10</sup> This fact no doubt, reinvigorated and enhanced the sector in the colonial era by opening up Nigeria and introducing other forms of economic activities other than buying and selling which arguably was the main stay of Nigerian economy ab initio. Unarguably, it could be asserted that the introduction of modern form of transportation boosted the economy as other services were introduced into commerce in Nigeria at the colonial phase.<sup>11</sup> Going by this background, commerce in the post colonial era in Nigeria became more consolidated. The political independence of Nigeria in 1960<sup>12</sup> which came with much hope, promises and ultimately economic prosperity, gave Nigerians a sense of faith in their new nation,<sup>13</sup> thereby encouraging a good number of people to invest in commerce and other sectors of the economy across the nation of Nigeria, without an iota of fear<sup>14</sup>. Consequent upon this, the independence of 1960 further promoted integration and cooperation in Nigeria. The Igbo who are said to have knack for trade and commerce found opportunity of exploring various economic activities all over Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> In Kano State for example, the area called Sabon Gari became a replica of Onitsha in today's Anambra State. Also in Kaduna south, a place called Television Garage was like an Igbo city. This also applied to other cities across Nigeria. They took advantage of the opportunity and established their business empire all over Nigeria.<sup>16</sup> Enugu road of Kaduna State was then like an extension of south eastern Nigeria due to the concentration of the Igbo in the area. In Lagos, the father of General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Sir Louis Philippe Odumegwu-Ojukwu (a native of Nnewi) was rated as one of the richest business men in the West Africa sub region. His chains of commercial activities were profound in Nigeria. He took commerce to a new level as at that time by delving into Transportation and other services before the Nigerian Civil War.<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may, before the Nigerian Civil War, Nnewi was a rural town with little commercial activities at the Nkwo Round About<sup>18</sup> commensurate with its size. In fact, it was simply just like any other rural area in Igboland before the Nigerian Civil War. Particularly, the popular Nkwo area or junction served as a weekend resort for indigenes outside Nnewi who came home for meetings and functions. All forms of social and economic activities took place in Nkwo Round About which Fredrick Forsyth in his book “Emeka” acknowledges.<sup>19</sup> Be that as it may, the event of 1966 which led to the massacres<sup>20</sup> of the Easterners across different parts of Nigeria, especially in the North, created a huge number of returnees who came to Nnewi.<sup>21</sup> The wholesale killings of Easterners and their neighbours across Nigeria<sup>22</sup> were so frightening and devastating such that

the returnees in Nnewi resolved to look inward. It could be argued, therefore, that the maiming, raping, looting, slaughtering and killings carried out in 1966 against the Igbo and their neighbours<sup>23</sup> gave birth to the initiative of large scale commerce in Nnewi in the post war era.<sup>24</sup> However, the implication of such difficult experience is that the pogrom<sup>25</sup> carried out against the people of defunct Eastern Region and their neighbours<sup>26</sup> (with the Nigerian Civil War) brought about the abrupt relocation of the Igbo and some of their neighbours to their various regions<sup>27</sup>. Large number of them lost their lives<sup>28</sup>, properties, business etc.<sup>29</sup>

### **Nnewi and the coping mechanism in the post war Nigeria**

Partly as a result of the lesson of the 1966 crises,<sup>30</sup> when many Igbo fled home only to find that they did not possess a roof over their heads- many Igbo migrants endeavoured as a matter of priority and urgency, to build a house they could return to any time they were home. The same sentiment informed long-time commercial investment strategies. Thus, this encouraged investment in property or in industry in Igboland as it were.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, business men preferred then to establish their investment very close to their home towns. The sentiment and passion for home investment began to find its root in Nnewi as at that period- the immediate post war era. It is mainly on the account of this that large and medium-scale industrial concerns are to be found in various parts of Igboland, especially in Nnewi, which at the same time is the focus of this paper.<sup>32</sup> In essence, this development with respect to commerce could be seen as the legacy of the Nigerian Civil War which had some build-ups in forms of crises that took place in 1966.<sup>33</sup> Without doubt, some of the best best-known success stories in the field of post-war-owned enterprises come from Nnewi. British economic historian Tom Forrest has argued that this rural town had a “head start in the period of reconstruction, especially because of its role as a major market during the War, and because of the international connections of its traders. In the oil-boom period of the mid-1970s, local business men in Nnewi diversified into new fields of enterprise which by the late 1980s had resulted in a “silent industrialization of Nnewi”.<sup>34</sup> Nnewi’s success was not by coincident. It was a product of initiative, rugged determination, courage, perseverance, hard work and discipline as seen in their resilience. Such development was attained through the following forms of enterprise as seen below.

