

Chukwuma Nzeogwu In The Throes Of Contemporary Nigerian History

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ABSTRACT

For the greater part of its existence as a sovereign state, Nigeria has witnessed more years of military than civilian rule. An excursion into this very important aspect of our national history must, of necessity, interrogate the circumstances and dramatis personae that led to the military's intervention in national politics. One name that has never escaped the scrutiny in this effort is that of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. Though a posthumous research, the intention of this paper is to attempt a reappraisal of the often ignored, misinterpreted and maligned intentions of the principal actors of the January 15, 1966 military coup d'état, especially the role of Nzeogwu. In order to achieve this objective, the research made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. These were subjected to initial qualitative analysis. The research concludes that part of the reasons for the misinterpretation of Nzeogwu's role is the need to justify the failure of the government of the First Republic to satisfy the basic human and material needs of Nigeria. In addition, it establishes the fact that subsequent political equations and configurations in Nigeria have evidently been to the benefit of those who have been at pains to justify the brutality that attended the January 1966 coup d'état.

Keywords: Nzeogwu, Civil War, Military, Regime, Nigeria, Army.

INTRODUCTION

The personality of Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu emerged in political limelight after the coup d'état of January 15 1966 that terminated the First Republic. The coup received varied interpretations. It was seen in some quarters as an ethnically-motivated political move by the Igbo to dominate other Nigerians while for others, it was a response to the ills of the leaders and government of the First Republic. Central in the various opinions about the coup is the role played by Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, one of the five original Majors that conceived the putsch. Chukwuma's popularity was not only because he successfully executed his own roles in the coup, but also because he was the only one among the five Majors that was opportuned to read the aims of the revolution to the populace. Also, Chukwuma was the only one among the coupists that established a government in the

northern region until the General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army eventually assumed control in Lagos. Events that followed subsequently marked the beginning of military intervention in Nigerian politics and a civil war that altered coexistence and national peace for almost three years, with consequences and implications for contemporary Nigerian history. The coup and the war exacerbated ethnic divisions and exclusions among the major ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian State and has lingered on in the throes of contemporary Nigerian history.

NZEOGWU AS AN ENIGMA: HIS BIRTH UP TO ENLISTMENT

Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu was born on 26 February 1937 to the family of James and Elizabeth Nzeogwu who lived in Argungu Road Kaduna, close to St. Joseph's Catholic Church where Chukwuma was baptised as Patrick. His baptismal name was preceded by an informal name—"Kaduna"—which became the preferred name for neighbours and acquaintances. Peter Okeleke Nzeogwu is of the view that the name 'Kaduna' came as 'Dan Kaduna' and was conferred on Chukwuma during the interregnum between his birth and baptism when neighbours awaited his christening. He was to be called 'Dan Kaduna' (son of Kaduna) until the formal conferment of a Christian name [1]. Neighbours and friends came to learn that the names "Chukwuma" and "Patrick" after "Kaduna" had become a common name for infant Chukwuma. One notable adjustment was the dropping of the prefix "Dan". Chukwuma Kaduna Patrick Nzeogwu became the name of James Nzeogwu's first son. Names come with significance in African societies. Aside the conferment of such English names as Augustine, Patrick and others which signify the wish by contemporary churches that new borns behave like the saints who they are named after, other Igbo names are explanatory and are informative of circumstances, feelings, dispositions and or sentiments. For instance, "Chukwuma," meaning "God knows," signifies the Omni-knowledge of the Supreme Being. It denotes that God knows and has a purpose for which he embarked upon the creation of the person in view. The name was an exaltation of a sort by Chukwuma's parents who believed that his birth was pre-designed for a great purpose, implying therefore that God alone knew the purpose for which Chukwuma was born. The growing Chukwuma perhaps inadvertently obliterated Patrick from his name. He rather preferred Chukwuma and Kaduna as most of his official documents and letters bore Major C. K. Nzeogwu [2].

