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‘Rangers FC Should Play Us Back Into the Nigerian Scene’: Igbo Identity and Rangers

FC of Nigeria, 1970-1990

By

Ugochukwu Ekemezie

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

through the Department of History

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for

the Degree of Master of Arts at the

University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario Canada

2022

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Nigeria, 1970-1990

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January 28, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Between 1970 and 1990, Rangers FC grappled with the difficult task of facilitating Igbo reintegration into Nigeria's social milieu. This was a postwar necessity owing to the dislocation of the Nigeria-Biafra War, which was fought between July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970, by the secessionist Igbo cultural group under the umbrella of the Republic of Biafra. However, where the insincere postwar Federal reintegration efforts failed, Rangers succeeded. This study focuses on examining the role of soccer as a reintegrating agent in a pluralistic postwar society like Nigeria. It argues that Rangers played an essential role in postwar Igbo psychological victories and healing experience, identity formation and dignified existence in Nigeria. Challenging existing scholarly arguments, it insists that Rangers being, at a time, an Igbo-dominated club does not make it an Igbo club. It highlights the changes in the club and it also attests to the migratory inclinations of the Igbo. It concludes that later, Rangers became less about celebrating a specific Igbo identity, but over time, they reflected a growing integration of Igbo people into the broader Nigerian society.

DEDICATION

For my mom, Margaret Okwudili Obi-Ekemezie (Hajiya)

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Despite studying remotely from Nigeria, my graduate experience at the University of Windsor has been remarkable, especially because of some people who made significant contributions to my journey. First, I would like to appreciate Dr. Miriam Wright for outrightly seeking to help me; and for patiently guiding, supporting with resources and challenging me throughout the period of this research. I am really grateful!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“All energies will now be bent to the task of reintegration and reconciliation.”¹

—General Yakubu Gowon, 1970.

On January 15, 1970, in a radio broadcast, Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria’s military leader (1966-1975), delivered a victory speech titled “The Dawn of National Reconciliation,” to mark the formal end of the Nigeria-Biafra war (July 6, 1967-January 15, 1970). The war was between Igbo majority Eastern Nigeria and Nigeria’s Hausa/Fulani-led military government. In this address, Gowon recounted events leading to the war, acknowledged the sufferings of the people of Biafra and tried to justify Nigeria’s action. Remarkably, he pronounced oxymoronicly that the war had “No victor. No vanquished” and recited the principles for the post-war efforts of Nigeria, popularly known as the 3Rs—Reintegration, Reconciliation and Reconstruction.² The above quote by Gowon reaffirms the Federal Military Government’s (FMG) commitment to its war mantra of national “unification and reintegration.” However, the sincerity of the FMG’s efforts towards the reintegration of the Igbo people has been questioned and its efforts successfully challenged as faulty with myriads of shortcomings. As a result, the alternative of self-reintegration became the final hope of the “vanquished” Igbo people into Nigeria’s social milieu.

Issues surrounding ethnic identity have been crucial in understanding patterns of inter-group relationships in ethnically diverse societies like Nigeria. Several scholars have studied the relationship between ethnic identity and soccer in various parts of the world including Europe, America and Africa. One of them, Chuka Onwumechili, considers this

¹ AHM Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook vol. 2* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 457-461.

² “Blueprint for postwar reconstruction” January 15, 1970, National Archives Enugu. Nigeria National Archives Ibadan CWC 1/2/12, “Blueprint for Post-War Reconstruction” [c.1970].

connection with war, especially the Nigeria-Biafran war.³ Though the multiple elements in ethnic identity have made it a cumbersome concept to clarify as Jean Phinney points out.⁴ Onwumechili invokes Henri Tajfel's social identity theory (SIT) to illuminate the relationship between the Igbo and the Enugu Rangers. He asserts that SIT provides a framework for Igbo identity and through this, Igbo identification with the Rangers FC—A soccer team founded in 1970 in Enugu—could be understood.⁵ Tajfel argues that through the use of stereotypes to exaggerate in-group similarities and differences between groups, individuals see their group membership as a source of pride, which enhances their feelings socially.⁶ Therefore, Tajfel's social identity concept demonstrates how the Igbo came to identify with the Rangers and how the club helped to boost their self-esteem, self-concept and self-image through their victories—a requirement to ensure the “dignified” and “no vanquished” attitude needed for reintegration after Biafra's surrender.

To locate the Rangers in the broader ethnic context requires an understanding of the club philosophy, formation, nature and activities at least within the period examined, 1970-1990.⁷ The club is widely perceived, in some circles, to have been formed based on of ethnic sentiment as “a representation of Igbo resistance against the rest of Nigeria” or as a “continuation of the war.”⁸ The club's philosophy also reveals that it was formed to provide

³ Chuka Onwumechili, “Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo Identity, and the Imagination of War,” Chuka Onwumechili and Gerald Akindes eds., *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 116-132.

⁴ Jean Phinney, “Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research.” *Psychological Bulletin* 108, no. 3 (1990), 499-514.

⁵ Chuka Onwumechili, “Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo Identity, and the Imagination of War,” Chuka Onwumechili and Gerald Akindes eds., *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 118.

⁶ Onwumechili analysis Henri Tajfel works in Onwumechili and Akindes eds., *Identity*, 120-121; Henri Tajfel and J. Turner, “The social identity theory of intergroup behavior,” in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, In S. Worchel and W. Austin eds. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7-24; Henri Tajfel, “Individuals and groups in social psychology,” *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1979), 183-90; Henri Tajfel, *Human groups and social categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

⁷ In this research, soccer is used instead of the commonplace “football” used in Nigeria because of the North American audience.

⁸ Chuka Onwumechili, “Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo Identity, and the Imagination of War,” Chuka Onwumechili and Gerald Akindes eds., *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

“morale anchorage” for the Igbo people in their efforts to “overcome the trauma of war and awaken their self-confidence and self-awareness” as they rebuilt their lives in post-war Nigeria.⁹ Popularly known as the Enugu Rangers, the Rangers International Football Club was formed in 1970 in the foremost Igbo city of Enugu, just at the end of the thirty months war. Its earliest composition of players, as well as support (including financial), remained largely Igbo, even decades after. Eventually, for the group, it became a recognized vehicle of ethnic identity and expression. However, this study argues that the Rangers played an essential role in postwar Igbo psychological victories and healing experiences, identity formation and dignified existence in Nigeria. Challenging existing scholarly arguments, it insists that the Rangers being, at a time, an Igbo-dominated club does not make it an Igbo club. It highlights the changes in the club and it also attests to the migratory inclinations of the Igbo. It concludes that later, the Rangers became less about celebrating a specific Igbo identity, but over time, they reflected a growing integration of Igbo people into the broader Nigerian society.

Through several activities, especially intra-national matches, the Rangers facilitated Igbo interactions with other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Reintegration involved the task of interactions and peaceful coexistence between groups in the Nigerian state. While studies on the Rangers focus on its ethnic orientation, consciousness and outlook, no particular study has focused on its contributions towards the self-integration efforts of the Igbo people into the post-war Nigerian social milieu. Studies on the Rangers that have appeared before this decade have tended to focus on the club as an Igbo representation, a vehicle for the expression of Igbo identity, and ethnic sentiment further exploited for ethno-nationalistic purposes.¹⁰

⁹ Paul Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War: Political and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland, 1970-1983*. (Nsukka: Great AP Express, 2009), 137.

¹⁰ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War*; Onwumechili, “Nigeria” 116-132; Chuka Onwumechili, Totty O. Totty and Leelanee Malin, “Nigeria,” in Jean-Michel De Waele, Suzan Gibril, Ekaterina Glorizova, Ramón Spaaij eds. *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics*. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 403-422.

However, emphasis on Igbo identification and sentiment do not provide sufficient explanation for the history behind the role and impact of the Rangers in the Igbo community and Nigeria at large in the post-war period. Considerations of ethnic inclusion and ways the Rangers helped the Igbo to overcome social differences and prejudices could provide a more encompassing explanation of the Rangers phenomenon and is a focus of this study.