### **Service, Apprenticeship: Greater Economic Cooperation in the Post War Nnewi**

The post war Nnewi was indeed a very challenging period. With the presence of countless returnees in a pathetic condition<sup>35</sup>, many of them decided to pitch their tent in Nnewi. The Northern part of Nigeria especially, and other regions outside the present South Eastern Nigeria were never considered for relocation given the experience of the War fresh in their memories. A good number of the returnees who were the victims of the massacres<sup>36</sup> were majorly traders across Northern cities, such as; Kano, Kaduna, Makurdi, Maiduguri, Bauchi etc. Some of the victims also were established traders in the Western parts of Nigeria, especially Lagos and Ibadan. This particular situation which not only left them empty handed owing to their looted property or abandoned. They equally lost their loved ones which further deepened their sadness.<sup>37</sup> This challenge brought about an unprecedented cooperation among Nnewi people in different ways as mechanism to cushion the effect of the War. It was on this back drop, therefore, that the idea of service, apprenticeship or learning of trade by Nnewi young folks crystallized in the post war era.<sup>38</sup> At the immediate post Nigerian Civil War Nnewi, a common visible phenomenon was the presence of abject poverty everywhere. The poverty was much and palpable. This could be attributed to the condition in which Biafrans fought the War.<sup>39</sup> The heavy support the federal government of Nigeria got from the Western Powers placed the Biafrans at the receiving end throughout the period of the War<sup>40</sup>. Also, the total blockade imposed on the Biafran territory terribly affected the well-being of the people as well as impoverished everyone greatly.<sup>41</sup> This condition led to the hardship of the Biafran people.<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the idea of twenty pounds policy introduced by Chief Obafemi Awolowo who was the then finance minister of Nigeria further compounded the agonies of the post war era for the Igbo. In other words, even those who had money before the war or generated money in one way or the other during the war, lost it to the policy of twenty pounds. Thus, the situation made it very difficult for many to start business on their own since they could not afford the capital. Nevertheless, there were some Nnewi people who were able to

access their properties outside Igboland or who had other forms of connections. Some in Nnewi and other parts of Igboland, out of their industry and ingenuity generated capital for business. Given the experience of the Biafran war, there was a great deal of spirit of solidarity deeply expressed in Nnewi. Various clubs and unions were formed within this period. Majorly, part of the objective of those organizations was to uplift the people. On this ground, therefore, the young men began to render service and learn trade from those that were financially established. The initiative involved negotiation between the two parties, the service provider and the boss. The service providers were the young men in some cases boys, who practically served their boss or masters as it is being commonly referred to. The period in which the young men were to serve their masters were being determined during negotiation. As expected, the young men were to learn on the trade during their years of service. They were mostly boys in their formative years.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from the aspect of rendering service in exchange of capital for their future enterprise, commonly referred to as “settlement”, these crops of young people were equally being prepared for their entire life experience. Their masters who were more advanced in age had acquired experience of life over time. Therefore, they did not only teach them business or trading techniques, but also made sure the young folks understudying them grow into maturity even in other areas of life.<sup>44</sup>

In other words, the idea of service and learning of trade became very lucrative in the post war era in Nnewi. Thus, this was one of the first initiatives in the post war Nnewi. It was one of the means in which the people survived the immediate post war era as there were no people with strong capital base. This effort enabled the people to cope with the hardship that attended the period. Many families had at least a boy who volunteered to serve a master. In the long run, the benefit of such venture became a means in which families gained support especially after the empowerment (settlement) of the young man. Within the space of five years in the post war era, the idea of service and learning of trade became an affair of the generality of Nnewi people due to the economic sense it made as a huge palliative measure in the face of poverty that confronted the whole of Igboland in the immediate post Nigerian Civil War.<sup>45</sup>