Chukwuma's birth brought his family to closer ties with severe hardship. Unable to cope with the very meagre remuneration from his teaching job, Mr James, with the help of Rev. Father McCarthy, secured another job at the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN), Kaduna where he trained as an apprentice technician and was fully employed after a short time [3]. Elizabeth, Chukwuma's mother, was a native of Ugbolu, a village close to Okpanam, Delta State where his father hailed from. After marriage rites, James took Elizabeth to Kaduna. In Kaduna, she initially relied wholly on James to provide all financial needs of the home. This became a source of tension for the young family. James' inability to provide all that was needed amidst rumours of his benevolence to colleagues and associates angered his wife. She was always willing to engage her husband in a heated argument until he provided what she considered manageable for the home. Economic conditions of the times forced the Nzeogwus into intense frugality. Only the necessary needs of the house were provided.

The family was deeply troubled by the difficulty of managing their meagre resources when Chukwuma and his siblings began growing into dependent infants. Most necessary needs were not available in the Nzeogwu home for which reason infant Chukwuma got acquainted to frugality. He adjusted to managing the little his parents could provide and regarded affluence as an unnecessary

waste. Chukwuma was a very inquisitive and precocious child. As a young primary school pupil in St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Kaduna, he often asked his teachers endless questions. He also often wanted to enquire into things that were unclear and also questioned the status quo. Frustration over things he could not explain was expressed after school when he would withdraw to himself, evidently perturbed [3].

Chukwuma was a good pupil who easily got on well with arithmetics and writing. He laid good preliminary foundations for his post-primary education. It seems that Chukwuma's inclination towards becoming a soldier was evident in his years as an infant when, after watching soldiers go through early morning drills, he would gather handy children for a mock demonstration of all they saw during the parades. It was perhaps at this stage that he made up his young mind to become a soldier. In 1950, he sat for the test for entrance into college. He gained admission into St. John's College, Kaduna. According to Obasanjo [3]:

Saint John's College in Kaduna was another possibility but the entrance examination was very competitive. It was conducted throughout the whole of Northern Nigeria, but the school hardly admitted more than sixty children at a time, so a child had to be exceptionally brilliant to get in. Even for children of Catholics, admission was not automatic.

True to the above testimony by his friend, Chukwuma sat for the interview and gained admission on merit. St. John's missionary outlook and features meant a strong emphasis on discipline and religion. Chukwuma did not find any of these two strange for, right from home, his disciplinary disposition was enough foundational training. He was severally subjected to corporal punishment by his father whenever he erred. Similarly, the family's travails over issues and problems arising from child mortality subjected Chukwuma's parents to regular prayers of atonement and other Christian activities that could attract God's mercies and intervention. Therefore, religion and discipline in St. John's was only a continuation [1], even though Chukwuma only partially participated in the post-class disciplinary activities because his father could not afford the £33 required for one to live in the dormitory. Chukwuma went to school from an improvised accommodation. His father could only afford the £11 fee for day students.

Chukwuma lived with a guardian to whom his father gave latitude and freedom to discipline him. Mr Hyacinth Odigwe, his guardian, had the philosophy that if you spare the rod, you spoil the child. He meted strict disciplinary measures on Chukwuma who sometimes challenged his highhandedness and disciplinary disposition. Chukwuma's attitude tilted towards revolt, especially towards behaviours he discerned as harsh and incompatible with freedom and liberty. In school, he often challenged students who derived pleasure in bullying the vulnerable. Similarly, his teachers attracted his rebellious characteristics when he perceived their actions as oppressive. He did not waste time to tacitly or overtly express disagreement over acts of, or perceived intimidation and oppression. He was narrowly able to escape the consequence of his revolutionary attitude until his final year in school when he was caught up in a web of conflict of authority and quest for liberty and fairness. First was his disagreement with his school's training instructor for which he organised a boycott in protest against his highhandedness. Next was his expulsion from school because he led a revolt against the school's authorities. This was the height of the indication that adolescent Chukwuma Nzeogwu, who was nicknamed "Major" had serious predilection for oppression by authorities and men in high places. In 1955, St. John's operated a syllabus on the basis of six years

for school certificate. When several efforts by Chukwuma's class to write the examination in the fifth year failed and yet the same privilege sought was granted to the immediate junior class, Chukwuma led a revolt of his classmates. This led to the suspension of members of his class. While other members of the class tendered apologies and were subsequently reabsorbed, Chukwuma insisted that the cause he fought for was just. This was the reason why Chukwuma wrote the school certificate examination from home. He did not plead for leniency and was therefore not forgiven.