This study examines the self-reintegration efforts of the Igbo through the Rangers as a significant example of the predominant Igbo self-help projects in post-war Nigeria, between 1970 to 1990. It emphasizes that despite the failure of the FMG to deliver on promises of reintegration, amidst heightened hopes of reconstruction and rehabilitation, the Rangers served as a vehicle of Igbo self-reintegration into Nigeria's social milieu. It also asserts that Igbo identification with the victories of the Rangers was vital both for psychological healing and stirring a "no vanquished" spirit and attitude among the defeated Igbo people for reintegration to be possible. By examining the Rangers during this period, the study hopes to situate the club within a wider context. It also brings academic attention to the social dimension of sports in general, and soccer in particular as a vehicle for both ethnic expression and inclusion, even in post-war societies.

The paper is divided into five thematic sections. The first section provides a brief review of the historiography on Igbo ethnic identity and ethnic identity generally and historiography on the Rangers. In this section, I intend to capture the proper conceptual and contextual framework for an understanding of Igbo identification with the Rangers in post-war Nigeria. It also examines existing historiography on the Rangers to locate a scholarly gap. The second section focuses on the socio-political and historical landscape of Nigeria, with a particular focus on the Igbo ethnic group. It examined the Nigeria-Biafra war to help understand the prevailing circumstance for the club's rise. It highlights inter-ethnic rivalry in colonial Nigeria and shows how ethno-socio-political rivalry played out in the

colonial period. The third section examines the Rangers, its origin, composition and activities to understand its attribution as representative of constructed Igbo identity. This section will consider how the clubs became a “morale anchorage” for a “vanquished” people and a vehicle of ethnic expression and assertion for the Igbo in post-war Nigeria as well as how other ethnic groups perceived the club. The fourth section explores the Rangers to assess how it was instrumental in informing ethnic interaction, inclusion and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Analyses of ethnic interactions through intra-national matches, prominent club rivalries, national support for the Rangers in African club competitions, the position of Igbo players from the Rangers in the national team (the Green Eagles), provides illumination into the social dimension of Igbo self-help efforts towards their self-reintegration. Finally, the last section will be a summary and conclusion. Overall, this study is intended to highlight the role of the Rangers as a vehicle of Igbo identity, assertion and inclusion in post-war Nigeria. It explores the discussions around how the club was perceived by other non-Igbo groups and the prevailing colonial socio-political climate. These are important scholarly gaps this study fills.

Herein, I used three categories of primary sources in addition to secondary literature on the subject matter. Newspapers are the chief primary source. Local newspapers such as *Daily Times*, *Daily Star*, *Satellite Newspaper*, *Nigeria Tribune*, *New Nigeria*, *Vanguard Nigeria* provide useful information on the Rangers and their national or ethnic outlook and provide important voices and sectional perceptions of the club. The *Daily Times* is Nigeria’s oldest national daily while it provides a national viewpoint of Nigeria, the latter two—*Nigeria Tribune*, *New Nigeria*—have sectional origins, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups respectively. They were both set up to cater for their group’s interests engendered by Nigeria’s cultural differences.¹¹ Other media sources, available online,

¹¹ See Eghosa Aimufua, “Press and National Integration: Analysis of the Role of the Nigerian Press in the Promotion of Nigerian National Identity,” PhD dissertation submitted to Cardiff University (June 2007).

including video documentary interviews of key actors in the formation and activities as well as their commentaries provide insightful perspectives on the team. The secondary sources include books and journal articles on the subject matter and the study area. Lastly, archival materials were also utilized for this study. They include records and documents of the Rangers which provides deeper insight into the activities of the club.

Historiography

Previously I discussed historiography on ethnic identity generally and Igbo ethnic Identity. Here, I will briefly touch on the Rangers, sports and nationalism/identity in general. In the discourse on sports generally and soccer in particular in the aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafran war, scholars tend to approach the Rangers from an ethnic perspective. Existing literature on the Rangers FC, which is credibly useful for examining the complexities of the post-war perception of the club, illuminates the relationship between soccer (the Rangers) and Igbo identification. Onwumechili, Totty and Malin in a case study approach examining the linkage of politics in Nigerian soccer, correctly allude to ethnic identification in soccer and equally the Igbo Identification with the Rangers.¹² Interestingly, this briefs readers on the history of ethnic-based rivalries in club soccer in Nigeria. Onwumechili reflects on how the Rangers represented the Igbo people and as a result, deemed Igbo resistance or “the continuation of the civil war.”¹³ Scholars like Paul Obi-Ani also contend that for the Igbo people, the war continued through the Rangers.¹⁴ However, this time, I argue that it was a war for the Igbo reintegration through sports and not succession leading to Igbo independence.

¹² Onwumechili, Totty and Malin, “Nigeria” 403-422.

¹³ Onwumechili, “Nigeria” 116-132.

¹⁴ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War*.

Though Obi-Ani's position that the Rangers provided "moral anchorage" as well as "psychological balm" for the healing of the Igbo people is true, however, the tendency to consider it only for ethnic assertion is worrisome as this could be perceived as sectional and divisive. It fails to stress on how this self-confidence was vital for the reintegration efforts and dealing with the stigma defeat of the "no vanquished" Igbo people into the national social fold.

Onwumechili in a separate study also explores various aspects of intra-national interactions in African soccer. The study stresses the intra-national relationship in African soccer as the core of soccer in the continent.¹⁵ Through this, African players across ethnic groups not only interact on the field of play but play as teammates on the same teams. This is an import of intra-national migration of soccer-players. However, ethnic diversity in soccer was less prominent in post-war Igbo homeland teams including the Rangers and Onwumechili attribute this to the "not as mobile" tendency of the other ethnic groups who do not migrate across regions as much as the Igbo do.¹⁶ Alongside the absence of an official ethnic-restriction policy by the club's management, this challenges the theory that the Rangers was an Igbo outfit because it was dominated by Igbo players for years.

Wiebe Boer in *The History of Football in Nigeria: A Story of Heroes and Epics* remarkably traces the origin and development of soccer as a cultural and unifying force in Nigeria.¹⁷ Examining how, though a colonial import, soccer became quickly indigenized such that the social history of Nigeria is incomplete without the significant story of this game. Drawing on the qualities of organized soccer, Boer shows how it was an important tool for anti-colonial protest, nationalism, construction of an "imagined communities," national

¹⁵ Chuka Onwumechili, *Africa's Elite Football: Structure, Politics, and Everyday Challenges* (London: Routledge, 2020).

¹⁶ Onwumechili, "Nigeria" 120.

¹⁷ Wiebe Boer, *The History of Football in Nigeria: A Story of Heroes and Epics*. Ibadan: Bookcraft, 2018.

identity, integration and nation-building. This book provides an important narrative on this organized game and key historical actors, including colonial institutions and Nigeria's nationalists and leaders, who influenced its prominent rise in Nigeria. Limited to its scope, the book did not examine soccer in post-Nigeria/Biafra war era Nigeria nor the Rangers. Furthermore, on the interplay of soccer as a tool of nationalism and identity, *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics*, draws from continents and countries to highlights cases of soccer "as [a] potent source of, and platform for, social and political distinction, regulation and self-expression."¹⁸ Whether it's in Spain or in Egypt, Nigeria, among others, the implication of soccer matches "goes beyond the limited sporting arena."

The approach in the above primary literature feeds the Rangers narrative as one that is symbolic of Igbo nationalism. However, works on the Rangers neglect its power to "command" the interactions of the various ethnic groups and the unspoken, silent yet salient, drive towards ethnic inclusion, interactions and peaceful coexistence. Therefore, they fail to acknowledge the Rangers' success toward fostering the reintegration efforts of the Igbo in post-war Nigeria's social milieu.

¹⁸ Ramon Spaaij, Jean-Michel De Waele, Suzan Gibril and Ekaterina Glorizova, "Football and Politics: Between the Local and the Global" in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Football and Politics*, edited by Jean-Michel De Waele, Suzan Gibril, Ekaterina Glorizova, Ramón Spaaij (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 8.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF NIGERIA

As Europeans claimed colonial territory on the African continent in the 19th century, they drew boundaries that did not align with pre-existing ethno-cultural groups who lived there. The colonial legacy created overwhelming crises of “national” identity formation, political instability, and ethnic-based conflicts.¹⁹ Geopolitical colonial creations like Nigeria and the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) provides a veritable space for examining the above common denominators. The 1914 amalgamation of the territory now known as Nigeria by the British colonial administration was the climax of its gradual but eventual occupation of lands inhabited by over 250 ethnic groups since the nineteenth century.²⁰ Without consent, these groups were “herded together”, as Max Siollun decried in “an unwieldy and non-consensual union.” Falola and Heaton explained that until the 1930s many Nigerians did not identify/see themselves as “Nigerians” while European-educated nationalists saw the territory as both “arbitrary and illegitimate.”²¹

The rhetoric of foremost Nigerian nationalists expressed the nature of inter-group relations. Future Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, would in 1947 state that Nigeria “existed as one country only on paper. It is still far from being united.”²² Another prominent Northern politician, Ahmadu Bello called Nigeria “the mistake of 1914” while Obafemi Awolowo of Yoruba extraction lamented that “Nigeria is not a nation; it is a mere geographical

¹⁹ Ferdinand O. Ottoh, “Ethnic Identity and Conflicts in Africa,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Politics, Governance and Development* Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba and Toyin Falola eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 335-352.

