

There Was a Country Study Guide

There Was a Country by Chinua Achebe

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Summary

“There Was A Country” by Chinua Achebe is a memoir of Chinua's early life in the Eastern Region of Nigeria where his people, the Igbo, were the dominant ethnic group. Always drawn to storytelling, Chinua eventually found himself and rejected a full scholarship to medical school once he succumbed to the allure of the arts, especially writing.

As he matured and was educated at the University College in Nigeria, it became his goal to develop with other young colleagues an honest voice for the Dark Continent. Chinua's dream was to establish African literature that was written by Africans and that would be embraced by the rest of the world. He felt the strong need for African stories to be told by Africans. The Dark Continent was under colonial rule when he was a young man and he and many of his fellow young intellectuals saw the dire need for independence from their colonial master, Great Britain, so that they could spread their wings and soar.

While Chinua tells the story of his childhood, education, marriage and fatherhood and goals and dreams as an elite writer and intellect, he tells quite another story in its backdrop. He provides a very different account, a dark and ominous one that runs parallel with the hopes and dreams of a young writer and of a young nation. In 1960 after Nigeria had been under British colonial rule since 1914, they had growing pains and a strong desire for independence. The British who had exploited the African nation's rich resources and fattened their coffers for decades recognized it was time to cut ties.

Nigeria won its freedom in 1960. There was great hope in the sovereign nation that the lives of its people would be enriched and their futures bright and hopeful. However, the nation quickly devolved into an abyss due to its weak leadership, corruption and bent toward ethnic oppression. Suffering more than any other segment of the nation was the people of its Eastern Region, in particular the Igbo who was the dominant ethnic group in the east but a hated minority by those who now ruled Nigeria.

In 1967, it was time for the Eastern Region to break away from the nation of Nigeria. But this time the motherland was not nearly as understanding or accommodating. The Nigerian government would not allow the secession of the Eastern Region that now had the temerity to declare itself the independent Republic of Biafra. A civil war ensued for the next three years. The Nigeria-Biafra War with its horrific atrocities and excessive bloodshed is considered to be the worst conflict in the history of man.

During these times of unbelievable strife, fear and oppression, Chinua Achebe's number one goal was to protect the lives of his wife and children. But he never lost sight of his goal to elevate the writings of Africans to a level that would be respected and honored throughout the world of literature and one that would represent the real true voice of Africa.



Part 1

Summary

Isaiah Achebe was raised by his uncle Udoh who was one of the first Christians in Nigeria. Isaiah Achebe, Chinua's father, was well-educated and an early Christian. His wife, Janet, often joined him on his missionaries. Chinua and his five siblings learned to love education and the pursuit of knowledge from their parents. He followed the Christian religion but was always intrigued by the religious beliefs of his Igbo ancestors. Their tenets were easier for Chinua to grasp than some elements of Christianity. He learned from both religions and they both were important to his future career as a writer. Christianity was brought to the Nigerians by the Europeans. Since it was the Europeans that enslaved his ancestors he retained a measure of skepticism about their religion, a feeling he did not share with his devout father.

Chinua excelled in school and, after completing elementary school at St. Philip's Central School, he went on to the Government College school in Umuahia for his secondary education. Living with his brother John while he had qualified for Government School gave him the opportunity to visit with the local villagers to learn more about the culture and beliefs of his Igbo ancestors.

Chinua was filled with both excitement and dread in anticipation of the new school year in Umuahia. Chinua was thrilled with the large campus of the school that included a cricket field. He was assigned to the dormitory called Niger house. He formed fast friendships with Chike Momah, Christopher Okibo and Benjamin Uzochukwu. Chinua was popular among students and teachers alike.

The school focused on ability and talent as opposed to social standing. The boys were all friendly but there was an air of competition among the students. Six boys including Chinua were promoted for a second year at Umuahia based on their excellent performance. The classes were taught in English ultimately making Chinua understand the power of unifying language having come from Nigeria that had more than 250 ethnic groups and dialects.

It was at Umuahia that Chinua was exposed to great literature including the works of Shakespeare and Dickens. Reading these books was an important part of his education as it had been for many African writers. Chinua graduated at the top of his class.

The colonial government announced that it would be building a University College in West Africa ultimately choosing Ibadan, Nigeria as the site. After passing an entry exam, Chinua earned a major scholarship to the university to study medicine. After a year he changed his major to English, history and theology but lost the scholarship and would be responsible for paying his tuition. His brother Augustine had completed his studies in England and paid Chinua's tuition. After graduation, Chinua returned home and sought a job at a school in nearby Oba as an English teacher.



Merchants of Light, the school where Chinua was hired, was rundown and had only a small library. To give his students more reading options, he brought some of his own books and newspapers for them to read. He only worked four months at the school when he was offered a job with the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. They hired college students as interns during the summer months. Christie Okoli lead a group of students who visited the studio asking to speak with Chinua.

Chinua was immediately drawn to Christie who was from the ancient town of Awka which was also his mother's hometown. After a two-year friendship, the couple became engaged. Christie was from a prominent Awka family; her father was one of the most important Igbo men of the twentieth century, Timothy "T.C." Okoli, an early convert to Christianity. Her mother Mgboye, died when Christie was born. T.C. was the son of a medicine man who delved in herbal medicine, mysticism, divination and magic. He encouraged T.C. to seek the Christian life. T.C. was a generous man who used his wealth to sponsor the education of gifted children in Awka.

Chinua moved to Lagos and applied for a job at the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation. He was hired to revise scripts and prepare them for broadcast. He learned to write realistic dialog during his stint at NBC. In his last year at University College he wrote several short stories that were published by the University in their campus magazine. He ultimately became the magazine's editor.

Chinua enjoyed his religion classes because they focused on religions other than Christianity including West African religions. He realized that his own religious story would have to come from within. A story he wrote and entered into a competition was rejected because it lacked form. When he asked the professor what she meant by "form" she could not answer him. It was then he realized that it was difficult for professors to teach across cultural lines. He was inspired and began writing "Things Fall Apart." He was dedicated to writing this work and it eventually grew into a manuscript.

Chinua's complete manuscript was rejected by several publishers who thought an African story had no market viability. Finally an executive with Heinemann Publishing loved the story and published it. Two thousand hardcover copies of "Things Fall Apart" were first printed by Heinemann. There were positive reviews from literary critics around the world. There were also a number of negative reviews from those who didn't get the point of "African literature."

There was excitement in Nigeria in anticipation of its independence. There was a general feeling that the future would be bright for the nation. They looked to Ghana that had won its liberation a few years before and had successfully made the transition. Chinua recognized that the British colonies had been expertly run. Before independence, people felt safe to travel across the country to visit relatives. There was no fear of abductions or robberies. The Nigerian nationalists deserved the gratitude and respect of their countrymen for the long fight for independence that they devoted themselves to. After World War II, there was a renewed call for Nigeria's independence.



There had always been power struggles and internal ethnic tensions among the minorities in Nigeria. Minorities were not comfortable with having to fit into the three main ethnic groups: Nigeria – Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. Many of the minorities were from proud ancient nation-states and were not willing to give up their identity. Their leaders, however, were pressured to align with one of the large groups.

The British well aware of these internal conflicts divided the country into the Northern, Eastern and Western regions to contain unrest. The British handed out stiff penalties for rebel rousers. The colonies were valuable to the crown because of their seemingly infinite amount of natural resources. After the war, Britain was exhausted both financially and politically and abandoned their efforts to thwart Nigeria's moves toward independence. Gandhi had taken advantage of Britain's weakness and led India to independence. Britain saw it as a losing battle.

Analysis

Since this is both an account of the Nigeria-Biafra War and a memoir of the author, Chinua Achebe provides insight into his family and his upbringing. He begins by noting that his father was one of the early Christians in Nigeria. Beginning his book with a focus on religion indicates that it is an important element in his book. The author contrasts his father's devotion to Christianity with his own skepticism about it. He shows a measure of resentment when he comments that the European missionaries brought them both the goodness of Christianity and the evil of slavery. He is obviously not as sold on Christianity as his father.

Chinua's interest in his heritage and his Igbo ancestors demonstrates his openness and a liberal attitude toward accepting new information. His willingness, even eagerness, to learn and gain fresh knowledge is front and center in the story. There are elements of both religions that appeal to him. His ability to see matters from more than one side undoubtedly contributed to his ability to think in broad strokes. The knowledge that he gained added dimension to his thought process which contributed to his success in becoming an accomplished writer later in life.

Chinua's outstanding performance in his school work and his acceptance at elite schools indicates that his intelligence and work ethic was an innate quality that was readily apparent to his teachers and professors. Chinua has provided the reader with who he was and where he was in life when his country was on the precipice of political upheaval. The reader knows a lot about Chinua at this point and is ready to learn more and see what happens to him when his country is liberated from Great Britain's colonial rule. The story is making a transition from memoir to Nigerian history.

Vocabulary

evangelist, phenomenal, mesmerized, casements, expatriate, heathen, Eucharist, doctrinaire, catechist, proselytizing, dichotomy, ancestral, metaphysical, exemplified,



amenities, trepidation, inane, orthodox, meritocracy, egalitarian, infrastructure, bursury, formidable, discordant, jaundiced



Part 2, Section 1

Summary

British officers began to retire from their posts in Nigeria and return home without being replaced. There was a long-held plan for the transition and it went smoothly. Official positions began to open up to Nigerians especially those who had college educations. Chinua was placed in one of these positions. Although the transition was ostensibly smooth its complexities were subtle. Prior to independence, Britain had named a new governor general, Sir James Robertson, of the Sudan. The Nigerians wanted to appoint their own leader but Robertson was in no hurry to leave. Nigeria's independence was off to a rocky start.