Chukwuma studied hard and his efforts were reflected in his good grades. His parents were happy that his distraction did not adversely affect his grades. They were more bewildered to discover that he declined to use his school certificate result to secure a job because he was studying for the Nigerian Army Cadetship examination. His father refused his several entreaties to be allowed to join the army. In fact, his detestation for his son's choice led him to hide Chukwuma's successful cadetship examination results until Chukwuma personally found out and insisted on enlisting. In March 1957, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu enlisted as an officer cadet in the Nigerian Regiment of the West African Frontier Force [4]. After few months in Lagos, the new recruits were taken to Ghana for a preliminary training. Successful ones, including Chukwuma, were to move to Mons in Aldershot and Sandhurst for officer training. Training in these prestigious military academies was designed to broaden the cadet's knowledge and outlook and was characterised by British military traditions which were vocally sermonizing and admonishing against communism. Officers were encouraged and in fact, coerced to openly declare aversion for communism.

After the trainings, Major Nzeogwu's Commanding Officer– Colonel Turbull– remarked that he was “a confident, mature and sound cadet and a good trier at most activities” [3]. From Mons and Sandhurst, Chukwuma proceeded for infantry and weapons training in Hythe in Kent, England. His success in Hythe gave passage to another– a platoon commander course in Warminster where it was reported that, “Nzeogwu should make a good platoon commander who has learnt a lot and who will improve with experience” [3]. Chukwuma was among the Nigerian contingent deployed to the Congo in 1960 under the command of Colonel Aguiyi Ironsi. Upon his return, he was posted to the Army Training Depot in Zaria and later to the Army Headquarters, Lagos to take charge of Military Intelligence. His obvious lack of knowledge in the new area prompted his training in Britain for which he was commended to be “an alert and interested student... who was not afraid to ask questions... he should make a good counter Intelligence Officer” [1].

Major Nzeogwu returned from training in India Staff College in 1964 to face disenchantment from the unimpressive political, economic, and social situations in Nigeria. His training in the Intelligence Unit endowed him with the proficiency to assess the rate of progress or otherwise within his country. Similarly, his exposure to certain books framed his views about political and social developments in immediate post-independence Nigeria. His choice of books were for instance, *Eoka*, a text on the Greek underground movement in Cyprus, *Archbishop Makarios, the Malayan insurgency and uprising*, Giap people's war and People's Army, the Guerrilla activities in Algeria and in Portuguese African territories. These books convinced him that it was not just necessary but also possible to fight and liberate Nigeria which was at the time, immersed in a deluge of disheartening corruption, nepotism, ethnicism and brigandage. The revolutionary tendency was, perhaps, exacerbated by news of successful military uprisings elsewhere in Africa in the 1960s and earlier.

NZEOGWU'S INTENTIONS AND ROLES IN THE JANUARY 1966 MILITARY COUP

In the early morning of Saturday 16th January 1966, Nigerians woke up to the news of the overthrow of the First Republic by some rebellious elements of the Nigerian Army. News had it also that the Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, and the Minister of Finance, Chief Okotie-Eboh, were missing. There was also news of the assassination of some senior military officers, followed by an acceptance speech by the General Officer Commanding (GOC) the Nigerian Army. Amidst this confusion, Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu announced over the Northern Radio Service that, "in the name of the Supreme Council of the Revolution of the Nigerian Armed Forces, I declare martial law over the Northern Provinces of Nigeria" [5]. The new Martial Law over the Northern provinces was a direct contradiction of the announcement from the Army GOC [6] that,

The government of the Federation of Nigeria having ceased to function, the Nigerian Armed Forces have been invited to form an interim military government for the purposes of maintaining law and order... this invitation has been accepted and I, the GOC have been formally invested with authority as Head of Federal Military Government.