²⁰ Chima J. Korieh, *The Land Has Changed: History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria* (Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 2010), 59. Pax Britannica means “territories were brought into submission only by the use of force” in Falola, *A History* 92.

²¹ Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria’s Military Coup Culture (1966–1976)* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 12; Falola, *A History*, 137.

²² Chukwuemeka Onwubu, “Ethnic Identity, Political Integration, and National Development The Igbo in Diaspora” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13, no. 3 (1975), 399; Siollun, *Oil*

expression.”²³ Though over 250 identified ethnic groups, three distinct cultural and linguistic groups constitute the largest ethnic groups with roughly two-thirds of its population—Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo.²⁴ In Northern Nigeria, the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups constitute the largest ethnic groups. Commonly referred to as the “Hausa-Fulani”, they have through intermarriage and cultural assimilation since the Islamic jihad of Usman dan Fodio in 1809 blurred the distinction between the duo by the time of British conquest of Sokoto Caliphate in 1903. Also, unlike their southern counterpart who are predominantly Christians, they primarily identify with Islam and were traditional and socially conservative in disposition. The south of Nigeria is inhabited by the two dominant Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups in the southwest and southeast respectively. Historian Siollun describes these groups interestingly: the former as “proud and culturally rich” and the latter “energetic and vibrant”.²⁵ Significantly, unlike other groups, the Igbo are “highly mobile” and had a “significant [regional] out-migration.”²⁶

Hemmed together and administered in three regions—Northern, Western Eastern and Midwest—ethnic differences began to breed “mutual suspicion and hostility” and tensions among groups. This became a source of frustration that set the stage for ethnic conflicts thus hampering Nigeria’s “organic” growth.²⁷ From the 1950s, bitter political confrontations triggered ethnic tensions that imploded into unrest and outright attacks along ethnic. This created a political culture of violence and divisions that continued in post-colonial Nigeria. Comparatively, Siollun asserts that, unlike the British model, Nigeria’s political landscape

²³ Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 47-48;

²⁴ Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), 21.

²⁵ Falola, *A History*, 61; Siollun, *Oil*, 12.

²⁶ Chuka Onwumechili, “Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo Identity, and the Imagination of War,” Chuka Onwumechili and Gerald Akindes eds., *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 118; Korieh, *The Land* 4.

²⁷ Falola, *A History*, 2; Siollun, *Oil*, 12.

was fragmented along regional and ethnic lines and worsened/accentuated by religious differences.²⁸ Summarily, Achebe captures the historico-political landscape of Nigeria thus:

“Nothing in Nigeria's political history captures her problem of national integration more graphically than the chequered fortune of the word tribe in her vocabulary. Tribe has been accepted at one time as a friend, rejected as an enemy at another, and finally smuggled in through the back-door as an accomplice.”²⁹

Many examples are illustrative colonial preludes to the Nigeria-Biafran war. Most prominent is the Kano Riot of 1953. This was instigated by the southern moves in 1953 to secure independence for Nigeria in 1956. When they failed to convince an alignment with the Northern delegates at the Parliament in Lagos, the Yoruba nationalist leader, Awolowo and other delegates visited the North to campaign directly.³⁰ However, their arrival triggered four days of rioting against southern immigrants in Kano Sabon Gari (strangers quarter).³¹ Diamond explains that “Though not the first instance of interethnic violence in the North, it was the bloodiest, and foreshadowed an even more traumatic confrontation in Kano thirteen years later that would accelerate the slide to civil war.”³² It resulted in the death of 36 people (21 were of Igbo extraction) with more than 200 injured. Diamond informs that a massacre of hundreds of Igbo people was only slightly averted.³³

Fear of domination and resentment factored deeply in intergroup relations and the Igbo cultural group would suffer direly. Diamond aptly explains that the Kano riot was

²⁸ Siollun, *Oil*; John Campbell and Matthew T. Page, *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 69.

²⁹ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983) 5.

³⁰ Siollun, *Oil* 156.

³¹ The British shielded the north from the advance of Christian missionaries and Western education from the south. They fanned ethnic prejudice by housing southern immigrants to the north in segregated living areas commonly known as sabon gari, or “strangers’ quarters.” see: Meir, *This House* 11.

³² Diamond, *Class* 49.

³³ Diamond, *Class* 49.

essentially an outpouring of resentment by the indigenous Hausa-Fulani population against their educationally advantaged southern neighbor, whose successful migrant kiths and kin now lived with them.³⁴ In 1955, Northern Premier, Ahmadu Bello and leaders introduced the famous Northernization policy. Though bitterly received in the south, it meant that in the Northern civil service, appointment would be North first.³⁵ This particularly harmed the Igbo people more, especially because they constituted the largest non-indigenous population of migrants in the urban center of both Northern and Western regions--more than one-third.³⁶ Since colonial times, there has been widespread Igbo out-migration, a quality that is now an intrinsic social feature. Between 1930-1950, they were the educated, the favorites of the British colonial administration to fill “temporal demand for semi-skilled labor,” and “most prominent and commercially successful.”³⁷ This bred Igbo resentment with countless episodes of both organized attacks and spontaneous riots targeted against them. The Igbo clannishness, outburst of confidence and chest-thumping pride or behavior and crude showiness, noisy exhibitionism and disregard for humility and quietness were offensive and only worsened their relations with other ethnic groups.

Thirteen years after the Kano Riot, in 1966, open hostilities against the Igbo would be resurrected. Antagonistic feelings of ethnic animosity, suspicions and fear of domination eclipsed statements and actions of regional leaders even in the wake of independence in 1960. By 1966, political rivalries worsened and degenerated into civil strife and many scholars and

³⁴ Diamond, *Class* 49.

³⁵ Dele Babalola, “Secession and Self-Determination in Nigeria” in *The Political Economy of Federalism in Nigeria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 116.

³⁶ see: J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 16; Falola, *A History* 125; Meir, *This House* 11.

³⁷ Obinna Muoh, “Displacement and Identity: Igbo Diaspora in Canada, 1965-1985,” MA thesis in History, University of Windsor, Ontario (2012), 18; Diamond, *Class* 49; Achebe, *The Trouble* 46; Korih, *The Land* 89; Siollun, *Oil* 12, 16. See: Diamond, *Class* 26: “Christian missionaries were forbidden in the emirates and Western education was severely restricted, in order to forestall the emergence of what Governor Lugard termed the ‘utter disrespect for British and native ideals alike’ that was beginning to be seen in the South.”

commentators believed that these events threatened to split the young Republic at its seams.³⁸ However, on January 15, 1966, a group of junior officers, mostly of Igbo extraction staged a violent intervention, a military coup. Despite initial “overt jubilation” by the general population, the mood would change as names of the dead began to leak.³⁹ Top politicians and military officers from all tripartite divisions were casualties except from the Eastern region—no dead Igbo politician. Achebe explained that the vacuum of information encouraged gossip and rumor that led to the “Igbo coup” narrative.⁴⁰ Though the coup plotters could not take the reins of power, the Igbo-domination conspiracy matured with the rise of an Igbo-led regime of Maj-Gen JTG Aguiyi-Ironsi, who had quelled the rebellion. In June 1966, a counter-coup led by northern officers was staged and Yakubu Gowon became military leader. Unfortunately, between June to October, inter-ethnic tensions spiraled out of control and migrant Igbo people became scapegoats again. They were massacred in their thousands by their hosts in Northern Nigeria while the government did nothing to halt it. Commonly called the *pogrom*, it led to the mass exodus of more than a million refugees back to their ancestral homeland in the Eastern Nigeria.⁴¹

The Igbo predicament and unresolved differences between Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, led to the declaration of the Republic Biafra on May 30, 1967.⁴² The Federal Military Government retaliated with a

³⁸ Chinua Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 64-65; See Adewale Ademoyega, *Why we Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nig Ltd, 1981); Alexander A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Pub, 1980).