In this discourse, one of the points to note is that this initiative helped in checking crimes and other vices. As expected, in a post war era, all kinds of vices do emerge given the hardship that naturally attends such difficult periods. Also, such vices are being carried out by young men lacking discipline or driven by their youthful exuberance. However, as noted above, most of the young men were engaged in one form of economic activity or the other. The large number of returnees from across different parts of Nigeria found Nnewi interested for establishment of all kinds of economic enterprise. Those who came back from Northern and Western parts of the country with their children engaged some of them in learning of trade.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, as has been established from the outset, these young men rendered all the services in anticipation of a particular period where they would be settled. The settlement has to do with empowering them financially. The extent of the financial empowerment depended on the benevolence of the master in question. This is because the amount in question cannot be compared with the long years of service from the service providers. With time, such amount is said to become depreciative. In some cases, some masters even went beyond the terms of agreement by increasing the said amount for the final settlement. This, however, could be as a result of the level of industry of the boy in his service days or his faithfulness and sincerity. In some few cases, the situations were not smooth resulting in serious disagreement. However, the whole exercise was a huge success and initiative considering the extent at which it helped the people economically.<sup>47</sup> In other words, though the settlement or the financial empowerment and reward was very important because it enabled the service providers to establish their own trade. Nevertheless, the training and experience they gathered were more valuable. This is because the training and experience were expected to help them all through their lives. It was, therefore, a very holistic experience. It was another form of education considering the number of years they put into it. As time went on also, some of them began to combine the training with adult education. They engaged in adult education in the evening after their trading activities. With that, some of them that were not able to pass through secondary school became literate to an extent.<sup>48</sup>

### **Technical Skills (Technicians) in Nnewi**

Naturally, the people of Nnewi are endowed with innate talent in the area of technical skills or ability. As part of the large Igbo family, they rendered some specialized services in cities like Lagos, Kaduna, Kano, Zaria, Ibadan, Kafanchan etc.<sup>49</sup> However, it was the event of 1966 which forcefully resulted in their mass exodus<sup>50</sup> that indeed, spurred their natural gifting in the area of technical skills. At the post war era in Nnewi, it was not everybody who went into commerce or trading as it were. Some of them followed their passion and developed their technical skills in the face of little or no resources. Be that as it may, before the war broke out, there were some technical works going on in Nnewi but that was not massive as such. A good number of the skillful young men travelled out of Nnewi to several places outside the present Southeast of Nigeria where they rendered their services.<sup>51</sup>

Based on the witnessed destruction of 1966<sup>52</sup>, most of them made a resolution to rather render their services in Nnewi. Since the vocation was not a strange field for them, they explored more possibilities which were propelled by the situation of that time. Their exposure over the years became one of their biggest assets at that moment when it really mattered. These skills began to find expression in the calibration of auto and motor parts. As time went on especially in the mid-1970s/1980s, new perspectives and initiatives began to emerge which helped and influenced industrialization to an extent in Nnewi. As a matter of fact, this experience and initiative since then had had a tremendous impact on commerce in the post war era in Nnewi. Generally, it is an established wisdom that any act of reproduction which result in profit making, impacts on commerce.<sup>53</sup> The chains of connection of the above activity became a source of expansion for commerce in Nnewi. For example, Mr. Uzor Okeke, one of the technicians of that era, affirmed that the technical skills produced thousands of employments for young men and even older adults. He further testified that the relationship such had with commerce was very profound<sup>54</sup>.

In view of the foregoing, it could be argued that the development of technical skills and commerce in Nnewi were the products of the post war era. Though war in itself is a very destructive event, but one could assert that it has some form of positive sides if one will considers the extent at which it brought out the best in Nnewi people.