Nigeria quickly declined into a corrupt state. Public servants stole from the nation and elections were rigged. Judges and politicians were used by the nation's leaders. Tensions between ethnic groups increased. To win the favor of various tribes, dishonest politicians exploited them and made false promises. The chaos that his country found itself in inspired Chinua to write, "A Man of the People." Nigerian writers believed that it was time for an African literary renaissance. Chinua, like the other contemporary Nigerian writers of the time, was determined to present the truth about the country's myths and images and reality through prose and poetry and books for children. When he had decided to write "Things Fall Apart" he had no idea how it would be received since what African literature that existed was largely mythical and magical.

Outsiders had written about Africa and Nigeria but their works were not credible. Nigerian writers wanted to give their country a voice. Chinua decided to tackle substantive subjects like imperialism, slavery and racism and other social issues. He sought to blend the culture and customs of his Igbo tradition with the values of everyman. Chinua and his peers had aspirations to develop African literature at its highest level and restate the relationship between his people and Great Britain. They strived to give voice to the African nations and urge the world to see them from their own perspective. He did not want to be a writer who avoided political and social issues. Art was a part of the African heritage and Chinua wanted his writing to reflect that.

On January 15, 1966, was a turning point in the story of Nigeria when a military coup was underway that would change the nation forever. News trickled in first that the prime minister was missing and then that he had been killed. Other officials lost their lives or been arrested and jailed. Nigeria was in shock and chaos and never recovered from that night.

There was unprovoked violence in the weeks that followed the coup. It seemed that everyone was out for revenge. The Igbo were placed in a precarious position since they were leaders in most elements of Nigerian society. The coup leaders exploited the hatred between the sectors to gain more power.



Homes, including Chinua's, were invaded. He was targeted because of his book "A Man of the People" because he had predicted a coup in the story which led some to believe that Chinua was involved in the plot. The dangerous environment led Chinua and his family to leave their home in Ikoyi and move to Lagos. A fringe element known as "area boys" was dispatched by the military to attack the Igbos in a bloody rage. The situation was heading toward all-out civil war. The blame for the escalation of unrest lay at the feet of the inept Nigerian ruling class.

Chinua was able to get his wife and children out of Lagos via a cargo boat heading to Eastern Nigeria where they were met by his brother, Dr. Samuel Okoli. Chinua decided to return to his home in Ikoyi and continue his work despite the inherent danger in such a move. But it was too risky to stay. There was violence and the killing of innocents without the intervention of the nation's leaders. They were corrupt and willing to risk everything to maintain their grasp on power.

The January 15th coup was led by what was referred to as the "five majors," – five junior officers with Chukwuma Nzeogwu as their leader. But the nation was consumed by chaos and violence and the five majors were ultimately crushed by the highest ranking Igbo officer in the Nigerian army, Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi who, in May 1966 emerged as Nigeria's new head of state. After issuing the unpopular Decree No. 34 there was a general outrage among the people that the government had been taken over by the Igbo.

Aguiyi-Ironsi made a nationwide tour to meet with the many different factions and sects in attempt for unity. While on this tour, Aguiyi-Ironsi was arrested by the Nigerian army and accused of the murder of the Sardauna of Sokoto. Only hours later, Aguiyi-Ironsi's bullet-ridden body was found in the bush.

The coup of January 15th had been perceived to be an Igbo plot to take over the north. Northern military officers retaliated by arresting and executing Igbo officers and private Igbo citizens. The series of massacres in the north were described by an English reporter as a "pogrom." In all more than 30,000 civilians including men, women and children were slaughtered. Hundreds of thousands were wounded and Igbo property was looted and burned. There were no consequences for the perpetrators of these egregious acts. What terrified Chinua more than anything was that the mass killings were planned and carried out by the government, army and police. Some called for war, while others, like Chinua, held out hope for peace. The influx of the million refugees into the East was the number one problem facing the region.

There was no governmental plan to deal with either the violence that broke out in the North against the Igbo or with the refugee issue. Support for an independent East was growing. A summit was held on January 4 and 5, 1967, in an effort to arrive at a peaceful settlement. Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon who headed the Nigerian government issued Decree 8 in support of constitutional reform but there was resistance to its implementation. Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Western Region, called for the removal of Northern troops in Lagos and other regions throughout the west. He also threatened to leave the federation if the Eastern Region did. With Gowon's continued



inaction, Ojukwu cut all ties with Lagos and discontinued communication between the Eastern Region and the federal government.

Despite attempts by the National Reconciliation Commission to keep the Eastern Sector in the federation, the Igbo detested how they had been treated and were wary of continuing relations with the rest of Nigeria.

On May 27, Colonel Ojukwu was given the go ahead by the Assembly to declare Eastern Nigeria's independence which henceforth would be known as the Republic of Biafra. Gowon was outraged and declared a state of emergency. Ojukwu responded with a litany of the abuses and horrors that the Igbo had faced and reiterated the declaration of independence. It was a declaration of war and Nigeria would never be the same.

Analysis

Chinua describes the hope that abounded after Great Britain granted Nigeria its freedom. As a sovereign state, it was thought that Nigeria and its people would all benefit. The benefits of freedom were limited to a small circle of insiders in the corrupt government that quickly formed after Nigeria was liberated. Knowing the mood of the people and the reaction of intellectuals like Chinua in this pivotal time in Nigeria's history is important for the reader to understand the dynamics that were in play. The disappointment and resentment that was a natural reaction of being forced to live under even worse circumstances set the stage for revolt.

Chinua was a student when much of the unrest and anger began to permeate into the consciousness of the people. He was inspired to write his first novel "Things Fall Apart" which is about his country's decline. Chinua wanted African writers to write about Africa and to help develop African literature that the world would respect and embrace. It was a dream that he held onto the rest of his life.

The January 15, 1966, military coup ridded the country of one corrupt government only to be replaced by another. The people were ready for real change. They were being repressed and mistreated and were not sharing in the glory of independence. The Igbo, a minority ethnic group which Chinua and his family belonged to, were treated more harshly than most other ethnicities.

The violence – including the massacre of 30,000 Igbo – and the unrest finally led to the Eastern Region, which had a large Igbo population, declaring itself an independent nation and seceding from Nigeria. On May 27, 1966, the Eastern Region was henceforth to be known as the Republic of Biafra. This sent shockwaves throughout Nigeria and Africa and beyond. The announcement was tantamount to a declaration of war. Chinua knew that Nigeria, the country he loved and wanted the world to know about through African writers, would never be the same. By now the reader has learned to toggle between Chinua's memoir and Nigeria's historic events... in fact, in many ways the two stories are merging.

Vocabulary

expatriate, sojourn, malaise, indigenous, renaissance, aficionado, aesthetic, colloquialism, innuendo, endemic, tribalism, insurrection, coup, pogrom, herculean



Part 2, Section 2

Summary

According to the Igbo, the Nigeria-Biafra War was the result of the January 15th coup by the Northern military and the massacre of over 30,000 Igbo and Easterners that followed. The federal government felt compelled to stop the Eastern Region from leaving the federation because it could inspire other ethnic groups to leave. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) held several meetings in an effort to resolve the differences. Chinua felt the OAU was biased because of its One Nigeria policy. Most African nations agreed with the OAU that allowing Biafra's independence could result in the destabilization of the entire continent.

A handful of African nations including Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon and the Ivory Coast recognized Biafra as a sovereign state. There was outreach by Biafra's diplomatic delegation to the international community for recognition. Haiti recognized Biafra because of their close connection to the Igbo people. Great Britain refused to recognize Biafra because they could not support the break-up of one of their former colonies. Although France did not officially recognize Biafra, after a year of bloodshed it issued a statement in support of Biafran independence. A Biafran emissary was dispatched to Paris to convince President Charles De Gaulle to recognize Biafra and to help persuade the United States government to support the cause. The U.S. remained neutral, however the American public was generous and sent millions to ease the suffering of the people. Leaders of African American civil rights offered full support for the people of the Eastern Region and were horrified by the negligence of the Nigerian government in not protecting them.

Well-known intellectuals and writers came to visit Biafra to witness the devastation and suffering first hand. They wanted to show solidarity with the Biafrans. These men were emotionally moved by what they saw and were inspired to write about it. The war had come as a surprise to intellectuals within and outside of Nigeria. The reactions of the Igbo people varied. Some were angry; others became depressed; and, still others simply loathed the enemy.

Emeka Ojukwu was the leader of the Biafran cause and Yakubu Gowon led the Nigerian forces. They were both young men in their early thirties. Many believed that neither Gowon nor Ojukwu were the right leaders for the times. They were young and self-centered and made bad decisions. The rivalry between the two men laid the groundwork for a losing situation. They were both fearful of looking weak and were surrounded by yes-men who convinced them that they were always right. Raph Uwechue, Biafra's envoy to Paris, commented in his memoir on the two wars Biafran wars. The first was for the survival of the Igbo and the second was for the survival of Ojukwu. The second was responsible for the death of millions of Igbo.



When Ojukwu first declared Biafra's secession, Gowon responded with a police action in an attempt to restore federal power. The first actual engagement occurred when Nigerian troops attempted to cross the Niger Bridge into Biafra. The Biafran army was able to drive them back and go on to advance into the Mid-Western Region.

The occupied area in the Mid-Western Region was named the Republic of Benen. Major Albert Okonkwo was named its military administrator. Okonkwo established martial law, curfews and other restrictions. The people felt they were being occupied more than being protected. Banjo had been directed by Ojukwu to push on further into the Mid-Western region. But intelligence reports told him it would be a suicide mission and he did not follow orders. Ojukwu ultimately ordered his execution.