³⁹ Ademoyega, *Why we Struck*, 87.

⁴⁰ Achebe, *The Trouble* 66; Emefienna Ezeani, *In Biafra Africa Died: The Diplomatic Plot* (London: Veritas Lumen Publishers, 2013), 21-37.

⁴¹ Ezeani, *In Biafra* 46, 95; Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 67; John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 65-88; Lasse Heerten and A. Dirk Moses, “The Nigeria-Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide,” in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970*, A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten eds. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 7.

⁴² Though the narrative of northern and federal-oriented newspapers described Ojukwu as a rebel leader, yet Biafra received overwhelming support from the Igbo, who identified with it as their nation and volunteered to fight in the Biafran forces swearing never to rejoin Nigeria even in death. For them, it was a fight for survival. See: “War diary,” *New Nigerian WAR SOUVENIR EDITION*, 1970.

“police action” that plunged the two sides into a war from July 6, 1967 to January 15, 1970. The war casualties range between 1-3 million, several other injured and malnourished children, and the massive destruction of Igboland, the epicenter of the war.⁴³ In a national broadcast, Gowon declared the war “No victor. No vanquish” and stipulated the federal postwar response of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (3Rs).

⁴³ Heerten, “The Nigeria-Biafra War” 1.

CHAPTER 3: THE FLYING ANTELOPE: THE ENUGU RANGERS FC, 1970-1990

After the devastating Nigeria-Biafra War, the Rangers Football Club International (popularly known as Enugu Rangers) had a huge impact on soccer in Nigeria, and on Igbo reintegration efforts. Between 1970 to 1990, they reached their peak, recording outstanding success both in the intra-national league and international (African) championship competitions. They won an unprecedented number of games, competitions and brought home several national and African titles. The influence of the club on Nigeria's national team, the Green Eagles, was significant as well. Several of its players were instrumental in the success of the national team in continental and other international matches and competitions, including World Cup tournaments. As a postwar Igbo-dominated club located in the Igbo capital city of Enugu, the Igbo cultural group identified with the soccer team as an "Igbo club" and it served its effort of soothing the wounds of the war, providing psychological healings, boosting morale, restoring their dignity and preserving their pride, and facilitating the self-powered re-absorption efforts into Nigeria's social milieu.

Enugu Rangers: Origin and Founding

The Enugu Rangers, nicknamed the "Flying Antelope," was founded in 1970, at the end of the Nigeria-Biafra war in Enugu by the East-Central State Government. Some sources explain that it is difficult to pinpoint the exact date for its formation. One version cites January 29, 1970, another April 1970 and Paul Obi-Ani speculates that it may have been inaugurated in May 1970 at the Sports Hall of the East Central State Council in Enugu.⁴⁴ However, Chief Jerry Enyeazu, of Igbo extraction and first Sports Administrator of the State, explained that Rangers started in January 1970, probably on 29th January as Okey Anyichie's

⁴⁴ Okwudili Chukwuma Nwosu and Emmanuel Ugwuerua, "Strategies towards the rejuvenation of Enugu Rangers International football club of Nigeria," *International Journal of Physical Education, Sports and Health* 2015; 2(1), 195; Paul Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War: Political and Economic Reconstruction of Igboland, 1970-1983*. (Nsukka: Great AP Express, 2009), 138.

Football in Nigeria: The Coal City Connection sets. It was launched on Saturday, May 30, 1970, with a friendly match with visiting Midwest State P & T Rockets. The newly-organized team won by three goals to one in this first-ever inter-state friendly soccer match to be played in Enugu since war ended. Coincidentally, this commemorated the third anniversary of the Biafran declaration.⁴⁵ The Rangers was originally reported in the press as the “Black Rocks,” which was a pre-war Eastern Region team.⁴⁶ It was established by Chief Enyeazu upon his appointment as the Director of Sports for the East Central State.⁴⁷ Enyeazu was tasked with the responsibility of reviving sports generally in the State at the time when athletes including players of Igbo extraction (especially those who played in different parts of Nigeria before they were displaced by the Pogrom and war) were uncertain of their future and hence “roamed” the streets of Enugu in search of unavailable opportunities.⁴⁸

On February 25, 1970, Enyeazu approved the recruitment of athletes and players which was conducted at the old Enugu Sports Stadium. According to Obi-Ani, it was originally established as the “Rangers Sports Club” to cater to the sports needs of the East Central State and participated in athletics, boxing, volleyball, netball, hockey, basketball and soccer competitions in the State with registered members in various sports.⁴⁹ By 21 March 1970, these athletes from the East Central State registered to participate in the All-Nigerian Police Athletics Championship held at the Police College Ground, Lagos.⁵⁰ The core of the

⁴⁵ Linus Anyanwu “Enugu Rangers subdue Rockets,” *New Nigeria*, June 5, 1970, 10; Edwin Eze and Emma Okocha, *The Ranger International Football Club: History of A People* (Enugu: Gomslam Int’l, 2017), 7; Eze E. *Satellite Newspaper*, Wednesday 7th August, 1985 cited in Okwudili and Ugwuera, “Strategies” 195; Okey Anyichie, *Football in Nigeria: The Coal City Connection* (Enugu, Nigeria: ABIC Books, 2013).

⁴⁶ “New Football Club Formed in Enugu” *New Nigeria*, July 15, 1970, 11; “Enugu Rocks Beat Lagos 2-1,” *New Nigeria*, July 17, 1970, 11.

⁴⁷ Jerry Enyeazu was the first Director of Sports in the Eastern Region (1958-1967). After serving as Director of Sports, East Central State from 1970, he also became the first Director of the National Sports Commission (NSC) from 1972 where, in 1973, successfully organized the first National Sports Festival (NSF) in Lagos and with the creation of Imo State in 1976, he was instrumental, as Sports Director in revamping sports in the state. Eze and Okocha, *The Ranger* 6.

⁴⁸ Nwosu and Ugwuera, “Strategies” 195.

⁴⁹ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 138.

⁵⁰ “East Participating in Nigeria Police Athletics,” *New Nigeria*, March 21, 1970, 11.

players that formed the Enugu Rangers' eventually became prominent. Postwar Igboland was a very difficult and critical period for the Igbo cultural group. Enyeazu ensured that the Rangers' motto—*Through Difficulties to the Heights*—embodying its mission, vision and history, reflected this situation with an inspiring tone.

Remarkably, the Rangers drew its name from the Biafran war efforts. It was named after the Biafran paramilitary organization called “The Rangers” or “Forest Markers”. “The Rangers” was established by the Biafran military force as an intelligentsia unit charged with the responsibilities of sustaining the war through psychological rejuvenation, sabotaging the operation of the Nigerian federal forces, intensifying guerilla warfare and ensuring the execution of Biafran propaganda in the grassroots by addressing rallies that were aimed at keeping the war spirit alive. Their intelligence activities were required by the Biafran Army before they engaged in any battle. Jerry Enyeazu, who was commissioned a Lt.-Colonel of the Biafran force, was responsible for organizing the more than 2,017 undergraduates and youths, who could not join the war at the war front, to form this paramilitary. As head, he named the group, gave them some basic self-defense training and briefed them on their definitive operations.⁵¹ The future course of the war depended on them, especially inside the Biafran enclave, at the time morale was low and the people feared extermination if over-run by the Nigerian federal troops. It is not unsurprising that, in postwar Nigeria, when he became East Central State’s Sports Administrator, he resurrected the name for the sports side.

The Aim of the Formation of Enugu Rangers

Aside from the need to provide new opportunities for dislocated athletes and soccer players or the necessity to resuscitate sports in postwar Igboland, the aim of the club is revealing. In a January 15, 1980 interview published in a local press, *Satellite Newspaper*,

⁵¹ Eze E. *Satellite Newspaper* 195; Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 138; Ikenna Nzimiro, *Nigeria Civil War: A Study in Class Conflict* (Enugu: Frontline Publishing Comp., 1982), 100-101.