Furthermore, the development of technical skills in Nnewi in the post Nigerian Civil War was not done in isolation. Various skills found expression in different areas and produced talented technicians such as; welders, builders, panel beaters, mechanics, electricians etc. These technicians established their workshops in the nook and crannies of Nnewi at this point in time. Towards the end of 1970; most of them began to expand their business by opening up new branches as well as employing more workers who assisted them. From 1980 through 1990, the technicians in Nnewi gained much ground. Their expertise attracted lots of people across Nigeria. These were the periods that strengthened their act. With the level of their development and expansion, the need to extend their services to other parts of Nigeria became very essential. In contrast to the pre-Nigeria Civil War era, the people of Nnewi consciously did not leave Nnewi massively to satisfy the needed services elsewhere which in turn was meant to expand their capital base.<sup>55</sup>

### **Transportation**

Transportation as one of the commercial enterprises had long ago existed in Nnewi. It could be recalled that Chief Philippe Odumegwu Ojukwu was one of Nigeria's first transporters after the Second World War.<sup>56</sup> He however operated from Lagos where he based.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, during the 1966 crises Chief Philip Odumegwu was among the returnees who flooded Nnewi and shortly died before the war broke out. In other words, it was in the post war period that Nnewi people began to establish their transport businesses at home. Though most of the men who established their transport firms within this period opened up branches across Nigeria but had their head office at Nnewi or vibrant office where administrative work took place. Unlike the era of pre-war, the men in this transport enterprise operated from Nnewi.<sup>58</sup>

With the idea of operating from within, the commercial activities in Nnewi were promoted and the people were able to boost the economy of the area. The experiment was carried out so as to guide against any future occurrence of violence such as that of 1966 which stripped off the people their wealth across different parts of Nigeria. A lesson from the experience of Chief Philippe Odumegwu was very fresh in the

minds of Nnewi people considering the fact that Chief Philippe Odumegwu, a native of Nnewi and the father of Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, was one of their mentors and role model. His death shortly before the commencement of the war could be attributed to the effect of his lost wealth all over Nigeria and the ugly height of the atrocities of that time. From late 1970 when some Igbo started migrating back to other parts of Nigeria, Nnewi people became engaged in the transport sector of commerce. Towards the beginning of 1980, the emergence of luxurious buses became very competitive. In Nnewi, there are some transport firms owned by Nnewi natives. Some of them are: Chi Di Ebere Transport Ltd, Ekene Dili Chukwu Nigeria Ltd, Izuchukwu Nigeria Limited etc.<sup>59</sup>

### **Motor Spare Parts, Motorcycle Spare Parts and Electrical Materials**

The great majority of industrialists in the cluster of spare parts factories in Nnewi within the period of this discourse were traders and most of these traders were producing one or more of the products they specialized in marketing as traders. These products were usually motor vehicle and motorcycles parts. With their experience over the years, they began to distribute their products through the existing distributing networks. Through their networks and contacts, they were able to expand their market and economy. In the post Nigeria Civil War era when the natives of Nnewi had settled down after their experience of the Civil War, they visibly became strong force in terms of supply of motor spare parts in Nigeria.<sup>60</sup> From the beginning of 1980, upward, Nnewi was already known as the centre of commerce and industry, and had one of the largest automotive parts in Africa. Industrialization of the town began around 1970 when Nnewi motor parts traders began marketing their own brand name products instead of the reproduction of “Original” parts. There were a lot of dealers of auto and motorcycle spare parts within this period which made Nnewi very popular across West African region in the post Nigerian Civil War era. The town subsequently became a centre for commerce and industry, and has one of the largest automotive parts markets in Africa. Besides the big players, small and medium sized industries also joined the venture, producing for both Nigerian market and for export.<sup>61</sup>

Partly, electrical materials became very lucrative in Nnewi as a result of the nature of the items traded by merchants in Nnewi. Most of those that came to transact business in Nnewi equally expressed their interest in electrical materials as it were. This factor was one of the things that encouraged the sales of electrical materials in Nnewi.<sup>62</sup>