Gowon responded to the Biafran invasion of the Mid-Western Region by strategically placing his top military personnel in key roles with a goal of crushing the Biafran forces. They had orders to take Benin and all occupied areas. The Nigerian army was successful in pushing the Biafran soldiers back. The federal forces were able to seize Benin and move on toward Asaba at the Niger River. The Northern commanders had been humiliated by the invasion and their anger led them to order the execution of every Igbo man and boy the soldiers could hunt down. Five hundred died in the Asaba Massacre. Pope Paul VI sent Monsignor Georges Rocheau in an outreach mission. The Monsignor declared that genocide had occurred at Asaba.

Biafra was under siege. Forces from the Northern Army captured the university town of Nsukka and bombed Enugu, Biafra's capital city. The conflict was gaining international attention which brought peacemakers to the region in hopes of brokering a peaceful settlement.

Mimicking Nazi tactics, the Nigerian forces decided to eradicate all Igbo from the city of Calabar. Between 1,000-2,000 people were killed in the Calabar Massacre. In another rampage, 14 nurses and their patients were killed in the assault of a medical clinic.

Gowon launched his final assault with a quarter of a million soldiers. The new Biafran capital, Umuahia, was Biafra's only stronghold. From this point, Gowon expected the war to end in less than three months. Gowon's offensive met with more resistance than anticipated and his soldiers were forced to retreat giving the Biafran Army a much needed breathing spell in which they hoped to recover.

To Chinua and his fellow countrymen Biafra had been the realization of a dream – a sovereign republic with a populace that elected its own leaders. In 1968, Chinua was invited by Ojukwu to be part of a panel to develop and write the Ahiara Declaration, a statement that would contain the qualities and values that Biafrans wanted their nation to be based upon. Chinua was made head of another group, the National Guidance Committee, which was tasked with writing the nation's constitution.

The committee produced the treatise entitled, "The Ahiara Declaration" which closely followed the substance of the Tanzanian constitution. The committee was comprised of talented and able men from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. One of the



members, Okudo Onenyi, was important because he was formerly educated but was older and still in touch with Igbo tradition. Chinua felt that the Igbo culture and values needed to be part of the constitution. Chieka Ifemesia, was an emeritus professor at the University of Nigeria an historian on Igbo history. Chinua's self-imposed role was to make sure things did not get out of hand and make a sharp left-ward turn.

Ojukwu delivered the Ahiara Declaration in a speech toward the end of the war. He spoke of the suffering the Biafran people were undergoing, the secession, what Biafra stood for and a brief history of the country and people. Ojukwu also articulated what Biafra was against – genocide, racism, imperialism and ethnic bias. The speech and the Ahiara Declaration were well-received by the public.

Analysis

Chinua writes of the attempts to stave off a war but all indicates pointed to the inevitability of war. Many felt it was important to squelch the move for independence because other ethnicities could be inspired to do the same. Nigeria and the entire African continent could be impacted by such secessions and the result would be constant war and chaos. While a few African nations recognized the Republic of Biafra, the only Western power to half-way endorse them was France. This early lack of support was a sign that the new republic would be standing alone. The world recognized the humanitarian crisis that quickly developed but there was no interest in joining the fight.

As Chinua describes the battles and atrocities of the war, he also describes the two young leaders from the opposing sides. He infers that the leaders were not mature enough for the responsibility of running a war and that more mature leaders may have avoided the conflict all together. The overarching element responsible for the problems that continually faced Nigeria was that the people had no say about their country, their struggle or their very lives.

Bloody massacres shocked the world. Children and babies were at risk, starving and dying by the hundreds. Genocide was taking place before the world and there didn't seem to be anything that anyone could or would do about it.

Although it apparently wasn't obvious to the Biafran leaders, it is at this phase of the story obvious to the reader that the war is virtually over and that the Nigerian forces will hands down be the victor.

Vocabulary

exponentially, emissaries, approbation, magnanimous, intelligentsia, nebulous, galvanizing, prodigious, rubric, atrocities, euphoric, hinterland, amphibious



Part 2, Section 3

Summary

After the establishment of the new Republic, Biafrans were told that they had to rely on British and European expertise to deal with the technological advancements in the oil industry. They were being treated as though they weren't intellectually incapable of understanding cutting edge technology. The Igbo people had proven themselves in many ways including the development of new technology for refining oil.

Chinua was asked by Ojukwu to serve as unofficial envoy of the Biafran people. His first trip was to Senegal. At the time, President Senghor, the Senegalese leader was leading a movement called La Négritude which had been inspired by the early work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington and other black leaders. The movement was an attempt to respond to the colonial experience through African literature and political ideation.

Chinua also was sent to Scandinavia in his role as envoy. Scandinavians had been supportive of the Biafrans and had come through for them with generous humanitarian donations. When he traveled to Canada he spoke before the World Council of Churches and the Canadian Council of churches. He also traveled to the United States on an extended university tour.

There were millions of refugees who were hungry, thirsty, exhausted and frightened. They headed wherever they heard there might be food and safe harbor. International relief efforts had established food distribution centers and refugee camps. There were 3,000 centers and camps by the end of the conflict. They provided food and a place to stay but the people were still vulnerable to attack.

Chinua and his wife and children and his siblings and their families all moved back to their father's house in Ogidi during the height of the warring. Still, they weren't safe since the village bordered the war zone. The sound of bombs and artillery fire echoed day and night. They could not retreat any further – they were out of real estate. Food supplies was short and conditions crowded and chaotic. Young men were actively recruited to fight but the administration had no guns to give them. Word spread that the Northern Army was crossing the Niger Bridge that was just a short distance away. At one point Biafran soldiers had set up a defensive base just outside Isaiah's house.

On May 25, 1968, the Second Division of the Nigerian army advanced into Onitsha. The plan was for the Second Division to join forces with the First Division that had already penetrated from the north and smash resistance. In response, Biafran forces 700-strong sealed off Abagana Road and destroyed the Northern soldiers in a surprise attack. Outraged Igbo villagers took bloody revenge on Northern soldiers who had survived the ambush. Bodies were mutilated and cut into pieces. This incident was known as the Abagana Ambush.



Chinua connected up with his friend Christopher Okigbo. They established a publishing house, The Citadel Press, with a goal of using their talents in support of the Biafran cause and in spreading the word of the atrocities that were taking place.

A few weeks after Chinua had moved to Ogidi, he learned of a job opening in Enugu where conditions were approaching normal. He packed up and moved his family immediately. His friend Christopher Okigbo had left his position and showed up a few weeks later. They decided to turn to their intellect and talent to support the war. They established a publishing house and get their stories out, especially stories for children. They called their joint venture The Citadel Press. The first manuscript was, "How the Leopard Got Its Claws" which was based on an African fable and, with their input, had touches of Biafra's story running through it.

Chinua was at the office when his apartment was bombed. Fortunately, his wife and children weren't home or they would not have survived. Chinua got just a glimpse of Christopher in the crowd that surrounded his devastated apartment. It was the last time he saw him. The next he heard of him was on the radio when he was killed at the hands of Northern soldiers. After the war, Chinua visited The Citadel Press offices. It had been bombarded and was a pile of debris. The buildings surrounding it were hardly damaged. Someone definitely had it in for the Citadel.

After Enugu fell, Chinua fled to Umuahia with his family. Bombings began to threaten the family there so they moved on to Ezinifite. Chinua and his family were refugees. Food was scarce. The Nigerian Army's bombing sorties intensified. Bunkers were built as safety precautions against the increased assaults. Chinua and his family resorted to hiding in a mud hut deep in the bush. It was becoming more obvious every day that the Nigerians were gaining a strong upper-hand in the battle. Biafrans were in retreat and their army was ill-equipped to wage a solid defense.

After life in Ezinifite was untenable, the family fled to Oguta where artillery fire could be heard but was way off in the distance. Christie started a school for her children and other children in the area who could no longer attend school because of safety concerns. From Oguta they were driven to the Shell compound in Owerri after Biafrans had recaptured it. Christie was pregnant and was moved to a Catholic hospital in the region. But she was discharged when Biafran soldiers warned everyone to evacuate the hospital. The Shell compound was taken over by Nigerian troops forcing Chinua to move his family to the village of Okporo.

A hospital run by Caritas was one of the sites ultimately chosen to gather sick babies that had to be airlifted out of the war zone. Eighty-nine percent of Biafran children under five were in various stages of starvation. There was a silent epidemic that few spoke of – mental illness, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder were among the many psychological disorders from which the Biafrans were suffering.

The Nigeria-Biafra war was the world's first TV war. Graphic representations of the war were seen around the world by everyone every day. This exposure was responsible for the overwhelming amount of humanitarian aid and for the media coverage that told the



world what was going on. The world saw first-hand the suffering of the Biafran people, especially the children, at the hands of the Nigerian army.

Chinua and Christie decided to stay in Okporo for as long as possible. There was confusion about the status and direction of the war. There was misinformation that led to some people to return to Enugu only to be slaughtered by the Northern soldiers who still occupied the city. The Nigerian soldiers soon showed up in Okporo. There were horrid accounts of the rapes of nurses and other women.

The government car that had been assigned to Chinua was stolen one night. Chinua and Christie decided to drive to Onitsha, just six miles from Ogidi, Chinua's ancestral home. En route, the car ran out of gas and refined petrol was not readily available. They spent the night in the car.

Analysis

In this section, Chinua became part of Nigeria's story. He served as an unofficial envoy for the Biafran people. He traveled the world. While everyone seemed to be eager to hear the story he had to tell and happily met with him, he was not able to garner much real support. The Nigeria-Biafra war was the first TV war. The bloody, brutal war was on everyone's TV each night. It compelled people to help with donations and humanitarian aid but it did not engender military support. Those who watched the war on TV saw that it was a hopeless cause. The world had to wait for Biafra to recognize that reality.