Chief Enyeazu explained that: “I felt that since Rangers of war could not shoot us into international recognition, then Rangers Football Club should play us back into the Nigerian scene,...but the task would be a difficult one.”⁵² “My remote aim of forming the Club,” he adds, “was to provide an immediate vehicle of expression of national awareness and belonging for the I[g]bo-man, whose future and faith in the national course was then still uncertain. I am happy that several years later, that bold step was crystallized and the Rangers Football Club has lived up to expectation.”⁵³ As he sold this idea, many Igbo people bought into it, even providing assistance and making financial donations that ensured the success of the club. Eventually, the Rangers became synonymous with the Igbo people in character and spirit. Chuka Onwumechili emphasized that, for the first time, as a cultural group, the Igbo identified with soccer and even a club, the Rangers.⁵⁴

The composition of the Rangers at the beginning in 1970 was mainly Igbo players. For years, this remained until in 1978 when a non-Igbo player, Adokiye Amiesiemaka joined; and in 1980, an international player from Brazil, Da Silva Pereira joined and two other Brazilians, Robert Paulo Diaz and Denilson Custodio joined as coaches.⁵⁵ The pioneer lineup players of the club include: Cyril Okosieme (Goalkeeper), Ernest Ufele (Right Full Back), John “Wheeler” Nwosu (Full Back), Peter Okeke (Right Defensive Midfielder), Luke “Jazz Buchana” Okpala (Central Defender), and Matthias Obianika, Kenneth Abana (Inside Right), Dominic Nwobodo (Central Forward), Chukwuma Igweonwu (Inside Left), Shedrack Ajero, Ogidi Ibeabuchi, Emmanuel Ojirika were the forward players, Daniel Amobi Amadi Anyiam (Coach).⁵⁶ Coach Anyiam was the first Vice-Captain of the colonial Nigeria national team,

⁵² Eze E. *Satellite Newspaper* 195.

⁵³ Eze E. *Satellite Newspaper* 195.

⁵⁴ Chuka Onwumechili, “Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo Identity, and the Imagination of War,” Chuka Onwumechili and Gerald Akindes eds., *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 117.

⁵⁵ Eze and Okocha, *The Ranger* 24.

⁵⁶ Uzor Maxim Uzoatu, “How Enugu Rangers Won The War For The Vanquished,” *PM News*, 11 June 2020, <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2020/06/11/how-enugu-rangers-won-the-war-for-the-vanquished/>

the UK Tourist, when it was established in 1949 and in 1970 became the Principal State Coach of the East Central State and later a selector of the soccer federation, the Nigeria Football Association (renamed the Nigeria Football Federation in 2008).⁵⁷ This accomplished sportsman was assisted by Paulinus Nzerem, Enugu Divisional Football Coach.⁵⁸ Other foundation players were Peter Okeke, Emmanuel Ojirika, Alphonsus Ikyume, John Nwosu, George Okoro, Sam Nwachukwu, Sam Okoh, Emeka Okonkwo, Patrick Ozuah, Raymond Ohaeri, C. Okonji, Nwabueze Nwankwo and Ben Offor. Many of these players were ex-Biafran soldiers, who had played for various pre-war clubs and some, like Nwobodo and Achebe were part of the Biafran operation “Win the War Football Campaign” that trained under Coach Anyim in late 1968 before the project was called off after Nigerian soldiers invaded Onne and Uzuakoli.⁵⁹

At the inception of the Rangers, Enyeazu appointed top management officials in the Sports Council, who gave their assistance as coaches, organizers as well as sought for philanthropists to support the club. They included Andy Okoro as Club Chairman, Tony Ojielo as PRO and Team Manager, player Cyril Okosieme doubled as Team Secretary, and Mrs. Julie “Madam Rangers” Alale was its Welfare Officer.⁶⁰ The ex-officio members were Tony Nzeribe, Ngozi Anyakora, Isaac Nnado and Chief Jonathan Boytie Ogufere.⁶¹ Enyeazu explained that

⁵⁷ Boer, *The History* 61; Kunle Solaja, “Lifeline for forgotten national heroes,” *Super Sports*, 10 June 2011, https://supersport.com/football/nigeria50/news/110504/Lifeline_for_forgotten_national_heroes

⁵⁸ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 139.

⁵⁹ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 5, 8; Madiebo, *The Nigerian*, 313-319.

⁶⁰ Julie’s husband, Philip Alale was executed in Enugu alongside Victor Banjo, Emmanuel Ifeajuna on 24 Sept 1968 for coup plots. See: Nelson Ottah, *Rebel against Rebel* (Lagos: Manson and Company, 1981), 59-61.

⁶¹ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 139; Okwudili, “Strategies”, 195; Popularly known by his initials, “J.B.”, Ogufere was the Controller of the Post and Telegraph Department in postwar East Central State and a sports enthusiast who, alongside a P & T Engineer Austin Otiti, founded the Enugu P & T Vasco da Gama Football Club in 1970. Alongside Enugu Rangers, the club represented the East Central State in national championships and had their historical tales of rivalry with their derby matches.

As Director of Sports of the war-torn East Central State, I saw the situation of these players as a serious challenge. There was no money! But there was goodwill. And so with the help of such philanthropists as Andy Okoro, then of the UTC, Enugu, Mrs Julie Alale, Gilbert Ofodile, and Mr Iloba of the Nigerian Police etc. I was able to organize these boys into what I christened “RANGERS FOOTBALL CLUB OF Enugu”⁶²

Despite the economic cost of the war on the Igbo people, the economic policy of the FMG worsened their harrowing condition during postwar reconstruction. The government, after five months reluctantly issued the paltry sum of twenty pounds (£20) irrespective of the amount of money an individual had in the bank. As a result, the conditions of the already impoverished people were further worsened and the Rangers lacked the financial capacity to engage fully in competitive soccer.⁶³ “The team lacked adequate training kits,” Obi-Ani recounts, “like jerseys and playing boots. Thus, at the beginning, some of the players played barefoot and with un-identical jerseys during matches.” Corroborating, Enyeazu recollects that “The boys trained with their trousers folded. They had no balls, no jerseys and boots, the first set of shorts were made from 50 yards of white baft donated by Mr Ofodile and Mrs Alale from the rehabilitation stores.”⁶⁴ The days were indeed difficult, rough yet hopeful for this once prosperous and independent people.

To meet the financial burden to acquire proper soccer kits, Enyeazu and John A. Egwu, a Pharmacist and founder of the Onitsha Red Devils, approached several Igbo people and businessmen including Enugu transporter and businessman Chief A.W. Ibe and Chief

⁶² Jerry Enyeazu interview, *Daily Star*, Monday 15th January, 1980 cited in Okwudili and Ugwuera, “Strategies” 195.

⁶³ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 25.

⁶⁴ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 139; Jerry Enyeazu interview, *Daily Star*, Monday 15th January, 1980 cited in Okwudili and Ugwuera, “Strategies” 195.

Michael Ilodibe of Ekene Dili Chukwu Motors. According to Okwudili and Ugwuera, Chief Ibe supplied all the funds for the running of the club including an initial five hundred pounds (£500) used to establish the Club properly with boots, jerseys etc.⁶⁵ However, Obi-Ani asserts that he gave the sum of twenty-five pounds (£25) to purchase jerseys and later “donated the sum of seven hundred pounds (£700) towards the overall resuscitation of the Sports Commission.”⁶⁶ Ukpabi Asika, the Administrator of East Central State, is credited with buying the first complete set of playing boots for the team. In addition, through the work and influence of Mrs Alale at the East Central State’s Rehabilitation Commission, the players were given food stipends and were served meals in groups under the auspices of the Commission. Later they were given full-time appointments with the State’s Sports Commission.⁶⁷ While it's difficult to tell precisely the donations, especially financial, they were significant and proved a tremendous help to the club.

The Victories and Reorganization of Enugu Rangers, 1970-1976

Between 1970 and 1976, the Rangers witnessed significant changes and results that turned the fortune of the club around. From April to July 1970, the team played some significant matches that established its presence in the State, qualified her to represent the State in national championships and attracted rival club players to the team. Before the inter-state friendly match against the P & T Rockets of Benin, the Rangers played other local teams in the East Central State. On May 2, 1970, they played their first match against Aba Giant Killers at the old Enugu Stadium, winning by a lone Alphonsus Ikyume goal. A return leg match was played at the Aba Sports Stadium on May 16. However, this was a remarkable experience for the large crowd of spectators who found a worthy distraction from their war

⁶⁵ Okwudili and Ugwuera, “Strategies”, 195.

⁶⁶ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 139.

