

Reading *Surviving Biafra* is in many ways exceptionally thrilling. The text is a combination of history, autobiography, biography and strands of a story including what could be described as semi-fictions to make a new literary genre. Biafra, the Nigerian civil war which began as a national reaction to a secession attempt by the Igbos in the southeast of the country, is the book's main focus. To the greatest possible extent, the authors have composed an objective and apolitical presentation of a Nigerian historical phenomenon.

Both authors have admitted adopting an anthropological approach (p. 5), which builds the text with sources including "observation, interviews, surveys, letters, diaries" (p. 5), rumor and even myths; hence, the claim that Rosina Umelo's initially took the stance of "an outsider." The concept of outsider however is not to be taken too seriously. Rather, it helps to describe the authenticity and perceptual reliability of the epistemological values that have produced the text. The outsider stance has contributed to making the original compiler acutely aware of mundane things that any local would have taken for granted and that as war dragged on she became fully integrated like any other Biafran experientially (p. 5). The anthropological ingenuity of the blend notwithstanding, the text remains a true first-hand phenomenologically driven record of an eyewitness rather than an intellectual interpretation on the Biafra war. The records were carefully woven into a unique literary genre.

The first of the three parts of the text pictures the pre-Biafran Nigeria, describing the hopes and fears that attended the eve and dawn of the independence. The second part deals with the war especially as it affected Rosina and her Umelo family. This was crafted in unique style and language so calm, clear, informative and beautiful in its description of day-to-day living during the war (p. 6). Like most other popular stories about Biafra, *Surviving Biafra* also describes the political scandals that attended the newly independent Nigeria, the valor of the Biafra soldiers in spite of the initial paucity of their war arsenal, and the food shortage which created the ugliest scenes. The text refrains however, from making the usual popular claim that the starvation was a deliberate device of the Nigerian government to scuttle Biafra. Nevertheless, it bemoans the colossal destruction of lives, property, and trust among Nigerians and the quagmires that eclipsed the nation in a torrent of lasting instability (p. 209). The third part involves an interpretative report of Rosina's record by Elizabeth Bird. *Surviving Biafra* is a laudable tale of the untold personal dimensions of the overall war.

*Surviving Biafra* distinguishes itself in a number of ways. The dissimilarities lie in the fact that most previous Biafra story records were an overly display of masculinity (p. 5). Given the choice of literary style, the text places minimal interest on providing stories of heroes and their heroic actions, or of justifying the secession and the resulting war (pp. 15-16). In spite of admitting "there were no panics" in the story lines (p. 207), there are some recorded events that could make even the Lucifer weep. For instance, it describes the extent of abuse of civilians during the war using the case of one Pius whose last memory glimpse of his mother was when she was being smuggled away by heartless soldiers who were laughing as they were pulling off her dress behind a moving army lorry (p. 21). One can imagine the psycho-social effect on Pius and the like.

In spite of their intention to write a reliable and credible story, it seems evident from a few comments in the text that the authors mostly edited the script of a pro-Biafra citizen. Nevertheless, the text builds up a phenomenological challenge to some existing positions in philosophy, anthropology, history, and even beyond, relating to Africa. Some of the most intellectually thought-provoking aspects relate to issues of polygamy, corruption, patrilinealism, cross-racial marriage, and womanhood in Africa, (pp. 202-05). The book has equally challenged the minds of readers towards re-examining the interests of Britain and the international community regarding Nigeria.