Chinua's personal life was impacted more and more as the war dragged on. Chinua and his family were refugees. They had no house and kept moving from one town to another – just in front of the artillery fire. Even though Chinua was considered among the elite in his country, he was running from the bullets and trying to find enough food to feed his family with.

Despite the danger that Chinua faced, he held on to his dream of developing African literature. He and a former school mate formed the Citadel Press that would be devoted to publishing the works of African writers. Sadly, Chinua's friend died in the crossfire and the small building that held the Citadel Press was leveled by a bomb. Chinua was down but he wasn't out. If he lived, he would help develop African literature.

Vocabulary

pandemonium, amalgamation, formidable, manifestations, perpetuity, usurpers, quintessential, bedlam, magnanimity



Part 3

Summary

With Gowon's three-pronged assault strategy millions in the Eastern Region were suddenly surrounded by Nigerian soldiers. Biafrans responded with guerilla warfare tactics and a tenacity and resiliency that surprised their enemy. As the war progressed, the famine increased in intensity. Disease began to spread and vultures circling above became a common sight.

Ojukwu hoping for aid and assistance, exploited the suffering through daily broadcasts. In his speeches he often referred to "Biafran babies" and "genocide." His pleas brought help and sympathy and deflected guilt from him and onto the enemy. Under great pressure, Gowon agreed to open up humanitarian routes that could pass without worry of being attacked by Nigerian soldiers.

Even though U Thant, the secretary general of the United Nations, was not an interventionist in October 1969, Ojukwu pleaded for help from the UN in mediating a cease fire. U Thant turned to Nigeria but Gowon would accept nothing less than Biafra's surrender. The Nigerian forces were ordered to attack and kill civilians in hopes of raising internal pressures that would lead to a Biafran surrender. The lack of intervention by the UN allowed Nigeria to conduct itself with reckless and total abandon. The Nigerians fundamentally had a green light from the UN to commit human rights violations without fear of consequences. Distribution centers and refugee camps were bombed. Ojukwu refused to discuss surrender.

By 1969, the Biafrans had two options: death through starvation or death by ethnic cleansing. One-hundred thousand men, women and children were dying every six weeks. Spirits were lifted when Owerri was recaptured by Biafran forces. Gowon was furious over losing Owerri, one of the largest cities in the Eastern Region. The Biafran soldiers were able to keep the Nigerian soldiers at bay at least for a while. Intelligence reports indicated that an Italian oil cartel was aiding Nigeria and providing sensitive information about the Biafran effort. In a stealth operation, Biafran soldiers killed and captured a number of Italian workers in Eni where the conglomerate was based. They were tried in Biafra and found guilty of aiding Nigeria in acts of genocide. There were pleas including from the Vatican for the release of these men. Ojukwu bended to the pressure and released them. Ojukwu complained that his soldiers were victims of the Nigerian Army's brutality but failed to recognize that he had ordered the Biafran soldiers to mimic that brutality. Chinua felt that Ojukwu's failure to recognize this basic reality was one of the factors that led to Biafra's downfall.

The Harmattan Season that led into 1970 was grim; it made everything seem more hopeless. Sand from the Sahara Desert was blowing in and covering everything. It was particularly hard on the most vulnerable, the children. Mercenaries were hired by the



Nigerian Army because of the physical and psychological damage the war was doing to its soldiers. The conflict seemed endless as it moved into its thirtieth month.

Gowon planned a “scorched earth” policy to once and for all crush the Biafran troops. By mid-January 1970, it was basically over. Biafrans were defeated in every way. Ojukwu announced that he was leaving Biafra to seek options for a peaceful settlement. He had actually abandoned the people and the republic seeking refuge in the Ivory Coast. In Ojukwu’s absence, Sir Louis Mbanefo, the chief justice, and General Philip Effiong, gathered with other officials to discuss surrender. Effiong announced the decision to surrender in a radio address. It was the fall of Biafra. The announcement was more a relief than a surprise.

Focus was on keeping those who survived the war alive and healing. So many children were ill and in need of food and treatment. Gowon called for the reunification of the people of the Eastern Region. There was a formal surrender ceremony the next day. Three million had died in the war, the highest percentage of which were children. The war was over but the humanitarian disaster continued on for years. Suicide and landmines took lives long after the surrender.

Chinua, like many others, had been filled with optimism when the Republic of Biafra had declared its independence. Now just three short years later, the republic was no more but the people had to continue on with their lives. Long before the crises in Rwanda and Darfur, millions had been lost in Biafra because of the policies of the federal government of Nigeria. There has never been an analysis of the war. It is hardly mentioned and not taught to school children. Chinua believes that the Nigerian government was responsible for the genocide of millions.

Biafrans contended that the Nigerians had planned a genocide based on a holy jihad declared by the many Islamic extremists in the Nigerian army. The genocide was largely accomplished through starvation. Food and medicine was intentionally blocked from reaching the starving and dying. The Nigerian and British governments denied the claims. But there was undeniable evidence of the atrocities and humanitarian crimes that were perpetrated by the Nigerian army. An international committee that investigated claims of genocide agreed with the Biafrans. Others including investigative reporters, diplomats, historians and Pope Paul VI also concluded that genocide had occurred. Nigeria’s defense was that it was war and that atrocities happen in wars. And that there was no plot or intention on the part of the Nigerians to wipe out the Igbo. Prime Minister Wilson asserted that the large numbers of Biafrans were killed because of the excellence of the Nigerian war.

Most ordinary Nigerians were against the war and loathed the violence. Chief Awolowo, a member of Nigeria’s wartime cabinet, was ambitious for power and saw the Biafran people in the way of his goals and had openly advocated starving them as a policy. The Geneva Conventions had been established after the Holocaust to avoid such atrocities but were ignored by the Nigerians. After the war Nigerian policy was established that destroyed what was left of the Biafran economy. The Igbo were never reunited with the rest of Nigeria. Nigeria launched a plan for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and



Reconciliation but did not follow through on it. It was Chinua's opinion that Nigeria was vulnerable to the rise of tyrants because of its willingness to settle for mediocrity.

In an interview with Pini Jason, a well-known journalist, Gowon was asked about the Biafran economy. Gowon said it was never his intention to break the Igbo. He felt that by 1972, there had been sufficient enough recovery to benefit everyone including the Igbo. Jason asked him about Igbo property that had basically been stolen. Gowon defended Nigerians who had taken property from Igbo. He stressed that it was never his goal to deprive the people of their homes.

Analysis

The famine and resultant genocide continued to devastate the Biafran people. The starving children were vulnerable to disease. Circling vultures in the skies were a common sight. The UN refused to send help. When Biafra asked for the UN's expertise in striking a peaceful settlement, the UN turned to Biafra's enemy for a resolution.

Nigeria and Biafran leaders were at loggerheads. Ojukwu refused to surrender. Gowon refused to accept anything less than surrender. Ojukwu solved the problem by abandoning the republic and the people. He fled to the Ivory Coast for refuge and remained there in exile. And that is basically how the war ended, although its tentacles of pain and destruction have endured through current times. Killing three million people and destroying their homes and livelihoods was not enough for Gowon. He passed laws that further devastated the Biafran economy.

Chinua, like his fellow writers and intellectuals as well as the ordinary people of the Republic of Biafra, had been so hopeful when their independence had been proclaimed. But that joy was short-lived and the outcome made the lives of the people who survived the war more unbearable than ever.

Chinua was upset that the devastation and genocide in Biafra did not see the same level of attention as did later crises in Darfur and Rowanda. It seems that Chinua took care of that oversight with this book. Just as he dreamed about so long, an African writer was able to tell the true story of his African nation.

Vocabulary

propaganda, ambivalent, lambasted, histrionics, conglomerate, enclave, callous, genocide, atrocities, rhetoric, chicanery, conundrum, insidious

Part 4

Summary

Following the war, it became clear that the leadership was rife with ineptitude, bigotry, mediocrity and corruption. The military head of state, General Yakubu Gowon, declared that Nigeria had more money than it knew what to do with. This wealth sparked an era of decadence and decline. Chinua and fellow writers and intellectuals could not merely attribute Nigeria's problems to the past; they had to deal with them in the present. They needed the right leader for the times, someone with the right background and education.

Chinua joined the leftist Peoples Redemption Party and became its deputy national president. The individual chosen to represent the party would have to agree to a tenure limit and agree not to turn their position into a dynasty to be handed off to a son. Unfortunately, most of the current politicians were mostly interested in their own advancement.

The entire political system needed to be overhauled. The current system consisted of rich men who pushed their candidates through and used any means necessary including bribery and even murder to succeed in their goals. Even though there were elections, the outcomes were predetermined by election rigging, violence and voter repression. This corrupt system had been allowed to take hold after Nigeria's declaration of independence and accelerated under military rule. This corruption resulted in the denial of the basic rights of the citizens. It is difficult for a people to fight back against such a system that they had been living under their entire lives. Dictatorships concentrate power and wealth on a small circle of people. Dictators create laws that keep them in power while crushing the freedom of the individual. Chinua called for the U.S. and Great Britain to help Nigerians fight for freedom, democracy and free and fair elections.

It was during Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 2004 that there was a struggle for political power which devolved into unrest and violence. A group of renegades arrested the governor of Anambra, an Igbo state. Looting and burning of government buildings followed. Chinua was most disturbed because it appeared that the nation's president was behind the assault. Friends of the president were after funds that had been allocated for improvements to the nation. In protest, Chinua turned down the offer to be commander of the federal republic. In his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he wrote that Nigeria was corrupt because the political system allowed for it. Almost three decades after having written those words, the level of corruption was worse than ever. The World Bank calculated that \$400 billion had been pilfered from the country's treasury.