⁶⁷ Victor Ude, “Black Rocks now in camp feed from relief materials,” *New Nigerian*, 10 September, 1970; Emeka Ed Keazor, “Unleashed: The Enugu Rangers Revolution (1970-1977),” filmed at Igbo Conference, video, 6:09, 17 June, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOpCMNogAPc>; Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 139.

miseries.⁶⁸ Anyichie explains that in the postwar period, Enugu assumed a prominent position in soccer and attracted many teams in the State for competitions like Chidi Ebere Cup and Lt. Colonel Abdul Rahman Momodu Cup.⁶⁹

For the Rangers, Eze and Okocha recount, this became an avenue for the recruitment of players from other local clubs in the State and beyond, all Igbo players. Ogidi Ibeabuchi played for Onitsha Red Devils. Nwabueze Nwankwo joined the Rangers from Abakaliki Spitfires XI after a friendly match on June 12, 1970; and Godwin Adimachukwu joined after another friendly match with Onitsha Red Devils on June 20. On 27 June, in another friendly against the Lagos ECN played at the Enugu Township stadium, which the Rangers won 2-1, they recruited Ernest Ufele and Luke Okpala, while Teddy Anikputa and Emeka Onyedika joined from Ministry of Finance FC (MINFIN) Enugu. By 1971, these key players (including Godwin Nwosu, Emmanuel Okala were drawn from local clubs) had joined the pioneer players and they became the bedrock of the team. Significantly, over the years, its main rival in Enugu, P & T Vasco da Gama became the Rangers' major source for recruiting players. Eze and Okocha list up to seven players that migrated to the Rangers—Stanley Okoronkwo, Patrick Ekeji, Damian Odo, Charles Okonkwo, Tony Orji, Uche Nwachukwu and Emesi Okereke among others.⁷⁰ Schools in the state were also another important early source of recruiting players especially after the 1971 Academics Soccer Championship, the Manuwa/Adebajo Cup also known as the Principal's Cup in Nigeria.⁷¹

The first major national competition that the Rangers participated in was the Amachree Cup Competition held at the City Stadium, Onikan, Lagos from March 1-15, 1971. The team, alongside P & T Vasco Da Gama FC, qualified to represent the East Central State.

⁶⁸ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 19.

⁶⁹ Anyichie *Football* 47-60 cited in Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 11.

⁷⁰ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 19-2; Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 138-139.

⁷¹ "Challenge Cup starts in July," *New Nigeria*, June 12, 1971, 11.

The latter played the opening match losing 4-3 to ACB FC, thus leaving only the Rangers to represent the State. Other teams in the competition included WNDC Ibadan, Ports Authority Lagos, Nigerian Army XI of Lagos, Mighty Jets of Jos and Vipers of Benin.⁷² On March 3, 1971, the Rangers played WNDC Ibadan, the team founded in the 1950s won the Nigerian Challenge Cup nine times and also held the unbroken record of winning the Ibadan city Division League competition from 1960-1972. Rangers beat WNDC 3-2 and ACB Lagos 4-3 in their subsequent match, thanks to Dominic Nwobodo's finishing goal, pushing them to the second semi-finals against the Nigerian Army XI of Lagos. Anyichie explains that Nigerian Army XI of Lagos, favorites to win, was reputed as the most expensively equipped soccer outfit in Nigeria and fielded star players like Paul Hamilton, Inuwa Rigogo (Nigeria's national team goalkeeper), Okon Bassey, Mohammed Lawal, Ganiyu Salihu, Segun Oladimeji, Willy Bazuaye, and Kenneth Olayombo. As the star attraction of the competition, many people predicted an easy win over this one-year-old club.⁷³ Yet "the men from Enugu," the *Daily Times* reported, "cannot be expected to be mere stepping stones. They intend to fight every inch and win, and they have as much material for the job as the Army."⁷⁴ In the end, the Rangers gave the Nigerian Army team a humiliating 2-1 defeat.⁷⁵

With this victory, the Rangers supporters celebrated in a carnival-style, Obi-Ani narrates. The match was dubbed by some soccer analysts as the "the final before the final' of the competition," and it shut them into the finals as well as reawakened and reinvigorated Igbo sense of resilience and fighting spirit.⁷⁶ In the final match played on Monday, 15 March 1971, they defeated the Lagos Port Authority team and the *Daily Times* report headline "screamed": *Abana is the hero: 3-0*.⁷⁷ Kenneth Abana (scoring one goal and assisting two

⁷² Owolabi Olori, "Enugu Rangers Labour to Lone Goal victory," *New Nigeria*, 27 Sept. 1971, 15.

⁷³ See *Daily Times*, 2 March, 1971; Anyichie *Football* 54-58 cited in Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 36-39.

⁷⁴ See *Daily Times*, 13 March, 1971.

⁷⁵ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 140.

⁷⁶ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 140.

⁷⁷ "Abana is the hero: 3-0" *Daily Times*, 16 March, 1971.

more, was the Player of the Match) alongside the squad's heroic display made the Rangers the first team to win the Amacharee Cup at its inception in 1971. The Port team were the first winners of the Nigerian Challenge Cup competition in 1945 when it began and fielded star players like Bobo Mordi, Tunde Agbaniko, Edet Ohiri and Dangerman Okonji.⁷⁸ Thus, in only one year, the Rangers was automatically qualified to represent Nigeria in the 1971 African Cup of Champions Clubs Competition.⁷⁹

Their participation in the African Club Championship was historic for the club and much more for the Igbo people whose hearts were now won. Their first match was against the Army team of Niger Republic, Secteur VI. Though this ended in a draw, the second leg match was played at the King George V Stadium, Onikan, Lagos ending 1-0 in favor of the Rangers. The second team the Rangers played was the Kaloun Stars of Guinea. The first leg ended 3-3 with goals by Nwobodo, Igweonwu and Abana. The second leg was monumental. It was played at the old Enugu Sports Stadium. This was the first international fixture to be played in postwar Igboland (the only one played in this competition) and with Dominic Nwobodo's two goals the Rangers won 2-1. However, this match was remarkable for soccer enthusiasts, supporters of the Rangers and Igbo people in particular and they demonstrated this economically despite their poverty. A total of 21,650 fans watched the match and the East Central State realized £15,450 (the State had paid the sum of £3,500 to the Nigerian Football Association to allow the match to be played in Enugu). Obi-Ani asserts that this match became the most financially profitable soccer match in Nigeria. Though the Stationery Stores FC of Lagos match against Asante Kotoko of Ghana at the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria earlier in June 1970 was watched by 35,000 spectators, less than £10,000 was realized.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 39.

⁷⁹ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 140.

⁸⁰ "Record Sale At Rangers Match", *Lagos Daily Times*, June 3, 1971, 22; Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 141.

This match demonstrated that the Rangers had through its success, gradually won the hearts of the Igbo people, commanded their overwhelming support and spurred the progress of soccer in Enugu. Although the Rangers was kicked out in the quarterfinals, they were champions of hearts. The Rangers lost more championship cups even to its two major rival clubs, WNDC of Ibadan and Mighty Jets of Jos, and ended the soccer seasons with no trophies until 1974. In the 1971 National Challenge Cup Competition, it lost 2-1 to the former and in the following year lost the Nigeria Football League (NFL) to the latter. According to Obi-Ani, in 1972, under the leadership of Commodore Edwin Kentebe, the NFA commenced the NFL on a home and away match basis. At the end of the league in 1973, the Rangers was tied on the same points aggregate with Mighty Jets of Jos. However, the league title was awarded to the latter on goal superiority.⁸¹

From 1972 to 1974, several challenges necessitated the reorganization of the State Sports Commission and the club. In 1972, Enyeazu moved to Lagos to become the Director of the National Sports Commission in Lagos and after the 1973 season, Clifford Eneli replaced him as Director of Sports in the State. A new management team was constituted by Barrister B.S.C Nzenwa (Chairman), Maurice Ezeudoye (Team Manager), and Chief A.W. Ibe (Life President). The same year, the Rangers suffered its first major crisis which resulted in the resignation of its goalkeeper, Okosieme and team reorganization. It also triggered the need to recruit a second generation of players to replace the retiring foundation players, some of whom started playing in the 1950s or 60s. Obi-Ani speculates that about eight of them were dropped. Secondary School lads, who played at the 1971 Academicals Soccer Championship, became the hope of the club including Christian Chukwu, Godwin Ogbueze and others.