### **1966 Experience, Pogrom and Post War Ideology**

At the end of the War in 1970, Nnewi people lost great fortunes. Both those who abandoned their properties across different regions of Nigeria<sup>63</sup> and those at home suffered greatly. It was more of lost-lost situation for the Nnewi people. Added to their pains were the cases of pogrom resulting in various degrees of casualties on the kith and kin of Nnewi peoples at the eve of the War.<sup>64</sup> Being that Nnewi people are also part of Igbo family, they also partook of all the pains Igbo nation bore at that point in time.<sup>65</sup> Thus, this ugly situation, therefore, created a strong atmosphere of solidarity among the people. All over Nnewi, the people were bound by the common sentiment and pain they all shared before, during and after the War. This particular situation made some of them declared that they would never cross the Onitsha- Niger bridge to other parts of Nigeria again, where their kith and kin were dehumanized.<sup>66</sup>

The resolve was immediately followed up with post war ideology in Nnewi. At this era, all prominent sons and daughters of Nnewi who survived the War were at home – Nnewi. There arose some level of indoctrination and consciousness hinged on how to re-build Nnewi out of the rubbles of the Civil War. Those men and women preached basically the message of love rooted in uplifting one another. Different social clubs began to spring up with the aim of giving financial aid or loan to their members. This post war solidarity really took a fervent dimension such that within a short period of time, massive investments were concentrated in Nnewi.<sup>67</sup> In *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspective from Below*, Axel Harneit-Siever succinctly captures the solidarity and ideology of that era as thus:

To grapple with it, Nnewi people united and regrouped themselves. Social clubs were set up with a view to finding a way to reconstruct the town and re-orientate the people through gainful occupation. To this end, many people with business acumen teamed up and formed business partnerships with headquarters at Nnewi.<sup>68</sup>

### **Onitsha's Factor**

Apart from other factors instrumental to the growth of commerce in Nnewi in the post Nigerian Civil War, the proximity of Nnewi town to industrial/commercial town of Onitsha also contributed to its growth. In the post Nigerian Civil War which brought about heavy concentration of Igbo in Onitsha, its influence thereby, sent some growth impulses to Nnewi town. With the proximity of both towns, there were exchanges of goods and services leading to the growth of economy in both towns. Already, Onitsha has been known for its commercial exploits even before the War, but with the resolve of the people of Nnewi however, attention was shifted to Nnewi as an emerging commercial centre. Following the synergy explored by both centres, ideas were borrowed and translated into productive and profitable values. Without doubt, the people of Nnewi also tapped from the knowledge of businessmen and women of Onitsha. This mutual understanding between both parties helped immensely in the re-building process of commerce in both towns.<sup>69</sup> According to Mrs Rose Okechukwu of Nnewi, "Onitsha people are brothers who shared things in common even in the immediate post War era when re-building process became very needful."<sup>70</sup>

### **Awka's Factor**

Awka is a neighbouring town to Nnewi. Nevertheless, Awka is noted for its prominence in Igbo history right from the pre-colonial days. Socio-economic activities in Awka had always been solid. The influence of Awka had also been great throughout Igboland as a whole. Specifically, however, with the passage of time, the influence took up different shapes and shades in Nnewi and the influence of Awka was felt in Nnewi with a renewed vigor in the post Nigerian Civil War era. The establishment of Awka as the capital of Anambra State had greatly contributed in the growth of socio-economic activities in Nnewi. Also, since the former Anambra State University was proclaimed a federal university – Nnamdi Azikiwe University, the population of the town increased. Students across different states in Nigeria flooded Awka in search of education. This development increased the cost of living in Awka. Also, the social status of the area skyrocketed exponentially which also had an influence on Nnewi, thereby sending away those who lacked sufficient economic footing. Some of them re-located to Nnewi.<sup>71</sup>

### **Nnewi-China Relations**

In accordance with the established fact of this discourse, as soon as the Republic of Biafra collapse<sup>72</sup>, trade became the main stay in the economy of the entire Igboland. Nkwo Nnewi served as the central market for virtually all the established traders. These traders concentrated majorly on the sales of all kinds of motorcycle spare parts. However, with the success made in the trade of motorcycle spare parts, these trades began to explore Asian market. They literally became the major importer of all manner of products and had the franchise for major Chinese brand. Having experienced how technology boosted the Chinese economy, these men, who started out as importers and franchisee for major Chinese brand, consolidated on such experience, thereby deeply veered into full scale production in Nnewi. They literally put their experience into action in Nnewi by building on what they have learnt over the years. Their relationship was that of give and take. This process, therefore, galvanized the economy of Nnewi. This, in a nutshell, was how trading metamorphosed into commerce which eventually resulted in industrialization in the post war Nnewi.<sup>73</sup>