In 2011, Nigeria was ranked below Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq in the Failed States Index. Corruption was the main cause of social and financial inequity. Extremists were able to infiltrate the government who recruited terrorists and criminals to further



intimidate and repress the people. Boko Haram, a militant Islamist sect has murdered more than 800 people since its establishment in 2002. The sect's goal was to overthrow the Nigerian government and establish an Islamic state. In numerous cases, the government failed to enforce its own laws and protect its people and their property.

Nigeria's crude oil was a major source of Nigeria's corruption. One fix that could help the country reject corruption would be to prevent politicians from being involved in transactions involving oil. Simply enforcing the law and prosecuting criminals would go a long way in discouraging corruption.

There are many problems in Nigeria that need solutions and that require strong and honest leadership. The Sovereign National Conference was established as a platform for discussing Nigeria's problems and its future. Chinua hopes to see improvements come in a series of transitions. A spirit of patriotism will encourage the right leaders to emerge and strengthen the fabric of the country. A good and honest leader will use his position for the good of the people.

Analysis

Biafra was gone and its land reverted back to being the Eastern Region of Nigeria and its people were in more strife and suffering than before. According to Gowon, the aftermath of the war saw Nigeria with more money than they knew what to do with. Not surprisingly, a glut of money in Nigeria led to more corruption and an era of decadence and eventual decline. Obviously the money wasn't used in the way that would have actually helped the country or the people.

Chinua joined a new political party in hopes of finding a leader who would have the right values and be eager to fight for a better existence for the Nigerian people. However, the majority of politicians were most concerned with self-advancement. Chinua recognizes that the entire political system in Nigeria needs to be completely overhauled.

Since the war's end, there has been periods of more violence and looting and burning. Most disturbing was the indication that the country's leaders were behind the crimes. Boko Haram is a terrorist group that has a goal of taking over Nigeria and turning it into an Islamic state.

Through his work, Chinua has been able to get the truth out about Nigeria, the Republic of Biafra and the war. He continues to write the truth about his nation and about Africa and remains hopeful that a true leader will one day emerge.

Vocabulary

cabal, exacerbate, zealot, compounding, inept, nonpartisan, subjugated, antithesis, categorically, bigotry



Important People

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16, 1930, into a culture that was at its crossroads. His parents and older sister, Zinobia, taught him about his culture through many stories. This early storytelling was the foundation of Chinua's later career as the author of children's books. Chinua and his five siblings learned to love education and the pursuit of knowledge from their parents.

Chinua began his education in 1936 at St. Philip's Central School. He enjoyed school and worked hard.

Chinua lived with his older brother, John, who worked at Central School in Nekede. It was thought that the academic environment would be a positive one for Chinua. He prepared for his entrance exam into Government College. Chinua was one of only six boys who were advanced to a second year at the elite school. He went on to attend University College in West Africa where he received a scholarship in the medical school. However, he realized that his true interest was in the arts and changed his major. He lost his scholarship but wound up in the field of choice that was to launch his career as a writer.

Along the way Chinua met Christie and immediately fell for her. Although her influential father didn't think Chinua was right for his daughter, Chinua hung in there and proved his worth and good intentions. Chinua married Christie and they had four children. Chinua saw his dream out and became a best-selling author with his first novel, "Things Fall Apart." The book was a huge success although controversial with the powers that be because it hinted at rebellion and independence. The book was the beginning of both Chinua's stellar writing career and the establishment of African literature that he so longed for.

While Chinua was forced to flee dangerous areas during the Nigeria-Biafra War to keep his family safe, he never lost sight of his goals. Other than protecting his family, his top priority was to establish African literature as a credible and respected entity. He wanted African writers to be the voice of Africa rather than outsiders who didn't know or understand the many cultures that existed within the Dark Continent.

Emeka Ojukwu

Emeka Ojukwu was raised in an environment of privilege. He was educated in King's College in Lagos and in London at Epsom College and at the University of Oxford. After college, Ojukwu decided to ignore his father's urgings to attend law school and join the family business. Instead, he decided to work in Eastern Nigeria as a civil servant. He ultimately joined Nigeria's colonial armed forces and attended officers training at the Royal Military Academy in England. Ojukwu advanced rapidly in the military ranks.



Ojukwu was initially appointed military governor of the Eastern Region. Once Biafra declared its independence, Emeka Ojukwu became the first, and only, president of the Republic of Biafra. Ojukwu was self-reliant and unyielding in decisions he made. While some thought that Ojukwu was a spoiled rich kid others saw him as a strong leader with outstanding oratorical skills. Ojukwu was an imposing figure and his temperament and background had a strong impact on the decisions he made throughout the conflict.

In hindsight, many felt that if there had been another leader of the Eastern Region, the war would not have happened. Other critics believed that Ojukwu placed his own survival ahead of that of the republic. Even when it was obvious that Biafra was losing the war, Ojukwu refused to surrender. Finally, he addressed the people in mid-January 1970, informing them that he was leaving the republic to seek external options for a peaceful settlement. Instead, Ojukwu fled to the Ivory Coast and abandoned his office and the republic. Nigeria tried to repatriate Ojukwu for five years following the war in an effort to try him for war crimes but was never able to do so.

Gowon

As tensions and unease escalated between the Eastern Region and Nigeria proper, Colonel Yakubu Gowon emerged as the leader of the Nigerian federal government. Yakubu Gowon's parents were Christian missionaries. He was educated in Zaria and then entered military training in Ghana and England and finally to several elite officer's training schools. He was popular with military leaders and a favorite of the British royals – aside from his natural charm no one knew why.

Gowon was elevated to head of state to convince skeptics that Nigeria was not turning into a Muslim state. Many felt that Gowon was ineffective and was placed as the government leader because he could be easily manipulated. An army officer, Murtala Muhammed, was not a fan. He had been passed over as the country's leader. Gowon had taken what he felt was his. For this, he resented Gowon and would never forget. He would one day be behind the coup that eventually rid the country of Gowon.

Many believed that neither Gowon nor Ojukwu were the right leaders for the times. They were young and self-centered and made bad decisions. The rivalry between the two men laid the groundwork for a losing situation. They were both fearful of looking weak and were surrounded by yes-men who convinced them that they were always right.

During a summit called the Aburi Accord, the Gowon-led contingent hoped to emerge from the meeting with a reunited Nigeria. Gowon issued Decree 8 which supported proposals for constitutional reform recommended at the accord. But members of the civil service resisted their implementation. War was inevitable when neither side would budge. Gowon was a ruthless leader and determined to not only win but to elevate himself as a hero and savior of Nigeria. He was, of course, on the winning side of the war. Many years later, he apologized for the atrocities committed by the Nigerian army during the war. He had no regrets about the homes destroyed and land taken from the Biafran people. It was part of war and his goal was never to break the Biafran economy.



Isaiah Achebe

Isaiah Achebe, Chinua's father, was orphaned when he was born in the last part of the nineteenth century. He was raised by maternal uncle, Udoh who was the first in his community to receive a party of English clergy. It was a time of civil, economic and religious unrest in Igbo land. Christianity was a new religion and already impacted the Yoruba heartland. Missionaries were trying to spread their influence to the rest of southern Nigeria. Christian singing annoyed Udoh but he did not discourage his nephew from associating with them.

Isaiah was an early Christian and well-educated. By 1904 he had attended St. Paul's Teacher's College in Awka and was qualified to be employed as a teacher and an evangelist in the Anglican Mission. He was a brilliant man and a voracious reader. His reading included the Bible, religious books and other periodicals.

Janet Achebe

Chinua's mother, Janet, was a student of the famed missionary Edith Warner and received a primary school education – unusual at that time for a girl. After meeting and marrying Isaiah, Janet joined him on his missionary travels. Janet was quiet and reserved but strong in character. She was a leader in the church. She was never rude or aggressive but was able to gently get her point across. Isaiah and Janet Achebe were the first of their people to blend tradition with education and religion introduced by the Europeans.

Nnamdi Azikiwe

Nnamdi Azikiwe was considered the father of African independence. Zik, as he was called for short, was the biggest political influence on Chinua during his youth. He had a vision for Africa that inspired others. He was helped in pursuing that vision with his high-profile sons and daughters. Zik was born in Onitsha but did not return there after returning in 1934 from attending college in the United States. He settled in Accra instead and became the editor of a daily newspaper. Through the years he encouraged other youth Africans to attend his U.S. alma mater, Lincoln University, in the U.S. Moving on to Lagos, he established his own newspaper called "The West African Pilot." His goal was to appeal directly to the people in spreading his anti-colonial message. To demonstrate his people's independence, Zik founded the African Continental Bank in 1944.

Jonathan Obimdi Okongwu

Jonathan Obimdi Okongwu was a colorful figure and the headmaster of St. Philip's Central School the elementary school that Chinua Achebe attended as a youth. He earned the respect, if not fear, of the children due to his reputation as a strict



disciplinarian. He reportedly spanked as many children as he could in a day and then picked up the next school day where he left off. Despite his stringent ways, he was greatly admired in the Igbo community especially for his achievements in education. It was unusual at the time for an Igbo to become the headmaster of a school so attaining that position made him a legend in his own time. He also had a kind and generous side. He routinely placed and sponsored kids in schools in Nigeria and in schools outside of Africa.

Christopher Okigbo

Chinua first met Christopher Okigbo at Government College. Christopher stood out as a great batsman and bowler in the game of cricket. Christopher was several years ahead of Chinua but the two became fast friends, a relationship that lasted until Christopher's death during the war. He came from a highly talented and successful family. Christopher was a talented writer and energetic and fearless in taking on life. Chinua and Christopher stayed in touch over the years. Christopher agreed with Chinua that there should be honest voices that tell the story of Africa. During the war, the two friends formed a publishing company, the Citadel Press, which was devoted to telling the true stories of Africa by Africans and began by focusing on children's stories. But their venture was interrupted before it could really take off by the danger and uncertainty of war. Christopher was a victim of the war and died in August 1967 when the war was in its last days.