⁸¹ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 142.

Like the Rangers, the East Central State's Academical squad led by Godwin Ogbueze, defeated other states and the defending champions, Kwara State Academicals 2-0 to win the Manuwa/Adebajo Cup in Lagos in 1971. Both the Rangers and Vasco da Gama sought and recruited these players after their secondary school careers. Enyeazu explained that after the tournament, to replenish the team, they organized a soccer match for them at the Enugu Township stadium and the students "outplayed and outscored Rangers FC 3-2." Quickly, The Rangers picked and registered the likes of Christian Chukwu, Godwin Ogbueze, Francis Nwosu and Kenneth Ilodigwe while rival Vasco da Gama recruited Ekeji, Odo, Chukwuma Nwankwo among others. In addition, the Rangers recruited players directly from strong "Footballing Schools" (where principals showed a lot of interest in sports) like John Azinge from Abbot Boys Secondary School, Ihiala, CKC Onitsha among others. By the 1974 soccer season, the team was reorganized to include new recruits, from schools and local clubs, some of who succeeded the pioneer players. They include:

Dominic Ezeani (Captain), Alex Nwosu, Godwin Ogbueze, Kenneth Ilodigwe, Ikechukwu Ezidinma, Christian Chukwu, Law Ufele, Foster Ikeagu, Emma Mba, Godwin Gbenimacho, Chimezie Ngadi, Harrison Mecha, Stanley Okoronkwo, Kelechi Emetole, Chukwuma Onyeaghala, Damian Odo, John Azinge, Obi Ekwo, Francis Nwosu, Alex Nwosu, Nnamdi Anyafo, Ifeanyi Onyejiaka, Sam Onyeaka, Patrick Iluno, Okey Emodi, Charles Adimora, Patrick Ekeji, Christian Madu, Okwuchukwu Anigbogu, Joseph Aniedobe, Sam Onyeaka, Chike Ikebuaku, John Uwanaka and Charles Okoroigwe.⁸²

These reorganizations paid off as the Rangers won three consecutive National Challenge Cups in 1974, 1975 and 1976, thereby retaining the cup. On March 2, 1975, The

⁸² Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 43; Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 142-143.

Rangers, representing Nigeria, won its first match for the 1975 African Championship against Accra Great Olympics. Also, they qualified after subsequent matches against Young Africans of Tanzania, the Green Buffaloes of Zambia in the quarterfinals. However, after losing 3-1 to Mehalla of Egypt, the second leg match of the semi-finals was spectacular. With NFA's permission, it was played in Enugu on October 24, 1975. Former Editor *Satelite Newspaper*, Obinwa Ben Nnaji recounts,

The build-up to the game was overwhelming, reminding me of those days when the club's matches drew fans from Ogoja, Calabar, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Abakaliki, Umuahia to Enugu. As a matter of fact, I will never forget this convoy of fifteen station wagon Peugeot cars that arrived in Enugu on the morning of the memorable Rangers vs Mehalla battle. The convoy was led into Enugu in a fanfare. The lead vehicle was decorated with the Rangers red and white colors. The flagbearer of the convoy was holding a loudspeaker machine. In the street language of Aba Ngwa [a dialect of Igbo language], he bellowed, '*Enyimba Enyi! Igbo kwenu!!...Oru na Omume...Owu kwazi ita bread. Mehalla o see Wahala [Enyimba Enyi! Igbo kwenu!!...It's action time...it's like eating bread. Mehalla has seen trouble]!*' That was enough. By the time he moved the convoy back to the stadium after the stop at Coal camp and Edinburgh Obiagu road, Enugu had been totally mobilized.⁸³

This reveals Igbo identification and support for Rangers. The 25,000 capacity Enugu stadium would host an estimated 40,000 spectators. With goals by Obianika, Ibeabuchi and Nwobodo, the Rangers emerged victorious qualifying with a 3-0 goal superiority over Mehalla.⁸⁴

The Rangers, the first Nigerian club to reach the finals, failed to clinch the cup. They fell to Hafria FC of Guinea, losing 1-0 in Conakry and 1-2 in Lagos in December 1975. Several reasons have been attributed for this defeat including ethnic mistrust of the Yoruba officials within the NFA. Lack of proper rest because of the late arrival of the Rangers players to Lagos. less than 24hours before the match. Also, the State Government's interference with coach Anyim's starting lineup selection broke the camel's back. Unfit Dominic Nwobodo

⁸³ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 45-47, xxii.

⁸⁴ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 144.

played despited coach's protest and he refused to replace him. Obi-Ani claims that Nwobodo was unfit while Eze and Okocha blames this on a pre-existing "social problem" between him and Coach Anyiam that led to his earlier benching.⁸⁵ The impact of this loss was heavily felt by the team. They were deserted, even by the Sports Council and returned to Enugu by road. However, Jim Nwobodo, the Rangers future Chairman hosted them to a party at the Hotel Presidential, Enugu and presented them with gifts to encourage their dampened demeanor.⁸⁶

In 1976, the Rangers was again reorganized and qualified for the African Winners Cup Competition of 1977 in which the IISC Shooting Stars were defending champions. The creation of new states across the federation in February 1976 divided the East Central State into two Igbo-dominated states, Anambra and the Imo States. Some of the administrators (Pauline Nzerem and Isaac Nnado), players (Kelechi Emetole, Harrison Mecha, Ikechukwu Ezidimma among others) and Coach Anyim relocated to the Sports Department in Owerri, the Imo state capital.⁸⁷ Godwin Achebe became the Rangers Coach. When the 1977 Championship began, the Rangers represented Nigeria alongside IISC Shooting Stars. Fortunately, the Rangers clinched its first international title after defeating the Canon Sportive of Yaounde, Cameroon in the first leg match in Lagos 4-1 and being held to a second-leg 1-1 draw at the Ahmadou Ahidjo Stadium, Yaounde. Captain Christian Chukwu was presented the Cup by the Cameroonian president, Ahmadou Ahidjo. Remarkably, the highlight of the tournament was the semi-final match against its rival, Shooting Stars. This match stirred ethnic tensions between two the dominant ethnic groups, the Igbo and Yoruba, which identified with the teams. The first leg was played on October 15, 1977 had 80,000 spectators at the National Stadium, Surulere, Lagos while the second leg was played at the Kaduna Sports Stadium on November 19, 1977 both ending goalless, except for a penalty

⁸⁵ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 145; Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 47

⁸⁶ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 145-146.

⁸⁷ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 48.

kick that ended 4-2 in the Rangers favor. “The victories recorded by Rangers,” Obi-Ani asserts, “throughout the 1977 soccer season further added to the joy and respect of the Igbo man in Nigeria.”⁸⁸

From 1978-1980, the Rangers won no cup. However, its former Chairman, Jim Nwobodo became popular for his work with the club and won the 1979 Gubernatorial election in Anambra State. With the new status as the soccer-loving State’s first Executive Governor, he gave the club political backing. In June 1980, in order to revive the fortunes of the club which was losing its steam, he hired two Brazilian coaches Paulo Robert Diaz and Dennilson Custodio to handle the club and recruited another Brazilian, Da Silva Pereira as a player. For the 1981 soccer season, new players of Igbo extraction were recruited, the likes of Ibezim Ofoedu, Uche Nwachukwu, Tony Orji, Mike Ogbuodudu and Okey Isima. This paid off as the team reached its apogee in the 1981 soccer season. They avenged the loss of the 1978 National Challenge Cup to Bendel Insurance FC, beating them 2-0 to clinch the 1981 Cup. Qualifying for the 1982 African Champions Cup, they recruited more players like Benjamin Okorogu, Justus Ewendu, Chibuzo Ehilegbu, Mike Emenalo, Sylvanus Okpala, Adokie Amiesimeka, Kenneth Boardman and Christian Ogbodo. However, they lost in the semi-finals to Ahly National of Egypt. In 1983, they defeated their opponent, DIC of Kaduna in a 6-5 penalty shootout to clinch the 1983 Challenge Cup Competition.⁸⁹ Though at the peak of its performance, the Rangers suffered from the exodus of its key players to US and Canadian universities, where they were offered educational scholarships, Ranger remains one of the greatest soccer clubs in Nigeria soccer history.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 148.

⁸⁹ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 148-149.

⁹⁰ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 52-53.