### **Lagos Perceived Excesses**

In the early 1980s, some Nnewi business men decided to extend their commercial activities to Lagos. This was because Lagos as the capital of Nigeria and in view of its economy, the business men from Nnewi stood the chance of making more profit which they could even invest some in Nnewi. However, with time, as these traders from Nnewi began to prosper, a lot of issues started cropping up. The Lagos state policy became unbearable and some Lagos indigenes, known as “Area boys” began to explore tribal sentiment. Nnewi traders were made to know that they were strangers and must comply by paying a certain amount of money to those “Area boys” milling around Lagos. At some points, Nnewi traders were threatened and it appeared to be acceptable or legal by those in government. As this very situation persisted, some Nnewi traders in Lagos resolved to head back home and reestablish their business. Most of them established their business in the popular Nkwo Nnewi market. Motorcycle spare parts traders took the lead and initiative and others followed.<sup>74</sup>

### **Incessant Political/Religious Crisis in Northern Nigeria**

It is established in this study that at the end of the Nigerian Civil War, there was heavy concentration of Nnewi people at home. Be that as it may, there were some who still went back to the Northern parts of Nigeria for one reason or the other. However, it should be noted that most Nnewi people went back around 1980s and early 1990s when it appeared that there would not be such occurrences of civil unrest again like that of 1966. At this point, Nnewi appeared to be very competitive and the wounds of the Civil War were gradually healing. As a result of these factors, some Nnewi people decided to extend their business to the Northern part of Nigeria in the spirit of one Nigeria.<sup>75</sup> However, the 1990s became a period characterized by several political cum religious riots. These riots swept through Northern states, especially, Kano and Kaduna. Other Northern states were affected but Kano and Kaduna had always been known as the most volatile states in this regard.<sup>76</sup> These riots in the 1990s were politically motivated but ended up most times as religious crises,<sup>77</sup> of which the Igbo who being majorly Christians were major targets by the Hausa-Fulani hoodlums. As traders, their investments were also the targets in such cases. These trends gained fervent momentum in the 1990s, claiming<sup>78</sup> the lives of Igbo people and other southerners residing in those troubled states. Based on this, a good number of Nnewi people and Igbo in those Northern parts of Nigeria relocated back to Nnewi and re-established their businesses at home.<sup>79</sup> An account of a victim of 1990s riots in the Northern part of Nigeria expressed her view as follows:

We came back with our family because the rate of killings and looting of Igbo people’s properties was too much. Often times, issues that do not make any sense are said to be the cause of the killings and lootings. We made our wealth through our ingenuity and hard work but we often loss them within few seconds to riots. At a point, I prevailed on my husband to bring us back to Nnewi because our peace and safety are more important us.<sup>80</sup>

### **Year 2000 Shari’a Law Saga and its Consequence**

The Shari’a law/ riot saga is said to be one of the crises that motivated the relocation of a good number of Igbo across Nigeria. Nnewi natives who relocated back to the North after the Civil War and those who were born in the North came back to Nnewi when the Shari’a saga generated serious tension all over the North on the heels of Islamic campaign on the said code- Shari’a law.<sup>81</sup> No one can deny that the introduction of Shari’a law in the Northern Nigeria resulted in massive loss, considering the number of lives lost and properties of inestimable value damaged which indeed halted the prospects of development in the affected places. Nigeria has too many accounts of inter-religious conflicts, but the magnitude of these conflicts especially in northern Nigeria heightened in the 1980. However, agitation for the adoption of the Shari’a law 2000 triggered unprecedented riots in some parts of Northern Nigeria. For example, it is opined that the February 2000 Shari’a violence that engulfed Kaduna city was described as the “worst since the riots that preceded the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970.”<sup>82</sup>