Benjamin Uzochukwu

Benjamin Uzochukwu was one of Chinua's closest friends at Government College. They were drawn to each other during their first semester together. Benjamin went on to become an engineer after studying in Great Britain. Benjamin became the director of the Federal Department of Public Works in the city of Lagos.

Benjamin Adekunle

Benjamin Adekunle who was also known as the black scorpion was a military leader and in charge of Division Three of the Nigerian army. He waged an aggressive southern offensive causing the Biafrans to retreat. In mid-war, Adekunle waged an offensive with the more than 40,000 troops of his Third Division command. The offensive launched an onslaught that included amphibious, land and air assaults on the Niger River city of Port Harcourt. The Third Division marched through the city of Aba leaving in its wake heavy casualties with as many as 2,000 dying. After word of the Aba Massacre traveled around, Adekunle was considered a war hero.



Chief Awolowo

Obafemi Awolowo was an early Nigerian elitist and one of the nation's most celebrated and influential political figures. He was an attorney who earned his degree at the University of London. When he returned to Nigeria in 1947 after finishing his studies, he was astonished at how the once robust political establishment in western Nigeria had been weakened and diminished. He reunited his ancient Yoruba people and inspired them to regain their ethnic pride ultimately resulting in the emergence of a new political party called the Action Group. He looked with suspicious eyes at the power and influence of the Igbo elite led by Azikiwe. Awolowo was eventually able to strengthen political support and outperform Azikiwe and his followers in his insatiable grasp for power and influence.

Sir Ahmadu Bello

Sir Ahmadu Bello was the Sark of Sokoto who created the Northern People's Congress in the late 1940s. The Northern Region of Nigeria did not have the number of Western-educated politicians as the South did. The establishment of the NPC was his plan for solving this inequity. Bello ultimately became the most influential and powerful politician in all of Nigeria. Through intimidation and fear tactics, Bello was able to pack the Congress with Northern politicians making the NPC the ruling party and Bello, in essence, its leader.

Chukwuma Nzeogwu

The military coup of January 15, 1966, was led by a group of young Igbo junior officers. The action was also referred to as the Nzeogwu Coup after Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu who was the ringleader.

Nzeogwu had become a hero but was killed in action just eighteen months later after war broke out over Biafra's declaration of independence.

General Aguiyi-Ironsi

The Nzeogwu Coup was thwarted by Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi. He emerged as Nigeria's new head of state. When he issued Decree No. 34 which fundamentally put Nigeria under military rule, the people were not happy. He decided to tour the country in order to gain support for his position as leader and for his policies. He was an Igbo and never trusted by other Nigerians. While on his tour, he was arrested in the Eastern Region, connected to a murder and ultimately executed.



Objects/Places

Nigeria

Chinua Achebe's story of "There Was A Country" takes place in Nigeria, a nation within the continent of Africa. Africa's importance to the West can be traced from its discovery 500 years before through the transatlantic slave trade and the Berlin Conference of 1885 where the Scramble for Africa took place with the continent literally being sliced up among European powers. The region that later became Nigeria was handed over to Great Britain. Like all African nations, the land was rich in resources which the British exploited to increase their revenues.

When the people became more sophisticated they began to long for their freedom and independence from their colonial power, Great Britain finally faced the music and liberated the country in 1960. The country actually devolved into corruption and hardship for its people after losing its colonial master. The Eastern Region of Nigeria had many ethnicities with the Igbo as the majority sect. In 1967, after feeling oppressed by the Nigerian government, the Eastern Region declared its independence and proclaimed that the Republic of Biafra was the new name of the sovereign nation.

Mbari

Mbari is part of Igbo phenomenological thought. Mbari art that was part of the process of living and celebrating life. Mbari mud houses with tin or thatched roofs were erected with decorated walls honoring Igbo culture and beliefs. Inside the mud house was an elevated platform that featured life-size sculptures of elements that comprised the Igbo world. They included replicas of Alusi deities including Otamiri and Ani, every day people, animals, crops and even Europeans. Europeans were included as a testament to the virtues of Igbo tolerance and grace.

Government College, Umuahia

Chinua took an entrance examination for the British public schools that existed in Nigeria while the nation was still a colonial possession of Great Britain. Chinua did so well that he was accepted into both the Dennis Memorial Grammar School and the Government College in Umuahia. Although the Government College was in an area remote to his hometown, Chinua was urged to accept that offer by both his older brother and his parents. Its reputation as a government college gave it an elevated status and it was felt that attending the school would be a positive step toward a successful future. The school was considered the Eton of the East and Chinua was eager to attend because he believed he would be the benefactor of an education on par with the royals.



Cricket

Since Nigeria was a colony of Great Britain there were many elements of Western society and culture that greatly influenced the African nation. For Chinua one of the most thrilling aspects of attending the Government College in Umuahia was the prospect of playing cricket. It was considered by many in his world to be an exotic sport, a sport of the royals. Soccer had become commonplace in Africa; cricket had taken its place as the nation's elite sport and was a symbol of the country's maturation and advancement.

There were organized cricket matches between Government College and King's College and other elite secondary schools. Umuahia's cricket field was huge and featured a green manicured lawn that was tended to more diligently than all the other grassy areas on campus. Cricket matches always drew crowds. Schoolmasters referred cricket as the gentleman's sport. While Chinua wasn't known for his sports ability, he enjoyed the sport, especially its aura, none the less.

Society of Nigerian Authors

The Society of Nigerian Authors or SONA was established by Chinua Achebe and fellow writers and intellectuals in the mid-1960s. It was created in an effort to shine the light on the talents and abilities of the young African writers but its founding had a dual purpose. Beyond just protecting and promoting young writing talents, it was hoped that the organization would be an inspiration to other Nigerians and Africans to feel free to express themselves. Through their art, Chinua and his colleagues aspired to bring order and civilization to the country that was suffering and on the precipice of crisis.

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe was dismayed when a professor told him that a story he had submitted lacked form. When asked she could not really explain what she was referring to. Upon pressing the matter, Chinua concluded that although the professor was bright and had a stellar background, she was not capable of teaching across cultures. It planted a seed in Chinua's mind that African writers needed to tell Africa's story. Shorter term, the incident was the spark that led to Chinua writing his first novel, "Things Fall Apart." Chinua was inspired and devoted every available minute to writing his manuscript.

As any writer discovers, it is not easy to get a manuscript published. But "Things Fall Apart" finally got to the right publishing house, Heinemann Publishing, and the right editor there, Alan Hill, who was blown away by the book. Heinemann initially published 2,000 hardcover copies of the book. It was met with many positive reviews and critical endorsements. However, there were some critics who resisted the idea that the world needed African literature.



Decree No. 34

Following retaliation against the coup, Decree No. 34 was issued in a broadcast to the nation of Nigeria on May 24, 1966, by General Aguiyi-Ironsi. The decree eliminated virtually Nigeria's federal government replacing it with military rule. Just a month later, Ironsi was petitioned by the Northern Nigerian ruling class to revoke the unpopular decree. In an effort to gain support of his position as new leader of the nation, Ironsi toured the country to calm fears and uncertainty. Decree No. 34 became a moot point when Ironsi was arrested in July by the Northern Nigerian army and executed a short time later.

La Négritude

President Léopold Senghor of the Republic of Senegal led a movement called La Négritude which was already established in other countries around the world. La Négritude was a continuation of the early work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and C.L.R. James and black intellectuals who had furthered the societal and political advancements of black people. In Africa its founding was unique among other such organizations in the world. The introduction of La Négritude into the Dark Continent was largely a response to being under colonial rule for so many decades. La Négritude was the venue that permitted an African voice to speak to that experience.

The Ahiara Declaration

The Ahiara Declaration was the mission statement that described the basis for the Biafran revolution. It was inspired by a similar declaration issued by the president of Tanzania. The document stressed the importance of the values of equality, self-determination and respect for basic human values. Chinua was invited along with a panel of other high-profile writers and intellectuals to help write Biafra's declaration. Chinua admired the Tanzanian declaration because it included African values and ideology. The Ahiara Declaration was given in a radio address by Biafra's leader, Emeka Ojukwu on June 1, 1969. It was well-received and gave the Biafran people reason to celebrate and "dance to what Ojukwu was saying."

Civilian Massacres

The Asaba Massacre took place in early October 1967. In retaliation for the humiliation that the Nigerian army felt from being defeated in a Biafran offensive, Division Two led by Chief Commander Murtala Muhammed retook Asaba which was occupied by Biafran soldiers. The Nigerian forces rounded up and executed every Igbo man and boy they could find. It was estimated that between five-hundred and one-thousand innocent civilian Igbo men and boys were killed that day. In early 1968, Nigerian military leaders decided to purge the city of Calabar of Igbo. The soldiers shot and killed between 1,000-2,000 Igbo, mostly civilians.



Ogbunigwe

During the Nigeria-Biafra War, the Biafran army was always short on resources – both soldiers and weaponry. However, there was one weapon that made the enemy Nigerian soldiers quake in their boots. The ogbunigwe was the deadliest weapon in the Biafran military's armament. The bomb was a complex three-chamber device that was set off in delayed action sequences. These bombs were used by the Biafran military with great success during the conflict. There was speculation that Nigerians drove herds of cattle in advance of their movements so that the cows would set off the first stage of the bomb and give the soldiers time to take cover.



Themes

The Igbo

Chinua Achebe although raised Christian by his devout parents was always drawn to the Igbo, an ethnic minority in the nation of Nigeria that enjoyed a majority status in Eastern Nigeria. He found their stories and legends lyrical and easy to understand as opposed to the complexities that he experienced in studying Christianity. As Chinua matured and grew more curious about the Igbo, his ancient ancestors, and their cultures and beliefs he began to visit Igbo tribe members to learn more about them.