According to a special Branch report of the Nigerian Police, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Okafor and Captain Oji were the original members of the conspiratorial group that came up with the idea of Nigeria's first military coup in August, 1965 [7]. Siollun [8] believes that while Major Ifeajuna was certainly one of the originators of the plot, the participants admitted that they had discussed the idea of a coup for several years before 1965. Events became clearer when minds began to discern the text of the Northern Martial Law in which the reasons for the coup were contained and wherein Major Nzeogwu made it clear that:

The aim of the Revolutionary Council is to establish a strong, united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife. Our method of achieving this is strictly military, but we have no doubt that every Nigerian will give us maximum cooperation by assisting the regime and not disturbing the peace during the slight changes that are taking place.

Further on the aim of the coup, Nzeogwu's speech stressed that:

You will hear and probably see a lot being done by certain bodies charged by the Supreme Council with the duties of national integration, supreme justice, general security and property recovery.

To allay the fears of ordinary citizens on the exact targets of the coup, the Major further pronounced that:

Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men in the high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers and VIPs of waste, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds [9].

Major C. K. Nzeogwu's objective in achieving national rebirth through a revolution was truncated by the failure of the eastern and western contingents of the coup [10]. Loyal troops led by General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi took over governance while Nzeogwu, convinced by an old friend, Conrad

Nwawo, submitted to the new military government and was subsequently incarcerated for his actions that led to the end of the First Republic.

A police special report on the coup suggests that the idea of a coup began in about 1964. It equally believes that the original initiator of the idea that metamorphosed into the coup was Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna. Like-minded soldiers were incorporated into the plan usually by ascertaining their opinion about the government of the First Republic. Alex Madiebo reveals that the most efficient strategy was that either Nzeogwu or Ifeajuna would initiate an anti-government discussion where a cooperative co-discussant was seen as a friend while those whose opinions favour the government were regarded as uncooperative. It was largely through this means that most of the co-conspirators were initiated. Similarly, initiation and incorporation were made easy by the dominant feeling of disenchantment over happenings in the government of the First Republic and in the Nigerian State of the 1960s. For instance, by 1964, tension had risen over disagreements arising from the general elections. Events following were the disagreements by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) which almost brought governance to a halt. Also, the Western Region was engulfed in the political squabble between S. L. Akintola and his erstwhile leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo for which the Balewa government took sides with the former. These later events did not trivialise the high level of corruption, repugnant rate of favouritism, nepotism and palpable ethnic divisions.

Spurred on by his detestation for the degree of decadence in Nigeria, and encouraged by his inability to endure the rot, Major Nzeogwu yielded to the idea of putting an end to the government that was believed to have infested Nigerians with wrath. No doubt, some people believe that Nzeogwu's actions had ethnic motives, but one can understand his ideals in Muffets words:

Any officer who knew him (Chukwuma) could tell you that this man was a pure nationalist who burned within with love of his country... he gave scant regard to the place of origin of his countrymen, having been born in Kaduna and raised in an era of nationalistic consciousness. He was sophisticated in his analysis of history and of political events in the country [11].

Chukwuma believed that some people were undesirable for the future progress of the country. He believed that some people had to be sacrificed for Nigeria to move forward. Furthermore, he sought to cleanse Nigeria of the corrupt generation of politicians and replace same with those considered apt for Nigeria. One of the men in this category, by his rating, was Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a Yoruba. According to Nzeogwu:

Neither myself nor any of the other lads was in the least interested in governing the country. We were soldiers and not politicians. We had earmarked from the list known to every soldier in this operation who would be what. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was, for example, to be released from jail immediately and to be made the executive provisional President of Nigeria... [12]

In the same vein, Captain Nwobosi, one of the conspirators and coupists, attests that:

We planned that after the coup, none of us was going to be the Head of State. Awolowo was in Calabar Prison and in our own minds, this was the man. We wanted to put somebody who was sincere... Awolowo was our man, our man for the job [13].