In a nutshell, with the adoption and introduction of the Islamic legal system by the State Government in early 2000, groups of Muslims went about the streets of Kaduna city celebrating. Few days later, the Christians embarked on a peaceful demonstration to reject the adoption of Sharia's in the state. Some Muslim groups barricaded some streets refusing to allow the Christian easy passage while some among the Muslims started to stone the Christians. Conflict broke out when the Christians tried to enforce their way through leading to massive loss of lives and properties. During the conflict that lasted for about 2 weeks, many churches and mosques were razed down, while several inestimable lives and properties were destroyed. On 26 February 2000, the Zenith News Service reported that the death toll in Kaduna had reached 400. By 1 March 2000, the Ecumenical News International (ENI) in Geneva had reported that "many mosques and at least 36 churches were destroyed, and more than 200,000 people were forced to flee." To show the magnitude of the crisis, the police was unable to restore law and order until the army was drafted. By 19 March, 2000, the Anglican Communion News Service (ACNS) based in London reported that "Much of the infrastructure of the city of Kaduna has been destroyed; churches, mosques, homes and businesses have been burnt. 800,000 people have been made homeless, and hundreds have been killed". Maison and Talbot stated thus; "Reports speak of rival armed gangs of Christian and Muslims roving the streets. Churches and mosques have been put to torch. Corpses were seen lying in the streets and people's bodies hanging out of cars and buses, apparently killed while attempting to flee the violence". Reported figures of the damages to human lives and properties are underestimations.<sup>83</sup>

Religious/political of crises which became very common in the 1990s up the year 2000 as stated above is no doubt, one of the reasons Nnewi people had a rethink and decided to come back to their home town-Nnewi, at those times. It is very possible that the event of 1966 and the Civil War itself had taught them a lesson such that they did not waste time in coming back to Nnewi.

### **Challenges on commerce in Nnewi**

Despite the manifold and often impressive examples of post-war commercial success in Nnewi, there were some challenges associated with the commerce in Nnewi within the period of this study. Bulk of the challenges emanated from the negative politics entrenched in Nigerian polity in the post war Nigeria.<sup>84</sup> There many challenges in this regard and other areas but the major challenges were as follow.

### **Power (Electricity)**

As has been established, since the end of the Nigerian Civil War in 1970, Nnewi people mostly began to invest in commerce in Nnewi. Within a short period of time, what started as trading metamorphosed into big commerce. This boosted the manufacturing/production of all kinds of goods. In the early 1970s and 1980s, efforts were majorly concentrated on production of auto spare parts but with time, all manner of goods were produced and sold in Nnewi. As a response to the growth of commerce in a rapid succession, services were also boosted in Nnewi. Be that as it may, electricity supply had been identified as one of the major challenges the people grappled with. Though, it is an established fact that electricity had remained one of the major challenges affecting the socio-economic development of Nigerians, but the experience of Nnewi had been identified as a very ugly development considering the corresponding effect it had had on the economy of Nnewi in particular and Nigeria in general. Ironically, Nnewi had been identified as hub of Nigerian economic activities. Some people had at different times referred to Nnewi as the Japan of Africa. Such assertions were made in recognition of the industrial activities carried out in Nnewi. The commercial activities in Nnewi found its strength from the manufacturing activities in Nnewi. Nevertheless, an interaction with the manufacturers or industrialists in Nnewi had revealed that poor electricity supply was their major headache.<sup>85</sup>

Moreover, in order to keep their activities on, the people of Nnewi involved in other forms of commercial activities depended on diesel and fuel for the operation of heavy machines and generators. The nature of Nigerian's unstable power supply also prevented a lot of industrialists from veering into other aspects of manufacturing that would require a massive capacity of power supply.<sup>86</sup>

## **Nigerian Politics**

An interaction with the people of Nnewi revealed that since the end of the Nigerian Civil War, the Igbo had been sidelined in the Nigerian politics. They believed that a deliberate effort was made not to empower them. One of them declared angrily that “if that was not the case, why was it that the successive governments in Nigeria had looked away from the Nnewi economic exploits”. He said if it was in other countries, such development would attract the attention of the federal government long ago. Specifically, Mr. Ugochukwu Okafor reinstated this:

I feel that due to the fact that we lost the War, we are being treated the way we are treated. The economy of Nnewi is really boosting the economy of Nigeria but what has the federal government done in order to encourage the hardworking people of Nnewi. Even common electricity is not regular in Nnewi. Individuals have to source for it. What then is the benefit we derive from Nigeria? They take from us and will not allow us to develop as we should. When you travel to other parts of Nigeria, especially the Northern and Western parts of Nigeria, you will see the heavy investment of Nigeria in those places. But here in Nnewi, almost everything is done by the people. Since the end of the Nigeria Civil War, the politics of Nigeria has not been favourable to Nnewi people but we thank God so much that we are gifted and do not wait for any government to favour us. If all the sections of Nigeria will replicate the enterprise in Nnewi, Nigeria as nation will become very great.<sup>87</sup>

In view of the above, it apparently appears that the Nigerian Civil War has its advantages and disadvantages on the people of Nnewi. Ironically, the Civil War spurred the people of Nnewi to ingenuity, resulting in growth of commerce and industry in Nnewi. At the same time, the Civil War has influenced the attitude of Nigerians and Nigerian leaders towards supporting or contributing towards the expansion of commerce and industrialization in Nnewi. Also, other Nigerians (i.e. non-Igbo and people outside South-South and South East regions) do not have interest of investing in the Southeast. A good example is Aliko Dangote who does not have a single investment in the Southeast region of Nigeria but has chains of investment all over Nigeria and outside Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

The 1966 experience<sup>88</sup> of Nnewi people and the eventual outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War brought untold hardship to the Nnewi people in particular, and the Igbo nation in general. Ironically, it was on this total state of hopelessness that Nnewi commerce sprung with vigor through industry and total commitment. Though the 1966 crises<sup>90</sup> and the eventual Civil War brought devastating destruction on Nnewi people in particular and Igbo nation in general,<sup>91</sup> it however, spurred an initiative that gave birth to commerce in Nnewi. The initiative in itself is a good and welcome development<sup>92</sup> but the Civil War is an evil to humanity<sup>93</sup>. In other words, what should be commended here should be the initiative that brought commerce in Nnewi to the limelight. Such initiatives are timeless foundations upon which nations are developed. Based on this development, Nnewi had since the end of the War, experienced relatively rapid industrialization. Since 1970, Nnewi residents have controlled approximately eighty (80) to ninety (90) percent of the motor-parts trade in Nigeria. The industrialists in Nnewi adapted foreign technology to local needs and provided thousands of employments to Nigerians. The manufacturers provided goods and services which were relevant to actual needs of the Nigerian citizens. The first indigenous car manufacturing plant is located in the city of Nnewi, while the wholly made-in-Nigeria motorcycle was manufactured in Nnewi by the Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASeni).<sup>94</sup> This development as examined in this study is a challenge to Nigerians and people of other countries in terms of turning their adversity into opportunity that would benefit the generality of humanity. Africa in this regard has suffered greatly because, despite the urgent need to look inward, attention had always been focused on the Western world for aids and other forms of assistance<sup>95</sup>. The exploits of Nnewi in the realm of commerce as interrogated in this study is an eloquent testimony spotlighting the talents inherent in

Africans. Nnewi has proven its mettle but much is still expected of her. The government and the well-meaning individuals are expected to come up with sincere plans and project that will further boost the economy and ingenuity of the people of Nnewi. Thus, this can only, however, be possible only when stakeholders do away with primordial sentiment and approach the reality of our time with all sense of sincerity, seriousness and responsibility. With this, the Nnewi economy will extensively influence the overall economic strength of Nigeria in particular and West Africa in general. This is thus, the only thing that can make Nnewi the “true Japan of Africa” as has been said by many Nigerian leaders and people. In a nutshell, therefore, the study has looked at the various factors that informed the renewed phase of post war commerce in Nnewi and its trajectories which engendered the exploits of Nnewi commerce in the post Nigerian Civil War starting from 1970 up to year 2000.

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