The Igbo believed in a number of deities. Being raised as a Christian with only one god, Chinua was intrigued by a religion that claimed that while one god might be upset with one's behavior that person could still be in the good graces of other gods. Chinua liked those odds! He learned how important art was in Igbo belief, something that Chinua as a budding writer could readily relate to. He realized that the Igbo love of art may have been responsible for his great attraction for the arts, in particular, writing.

The Igbo religion was as mysterious as it was dynamic. The Igbo believed that art, religion and virtually everything in life were all a part of a larger art – the art of masquerade. The Igbo would never dream of having a museum that would capture and freeze art in place forever. Likewise, having scripture to direct one's life was something that would be unheard of in Igbo culture. The Igbo were worshipers of change and to them if there were laws they were only temporary and vulnerable to change at every turn. The Igbo realized that one generation's "rules" may not satisfy a future generation and that change is not only allowed but expected.

The Igbo became a wedge issue in the war that broke out after Biafra declared its independence. Chinua wrote in his book, "The Trouble with Nigeria" that the people of Nigeria would only reunite if they were to share in the resentment of the Igbo. Their hatred for the Igbo would connect them. Resentment for the Igbo was long-standing among other ethnic groups. The competitive nature of Igbo made them highly receptive to change and for the organic advancement that was possible when Nigeria was a colony. The Igbo grasped the opportunities presented by white colonialists. Although they were a minority in the nation, they could not be ignored because they numbered in the millions. Igbo interest in economic growth and in education elevated them to positions of authority. Progress in Igbo communities saw achievements at all levels of society. Igbo had no interest in unity with other ethnic groups nor did they aspire to have an advantage over them.

The Nigerian military leaders wanted to stir anger against the Igbo so that the highly educated and achievement-focused Igbo could be replaced with less qualified individuals who could be more easily manipulated. Government propaganda depicted the Igbo as aggressive and unfairly dominating every segment of Nigerian society. There was no mention of their achievements and advancements in education and



economic development. Statistics were presented that indicated the dominance of Igbo in important government positions throughout the country despite their relative small numbers in comparison to other ethnic groups. Instead of using the Igbo as an inspiration for others, their success was used against them.

The Igbo disposition towards change could explain why it was the Eastern Region of Nigeria which was dominated by Igbo that wanted independence and change. The Igbo may have also been compelled by their strong advocacy of democratic societies and their rejection of kings and dictators. Absent the spirit of the Igbo, perhaps the secession and the war would never have occurred.

African Literature

One of the driving forces behind the work and writing of Chinua Achebe was his goal to establish African writing as a respected and credible contribution to the world of literature. He came to believe that it was essential that African writers be the voice of African stories. In college, Chinua realized that even well-educated professors could not broach the gap between Western and African cultures. Up to that point, books about Africa were written by Western writers – chiefly Europeans and Americans. It struck Chinua as a young college student that only an African writer could accurately and credibly tell the stories of Africans, their struggles and disappointments and their hopes and dreams. It became Chinua's lifelong dream to make this dream a reality.

Chinua saw African writing as unique in its rawness and imperfect quality. Unlike other writing that was refined and edited until it lost its very life, African writing was real and genuine and just like its people far from perfect. It was African tradition that art be accessible to all the people. In fact, Igbo art encompassed the people – it was part of the art. Stories written by African writers reflected this same intimacy with the people – a quality that Western writers did not understand and, therefore, could not accomplish. African writing did not draw a line between what was allowed and not allowed.

It was Chinua's belief that it was not possible to write about Africa without an underlying message or protest. Commitment was also essential to African writing. While some writers became political in nature others merely took a stand. Africans lived under so much corruption, oppression and subjugation that it was impossible for those from other cultures to imagine the difficulties and struggles that the ordinary African faced throughout his life. Chinua felt that African writers had an obligation to align themselves against the powerful and to take the side of the powerless.

Religion

Chinua Achebe's family was Christian. His father, Isaiah was an early Christian in Nigeria and lived his life guided by Christian values. Being a Christian in Nigeria was not without its challenges since the family lived in an environment of intense religious diversity. The Bible was an important element in Chinua's upbringing; his parents and older sister often read to Chinua from the revered book. The center of the family's life



was St. Philip's Church in Ogidi. His father helped build the church and helped out in the Sunday service which typically lasted more than two hours.

Chinua's career in the arts was influenced by his parents' devotion to Christianity as well as by the religion and beliefs of his ancestors. He encountered those who refused to convert and was curious why they held onto their old beliefs. This curiosity led Chinua to find out more about the old traditions and culture that was part of his family's story. His great uncle Udoh was an ozo which was a revered position among the Igbo. In the Igbo religion, there were many gods to worship.

Chinua was fascinated to learn that one could be at odds with one god while at the same time be on good terms with another. Chinua was drawn to the old religion of his ancestors finding Igbo sayings and proverbs more appealing and pure than the complexities of Christianity. Chinua found Christianity to be stringent and unwelcoming to the outsider. While he appreciated the education he received from the Christian missionaries, he had skepticism about them. After all it was European Christians who had delivered his people into slavery.

Chinua understood that he could not be too vocal about his attraction for Igbo beliefs. Because of his father's devotion to his religion and position in the Christian community, Chinua had to downplay his interest in the old religion. Chinua's father was trusted and respected by the people of the village. Chinua would do nothing to stain the reputation or image that his father enjoyed by debating him on his basic beliefs.

What Chinua learned from his father and from his great uncle all contributed to Chinua's ability to see events and issues from both sides and avoid looking at a matter in a narrow manner with preconceived notions. Developing this open approach to the world around him enabled Chinua to develop into an intellect and a much revered writer with great dimension and ultimately to become a leader among his people.

The Republic of Biafra

The driving spirit of "There Was A Country" is the country itself – The Republic of Biafra, a nation that will filled with hope and anticipation for a future that held true independence and democracy for its people. But this bright shining beacon in the Dark Continent saw but a brief moment of existence.

When the Igbo people of the Eastern Region of Nigeria were under siege by federal forces, the region seceded from the nation and was declared to be the Republic of Biafra, an independent and sovereign nation. The Republic lasted only a short time and the secession sparked a vicious war between the Nigerian and Biafran armies.

The Republic was named after the Bight of Biafra which was the vast reservoir of water into which the Niger River emptied before flowing onto the Gulf of Biafra. Enugu was the capital city of the new republic. It had a population of more than 100,000 people. After the invasion by the Nigerian Army on October 4, 1967, the capital was moved to the city



of Umuahia and then when that city was under intense fire, the capital was moved to Owerri.

The population of Biafra was 15 million. The Igbo was the dominant ethnic group in Biafra although there were a number of other ethnic groups that had a strong presence. Its monetary system was not recognized internationally. At the beginning of the war, the Biafran army consisted of only 2,000 soldiers but an additional 20,000 were quickly recruited. The Biafran air force was a limited one having just two fighter jets and three helicopters. The most deadly weapon that the military had possession of was the bomb called "Ogbunigwe." It struck fear in the hearts of Nigerian soldiers.

When Biafra refused to abandon its claim to independence from Nigeria, a vicious war broke out between Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra. The war lasted nearly three years and is considered one of the bloodiest battles in the history of man. Almost three million Biafrans died – men, women and children. Biafran children were the most tragic victims of the war. They were most vulnerable to the starvation and diseases that beset the Biafran people during the war. The war was the first "TV war," which enabled the world to see the devastation, cruelty and genocide that the Biafrans were suffering. There was worldwide outrage and the republic was the recipient of a wealth of humanitarian aid.

When Biafra finally surrendered to the Nigerian army, the country returned to being the Eastern Region of Nigeria and the Republic of Biafra was no more. The people, Igbo culture and the physical state of the region were all devastated and it took literally decades for the area to begin to show signs of recovery.

Humanitarian Disaster

The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967 – 1970, was considered the bloodiest war in the history of man. Evidence of that fact was apparent every night in homes around the globe. The war was the first TV war. Reporters and TV cameras kept a vigil on the atrocities committed during the war, the pain and suffering of the people and in particular the starvation, brutality and disease that impacted the children and babies of Biafra. As the camera rolled each day, the heart of the world bled for the people of Biafra. There was great sympathy for the innocents of the war who lost life and limb and hope.

Charity and donations poured into the country but they often did not reach the people they were intended for. The Nigerian army often refused to allow humanitarian shipments to pass through war zone roads. They weren't concerned about the welfare of those driving the trucks; they didn't want the food and medical supplies to reach the people. It was part of war, the Nigerians claimed. Innocent children dying was just a fact of war.

The Nigerian army staged several massacres that became infamous during the war. There was the Asaba Massacre and the Calabar Massacre to name a few. In each case, innocent civilians were executed. In the Calabar Massacre alone there was an estimated one to two-thousand civilians brutally murdered. There was also an attack on



a medical center where fourteen nurses and their patients were all mowed down by artillery fire. It was a part of war, the Nigerians claimed. A Swiss Red-Cross plane loaded with supplies for the sick and dying Biafrans was shot down.

Near the conclusion of the war, there was outrage over Nigerian soldiers blocking the passage of trucks carrying food and medicine for the Biafrans. At that time, it was estimated that hundreds of children were dying each day. During the nearly three years of conflict, more than two million Biafrans were slaughtered. Of that number, the majority were children. The numbers of refugees, people who lost their home and everything they owned, displaced citizens, lost children, sick and injured adults and children were too numerous to count. There was no doubt among rational people everywhere that the Nigerians were guilty of genocide. Sadly, when the war finally ending the suffering was to go on for years afterward. Nigeria has never fully recovered from the war.