Similarly, Odia Ofeimun, Awolowo's personal secretary confirmed that the plan of the coup makers was to release Awolowo from jail and make him their own leader [14]. Available evidence indicates that the intention of the coup plotters was to replace the leaders of the First Republic leaders with people they believed could give better governance. The group reasoned that Chief Awolowo was oppressed by the Balewa government due to his aversion for corruption and the retrogressive policies of the government. For this, and the belief that he possessed the dexterity for good governance, they sought to entrust Nigeria in his hands, but the failure of the coup ushered in more deplorable socio-political and economic conditions for Nigeria and Nigerians. Six months after General Ironsi led loyal troops to foil the Nzeogwu coup, he, Ironsi was killed in the first ethno-nationalistic coup by northern elements in the Army. The following periods in Nigerian history were marked by ethno-religious and regional politics characterised by the ascendancy of the hegemonic Hausa-Fulani oligarchy in Nigerian politics.

THE PARADOX OF THE JANUARY 1966 COUP AND SUBSEQUENT POLITICAL PERMUTATIONS AND EQUATIONS IN NIGERIA

Contrary to the motives and intentions of the detribalised January 15 coup, the Nigerian state from July 1966 became a veritable ground for ethnic nationalism. This was a product of many reasons including the manipulation and false reasoning that the coup was an Igbo coup meant to ensure Igbo domination over other Nigerians. This misconception coincided with the emergence of Ironsi which exacerbated fears within northern elements in and outside the army, drawing from the fact that he was Igbo. It is plausible that this accounted for the "re-match" which saw the killing of General Ironsi, as well as its aftermath, the Civil War, after which the following political equations and configurations followed: ethno-religious and regional politics since 1970 and the ascendancy of the Fulani oligarchy in Nigerian politics from the days of military regimes up to 2015. Ethno-religious politics in Nigeria did not commence after the Civil War, rather it assumed more intense dimensions after the war. Earlier in 1959, party politics had assumed an ethno-regional dimension. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens lost its national outlook to become more of an Igbo party as was the Northern People's Congress, a predominantly northern Nigerian party, while the Action Group was the party for the Yoruba. A similar trend was repeated in 1964 and formed part of the subterfuge for military incursions into Nigerian politics. The Civil War that followed was also fought along ethno-regional and to lesser extents, religious dimensions. The Federal Government by this time dominated by the north, itself dominated by the Hausa-Fulani, refused the secessionist moves of the Igbo and Christian-dominated Eastern region. The end of the war saw the north victorious after which the Hausa-Fulani carefully manipulated the political configuration in their favour.

Yakubu Gowon, the war-time northern ruler, retained power until 1976. His regime was notorious for its exclusion of easterners, especially the Igbo [15]. In fact, he was believed to have taken a compensatory posture in favour of those who planned the coup that brought him to power. The regime paid lip service to the much renditioned "No victor, no vanquished" slogan. Ethno-regional politics at some point took the dimension of economic, social and political emasculation targeted against the perceived enemy– the former Biafra. Both the timing of the indigenisation policy of 1972 and the preceding issuance of £20 to Biafrans irrespective of amounts they had in the banks were aimed at dehumanising the Igbo. As if these were not enough, the Second Republic became another example of demographic and ethnic superiority. Shehu Shagari's emergence was, no doubt, a product of the inflated census figures of the 1950s and 60s. This accounted for demographic imbalance in favour of the north. That regime was succeeded by another military regime (General

Muhammadu Buhari) whose Supreme Commander was also a northerner. By the time its life span was forcefully terminated in 1985, the regime was succeeded by another northern regime. General Babangida, a northerner, ruled for eight years and was succeeded by another northerner. His interim successor peacefully stepped aside after three months, ostensibly to realise another ethno-regional agenda– the installation of another northerner. The Abacha regime, with its numerous flaws and unacceptability, threw Nigeria into deeper ethnic divisions. It was another era of heightened ethno-nationalism and ethnic conflicts. General Abacha's death gave the impression that there would be a natural shift of political power, or at most that the following periods would mark the sharing of power among the various ethnic areas that make up Nigeria. A contrary situation emerged shortly as Abdulsalami Abubakar succeeded the late dictator.

Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure was perhaps a compensation for the west's help in the 1967–70 war against the Igbo, or a recompense for denying Chief M. K. O. Abiola, the supposed winner of the 1992 elections, the opportunity of emerging as Nigeria's President. That compensation lasted for only seven years, after which power returned to the acclaimed "natural owners". By the end of the Obasanjo-led administration, itself preceded by the Abdulsalami Abubakar-led military regime, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua emerged as President. A detribalised Nigerian, Yar'adua could not live to fulfil his dream of national integration. His Vice, Goodluck Jonathan, from the South, completed the tenure and had another before power was returned to the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy.

The emergence of the Fulani oligarchy in Nigerian politics is more of a design and a long-borne aspiration than an accident of history. The force suppressed the established Hausa civilisation and took over governance of the upper Niger until their suzerainty was subdued by British colonialists who, on exit, found favour in them [16]. The Hausa-Fulani were encouraged by their British overlords to, not just ensure the indivisibility of Nigeria, but also the imposition of a purportedly larger numerical strength over the south. The admonition by the British accounted for the withdrawal of intentions to secede from Nigeria by the Hausa-Fulani. The 1959 election marked a manifestation of the mischievous advice by the British. It was during that year that the results of the elections made it difficult for neither the north nor the south to emerge as a defined winner of the general elections. A coalition was arranged to create a marriage that was pampered for only four years before the strange bedfellows disagreed again. The disagreements and surrounding events accounted mostly for the intervention by Nzeogwu and others. The coup was erroneously condemned mostly on the ground that it was an Igbo coup, but awaits commendations on the ground that it marked the emergence into power of another class within the Hausa-Fulani.

The Nzeogwu coup that saw the death of the allegedly corrupt leaders of the First Republic marked an end to the era of rulership by the religio-traditional aristocracy. It ushered in the growth of a new oligarchy, mostly from the Army. Most of these leaders, for their efforts and birth, were not by any imagination to rule over the conservative Muslim society. Nzeogwu, himself from a humble background, inadvertently achieved the creation of a new cream of the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy who assumed power and still remain in or around the corridors of power in Nigeria till date. Unfortunately, rather than express gratitude to Nzeogwu, contemporary Nigerian historians have ascribed the place of a monster to the man whose revolutionary activities recreated Nigerian history in many ways including creating the opportunity for the Hausa-Fulani new oligarchy to remain in power. The argument here is that the political ascendancy of northern Nigeria could not have assumed its current status but for the Nzeogwu-led coup. It is true that the British were paternalistic

to the northerners and wholeheartedly planted them as their successors, but this does not obfuscate the fact that but for the coup of 1966, the south would most likely not have endured the northern dominance for long. The disintegration of the country may have come earlier by any means, violently or peacefully. That would also have brought an end to the Fulani hegemonic domination of Nigeria, but the January 1966 coup put paid to that. Therefore and as stated earlier, contemporary political developments in Nigeria cannot and should not ignore the patriotic role of Nzeogwu in keeping Nigeria one, as it were. The coup he led was well intentioned but was misinterpreted by the eventual beneficiaries of the exercise. For many decades after 1967, Nigeria's military rulers came from the former northern region. Even when democratic governance was restored in 1979, it was still the north that produced the President. But for the brief period of 1999 to 2007, and 2010 to 2015, Nigeria has remained under the firm grip of the Fulani-dominated northern oligarchy. That is the legacy that was initiated by the British but which the quelling of the January 1966 coup restored. Also, Ahmadu Bello's *Fulanization* policy in northern Nigeria was truncated by the coup. In that regard, non Fulani northerners owe gratitude to Nzeogwu and his colleagues. For the Igbo, the war of 1967 to 1970 which was a direct consequence of the January 1966 coup earned them the admiration of the world for their ability to exhibit their innate ingenuity in improvising materials and weapons which enabled them to survive the war. For this too, they owe a lot to Nzeogwu. The legacy of State creation is traceable to the 1966 coup which brought benefits to regions after the war.

CONCLUSION

Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu's revolutionary mind changed the order not just in contemporary Nigerian history but also in Nigerian politics. His rebellious streaks, manifest from infancy, were outrageously uninhabitable. The same urge that manifested in his rebellion against his teachers in St. James manifested again during the problem infested First Republic. To end the era of poverty, cronyism, ethnicity and corruption, Nzeogwu joined the plan to execute a coup. By January 1966, the Majors struck, bringing to an end, the rule by the Hausa-Fulani religious aristocracy. Yakubu Gowon, Murtala Mohammed, Muhammadu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha, and other such names made unprepared appearances in Nigerian politics, thereby marking the emergence of a new Hausa-Fulani oligarchy. This group, till date, directly or indirectly determine their successors. Rather than pay deserving tributes to the Major that pulled the trigger that marked the unexpected change, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu's place in the throes of contemporary Nigerian history is yet to be properly appreciated. Similarly, one wonders what would have been the lot of the average core northerner, those in the Middle Belt and Nigerians generally if the coup had not occurred when it did. Would the north have achieved the monumental development strides it has today if the ultra-conservative elements had remained? What would have been the fate of the non Fulani of the north? Would the north have had more States than the south or dominated the military? Here lies the historical relevance of Nzeogwu in contemporary Nigeria.

[1] Peter Okeleke Nzeogwu, Major C. K. Nzeogwu: Fighting the Illusive Nigerian Enemy (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003), 23 – 25.

[2] Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu signed all his cheques and documents as Major C. K. Nzeogwu. See Peter Okeleke Nzeogwu, Major C. K. Nzeogwu, 26.

[3] Olusegun Obasanjo, Nzeogwu: An Intimate Portrait of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1987), 11.

- [4] Nigerian Army Education Corps and School (NAECS), History of the Nigerian Army, 1963 – 1992 (Abjua: Nigerian Army Headquarters, 1992), 67.
- [5] Major Kaduna Nzeogwu, Broadcast over Northern Broadcasting Service declaring Martial Law over Northern Region on 16th January, 1966.
- [6] General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi's acceptance speech as the Head of the Federal Military Government- 17/1/1966.
- [7] Police Special Branch Report on the 15 January 1966 coup quoted in Max Siollun, Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture, 1966 – 1976 (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 31.
- [8] Max Siollun, Oil, Politics and Violence, 32.
- [9] Speech by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu declaring martial law over the North quoted in A. H. M. Kirk Green, Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Source Book, Vol. 1 January 1966 – July 1967 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 127.
- [10] For more on the failure of the coup in the west and east, see Adewale Ademoyega, Why we Struck: the Story of the First Nigerian Coup (Ibadan: Evans Publishers, 1981). See also Ben Gbulie, Nigeria's Five Majors: Coup d'etat of 15th January 1966, First Inside Account (Onitsha: Africana Educational Publishers, 1981).
- [11] D. J. M. Muffet, Let the Truth be Told: The Coup d'etat of 1966 (Zaria: Hudahuda, 1982), 17.
- [12] Nigerian Tribune, July 2 1967.
- [13] Hafiz Momoh (ed), The Nigerian Civil war 1967 – 1970: History and Reminiscences (Ibadan: Bookman Publishers 2000), 737 – 739.
- [14] See Guardian, May 6 2007, cited in Max Siollun, Oil, Politics and Violence, 38.
- [15] Max Siollun, Soldiers of Fortune (Abuja: Cassava Republic Press Book, 2013), 76.
- [16] See Chibuike Uche, "Oil British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War", Journal of African History, Vol. 49 (2008), 111-35.