Styles

Structure

“There Was A Country” by Chinua Achebe is separated into four large parts with numerous unnumbered subsections in each part.

Part 1 describes the author’s childhood and student years. Chinua also tells of his hopes and dreams to develop African literature written by Africans about Africa that would be accepted in the literary world. In this section, he also writes of the internal conflicts that existed between various ethnicities and Nigeria’s existence as a colonial possession of Great Britain. Finally, it tells of the jubilation of the people when Great Britain agrees to grant Nigeria its independence.

Part 2 covers the Nigeria-Biafra War that breaks out when Eastern Nigeria declares its independence and proclaims its status as the sovereign Republic of Biafra. Part 3 describes the final stages of the war and the humanitarian disaster that existed among the Biafran people. Part 4 describes the aftermath of the war and the long recovery of the people in a country that existed for only three years.

Chinua Achebe is a well-known African writer and poet. There are poems included in various sections of the book. There are also maps of Nigeria at different stages of the war. Chinua Achebe has included his many notes and resources that he used in writing this book.

Perspective

“There Was A Country” by Chinua Achebe is a memoir of the author’s life with particular focus on his life and experiences during the Nigeria-Biafra War of 1967-1970. The author tells his story and that of his people and the Republic of Biafra a sovereign country in Africa that lasted only as the civil war over it did.

Chinua Achebe is a noted writer and intellect who, along with other colleagues, was determined to bring life to African literature. While he endeavors to elevate his country and the Dark Continent with the works of talented writers like himself who want to tell the story of Africa for the world to hear, he must contend with the life and death situation that his country had devolved into.

There would be no better choice to write about Achebe’s experiences during the war, the horror that he witnessed and the fear that he and his family would become victims, he continues to focus on his writing. He has become weary with writers who did not live in Africa and did not know what it was to be a Nigerian. He wanted to tell the story of Africa himself. He was the perfect person to tell the horror story of the Nigeria-Biafra story. Despite the dangers and challenges that he faced in war torn country, he continue

to pursue his dream of establishing African literature as a respected and credible body of classic works.

Tone

“There Was A Country” by Chinua Achebe is written with the unique authority of one who has actually experienced what he is writing about. He lived in the Eastern Region of Nigeria which seceded from Nigeria and declared itself to be the independent Republic of Biafra. Chinua was raised a Christian by his devout parents but as he matured and became more curious and sophisticated, he was drawn to the old religion of his culture, the Igbo, and the poetry of their stories and legends.

The Igbo were a majority in the Eastern Region but a minority in Nigeria as a whole. The Igbo were abhorred by other ethnic groups for reasons probably lost in time. But as an Igbo, Chinua is able to relate how it felt to be a majority in one area and conversely what it meant to be a minority in another. Throughout the story of living in a quickly changing world, of division and diversity and of war and humanitarian crisis, Chinua tells the facts as he knows them which doesn't preclude him from being emotional about them.

Chinua, like a reporter, strikes a balance between what happened to him, his loved ones and his country and how he felt about the devastation and tragedy there were part of the transitions. Chinua brings insight, perspective and an unexpected elegance in providing a very personal account of his fight to give Africa its own voice in the literary world and in the retelling of the Nigeria-Biafra war which was arguably one of the bloodiest and most savage in the history of man.

Quotes

I was to leave my traditional classroom in the forests of Nekede for the second stage of my formal education, secondary school. There is a certain sense of mystery that I feel when I look back to those times, because things we encounter in life that leave the greatest impressions on us are usually not clear.”

-- Author (Part 1 paragraph 0)

Importance: Chinua has experienced a conflict between his Christian upbringing and the appeal he felt for the traditional ways of his people. At this point he was leaving the comfort of tradition for the mystery and trepidation of the unknown.

Don't say or imply that what someone else has to say or is saying is not worth attending or listening to.' It immediately struck me that I had to be careful about the way I handled someone else's words or opinions, especially Christie's. Even when there was strong disagreement, one had to remember to be discordant with respect.”

-- Author/T.C. Okoli (Part 1)

Importance: Chinua's father-in-law T.C. did not like the flip remark that Chinua made about something his daughter just said. T.C. reminded Chinua that everyone should be listened to. It was something that stuck with Chinua the rest of his life.

The general feeling in the air as independence approached was extraordinary, like the building anticipation of the relief of torrential rains after a season of scorching hot Harmattan winds and bush fires.”

-- Author (Part 1)

Importance: Chinua describes the anticipation that the people of Nigeria felt as they drew closer to independence from the British empire. He likened those feelings to how India and Ghana must have felt on the dawning of their independence.

... art and community in Africa are clearly linked. African art as we understand it has not be distilled or purified and refined to the point where it has lost all traces of real life, lost the vitality of the street, like art from some advanced society and academic art tend to be.”

-- Author (Part 1)

Importance: When Chinua came into his own as a writer, he wanted his work to reflect that of the real Africa. He wanted to give Africa a voice in its own literature and not be muddled by outside influences and standards that did not represent African life of which art was an important part.

As we reached the brink of full-blown war it came clear to me that the chaos enveloping all of us in Nigeria was due to the incompetence of the Nigerian ruling class. They clearly had a poor grasp of history and found it difficult to appreciate and grapple with Nigeria's ethnic and political complexity.”



-- Author (Part 1)

Importance: After winning independence from Britain, Nigeria devolved toward civil war. The Nigerian leadership was weak and out of touch with its people and failed to understand the necessity of finding solutions that would meet the needs of all the tribes and cultures of the nation.

... Nigerian politicians, we felt, had slowly transformed themselves into the personification of Anwu – the wasp – a notorious predator from the insect kingdom. Wasps, African children learn during story time, greet unsuspecting prey with a painful, paralyzing sting, they lay eggs on their body, which then proceed to 'eat the victim alive.'"

-- Author (Part 2)

Importance: Chinua and other writers and intellectuals in Biafra had been surprised by the onset of the war. He compares them metaphorically to wasps that sneak up on unsuspecting victims and eat them alive.

[Biafran aid is] misguided humanitarian rubbish.... If children must die first, then that it too bad, just too bad."

-- Colonel Benjamin Adekunle (Part 2)

Importance: Benjamin Adekunle was one of the brutal commanders of the Northern Army that invaded Biafra. In several assaults, thousands of innocents were slaughtered – men, women and the children he refers to in the quote. The statement brought international outrage to Nigerian leaders who were forced to apologize for the colonel's statement. The colonel retired soon after this incident.

The Nigeria-Biafra War was arguably the first fully televised conflict in history. It was the first time scenes and pictures – blood, guts, severed limbs – from the war front flooded into homes around the world through television sets, radios, newsprint, in real time."

-- Author (Part 2)

Importance: The modern war is an "as seen on TV" feature of modernity. The graphic representatives of this war – the first TV war – were largely responsible for the global outrage and the humanitarian aid and monetary donations poured in for victims and refugees.

By the middle of January 1970, the Nigerian troops had regained the upper hand decisively. Biafra, for all terms and purposes was crushed emotionally, psychologically, financially, and militarily, and it came crashing down soon after the new year began."

-- Author (Part 3)

Importance: This quote captures the dire and hopeless situation that the new Republic of Biafra found itself in after the war that lasted almost three years. The Biafran people and its army were finished in every way imaginable. Although most chose not to voice it, everyone knew that the end was near.



... we little people of the world, are ever expendable. The big powers can play their games even if millions perish in the process.”

-- Author (Part 3)

Importance: This quote about the Nigeria-Biafra war could be said about any war. It is always the “little people” who suffer while the big powers feel they are serving a higher cause.

All is fair in war, and starvation is one of the weapons of war. I don't see why we should feed our enemies fat in order for them to fight harder.”

-- Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Part 3)

Importance: Chief Awolowo was a member of Nigeria's wartime cabinet. His policy, quoted above, was one of the policies that led to the genocide of the Biafran people. The Nigerian army would often block humanitarian trucks from getting through to the Biafran people. This action was based on the policy that starvation was a “weapon of war.”

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.”

-- Elie Wiesel (Part 4)

Importance: Chinua quotes the famous writer and political activist about the power of the written and spoken word in protest of injustice that one is powerless to prevent. These words inspired Chinua to turn down an important position in the corrupt government of Nigeria following the war.



Topics for Discussion

1

What did Chinua find unfavorable about Christianity? Why was he skeptical about European missionaries? How did his conflict over religion manifest itself during his student days?

2

What type of college scholarship did Chinua receive? Why did he change his major and who helped him pay his tuition?

3

Why did Igbo and other Eastern Nigerians hold Ghana up as an ideal? What was Chinua's assessment of the British government in the administration of its colonies?

4

Describe the tensions between the different ethnicities within Nigeria. What were the four main ethnic groups? What impact did they have on minority groups within the nation?

5

What books written by Chinua were inspired by the decline of Nigeria after its liberation from its colonial master, Great Britain? What issues facing Nigeria and Africa did Chinua want to address? Why did he feel it was essential that stories about Africa be written by Africans?

6

What problems had beset Nigeria leading up the coup d'état on January 15, 1966? How was the coup received by the people?

7

Describe the aftermath of the January 15th coup. Who were the five majors and what role did they play before and after the coup? What was Decree 34 and what ramifications did it have?



8

What were the goals of the Aburi Summit and which goals were met? Who issued Decree 8 and what was its significance?

9

Which African nations supported the Republic of Biafra as an independent nation? What was behind France's support of Biafra's independence? Why did England refuse to support Biafra's freedom and what was America's stance on the matter?

10

What was the significance of the Nigerian-Biafra war being the first "TV war"? What was the impact of the graphic images of the war and suffering being broadcast on the nightly news?