CHAPTER 4: HANDSHAKE ACROSS THE NIGER: THE ENUGU RANGERS AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Shooting Stars were more than a football club. It was a movement of the Yoruba people. After the war, the Igbos came back using Rangers International FC as their beacon, they said at that time that there was “No Victor! No Vanquish!” but everybody knew that was not true. The Igbos were not given recognition of a people that were not conquered. So they used Rangers FC to tell Nigerians that though you have conquered us at the warfront but in football, we are the Champions.

—Segun Odegbami, Shooting Star (1970-1980) and ex-Nigerian professional soccer player.⁹¹

This chapter examines the contribution of the Rangers to the Igbo cultural group as they reintegrated into the Nigerian society in the postwar reconstruction era. It establishes Igbo identification with Rangers, examines how the club, beyond securing Igbo “psychological healing,” helped restore the dignity of the “vanquished” people. It asserts that as an Igbo self-help project, the club served as a flagship for the group’s successful self-reintegration. It asserts that the concept of Igboness is not anti-Nigeria—Igboness *and* Nigerianness—as opposed to Igboness *over* Nigerianness. It concludes that the Rangers, beyond celebrating Igbo identity, became a symbol of nation-building, national integration and pride.

This section parallels the role of sports in Black communities in the post-civil war, segregation-era US. Authors have argued that Black sports teams were a way of seeking inclusion, a way of interacting with a wider community (and white community), as well as a source of pride. Rob Ruck’s *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* offers an incredible example. According to Ruck, “sport was a forum for symbolic political assertion and an arena

⁹¹ Jimanze Ego-Alowes, “Segun Odegbami was a poor foot-baller!” *Daily Sun*, June 6, 2013, 34.

for real political struggle. Through competition with whites in a variety of contests, sport provided the black community, in Pittsburgh and nationwide, with its most visible heroes and its most tangible elements of new self-esteem. It energized black consciousness during the 1930s and 1940s in ways that went unmatched by other aspects of black life.”⁹²

Igbo identification with Enugu Rangers

In the postwar reconstruction years, proactive attempts at postwar reconciliation and national unity were made. These included the FMG’s promised peacebuilding pact framed around reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction policies (the 3Rs) and the Igbo self-help projects. However, several scholars have remarked on the failure of this official policy. In fact, Victor Ukaogo asserts that “the three Rs marked the beginning of Igbo relegation and alienation ‘rather than the end of the Igbo marginalization.’”⁹³ In Nigeria’s Second Republic (1979-1985), “charges of neglect of federal projects and the unfavorable statutory allocation” and promises by federal officials including Vice President Alex Ekwueme and Minister of Steel, Mr Paul Unongo, to correct imbalance suffered prominently Anambra and Imo States because of “deliberate neglect.”⁹⁴ As a matter of prime necessity to rebuild from the ruins and devastation of the war, the Igbo had to resort to self-help community efforts, and this proved hugely successful. Collectively, communities tasked themselves and built infrastructures, bridges, post offices, hospitals, schools, invested in the education of their children among others. Obi-Ani concluded that

⁹² Rob Ruck, *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 3.

⁹³ See Godwin Onuoha, “Memory, Reconciliation, And Peacebuilding in Post-Civil War Southeast Nigeria,” African Peacebuilding Network: APN Working Papers, no. 19 (June 2018), 1-34; Victor Ukaogo, “Igbo Challenges in Post conflict Nigeria,” in *The Nigeria-Biafra War: Genocide and the Politics of Memory*, Chima J. Korieh ed., (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2012), 304-323; Eghosa Osaghae, Ebere Onwudiwe, and Rotimi Zuberu, *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath*, (Ibadan: John Archers, 2002).

⁹⁴ “The Nigeria YearBook 1981: A Record of Events and Developments,” *Daily Times* December 17, 1979, 180; January 18, 1979, 196.

“What the Igbo got from the Federal Government was inadequate finance and discrimination. Save for the Igbo man's [and woman's] self-help efforts, Igboland would have remained in a state of decay and neglect.”⁹⁵

The major challenge of reintegrating the Igbo into the mainstream of Nigeria's society was another hurdle. Chuka Onwumechili provides insight into how psychological traces mark postwar relationships or official end of conflicts.⁹⁶ Amidst the national rhetoric of reintegration, Gowon's picked and encouraged particular interest in soccer as a tool of encouraging “national patriotism and unity;”⁹⁷ and the NFA Secretary-General, Chief Etubom Oyo Orok Oyo (1965-74) insisted that soccer contests must involve all the different zones of Nigeria, especially war-torn Eastern Nigeria. As a result, Chief Oyo insisted that for the Nigerian Army XI team to be crowned true champions in the Amachree Cup of 1971, they had to defeat representatives of the East Central State.⁹⁸ But they lost to the Rangers. Eventually, it was surprisingly the least expected agent, the Rangers that bore the burden of fast-tracking and catalyzed the reintegration of the Igbo people, a self-reintegration project.

My argument can be previewed as follows. The Rangers extended and carried forward into the socio-cultural realm, by their success, the political efforts by the Igbo and Nigerian Government in general, to reintegrate in the postwar “New Nigeria.” Political reunification of the Eastern Region with the rest of Nigeria was accomplished on January 15, 1970 with the surrender of Biafra and the appointment of a Nigerian administrator in the region. Political reunion may have been completed, but did the reintegration of the Nigerian nation simply

⁹⁵ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 151.

⁹⁶ Chuka Onwumechili, “Nigeria: Rangers, Igbo Identity, and the Imagination of War,” Chuka Onwumechili and Gerald Akindes eds., *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community, and Clubs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 116.

⁹⁷ Olanipekun Alli, “Sports can be a unifying agent, says Gen. Gowon,” *New Nigerian*, 16 March, 1970.

⁹⁸ John Nauright and Charles Parrish eds., *Sports around the world: History, Culture, and Practice* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 96.

come to a close with a political compromise? The failure of official 3Rs policies, constant cries of ethnic marginalization and demand for political representation suggest otherwise. Therefore, layered into the bitter memories of the Nigeria-Biafra war was the growing realization that in the “new Nigeria” unleashed division and political marginalization of Nigeria along ethnic lines. Where official pledges of “No victor. No vanquish” and official policies fail, nationalizing efforts like decades of the Rangers’ remarkable feat in soccer played a central role in reintegrating Igbo into Nigeria’s socio-political culture. It no doubt helped to underpin the popularity of Igbo players in the national team, the Green Eagles.

In the 1970s, with Igboland in ruins, Igbo people and leaders, seeking ways to rebuild popular faith in their ethnonational and Nigeria unity, turned to soccer. They launched the Rangers in Enugu, embracing *Igboness* and Nigerianness at the same time. This confrontation to solve the problem and shore up faith in themselves, the Igbo people, and the “New Nigeria” leading Igbo sportsmen, administrators, sports enthusiasts and businessmen pumped new life—and lots of scarce money—into the Rangers. This is similar to efforts in America after the Civil War and Europe in the 1920s with the world’s fair medium.⁹⁹

Onwumechili explains that collective Igbo identification with soccer was new and the launching of the Rangers was the first time the group would rally around a team. He describes this as a postwar “psychological trace.” Before the Rangers, the importance of soccer, collectively to the group, was less significant. Although soccer was prominent during and after the colonial era and utilized for nationalists' causes, a 1969 ceasefire that allowed Brazilian soccer star, Pele and his club Santos to play and a failed attempt by the Biafran side to play for recreation and entertainment during the war, collective identification with soccer remained elusive.¹⁰⁰ Onwumechili enumerates a sum of events, accounts and interpretations

⁹⁹ Read more on world’s fair in Robert W. Rydell, John Findling, and Kimberly D. Pelle eds., *Fair America: World’s Fairs in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁰ Boer, *The History* 93; Onwumechili, “Nigeria” 116.

that converged to create and strengthen Igbo symbolic identification with the Rangers. These include its direct dedication to Biafra, perceived exclusionary recruitment policy of Igbo players, success in interstate contests and enormous social pressure to publicly support the Rangers among others.

Onwumechili argued that the 1971 Amachree Cup victory and examples of critical events associated with contemporary Igbo myths, that established Igbo identity and aspirations with the Rangers. Their semi-final match against the Nigerian Army XI team was perceived as a re-enactment of the Biafra-Nigeria war, a psychological contest. “Motivated by the ‘Rangers Spirit’, Dominic Nwobodo recounts in an interview, “we demolished the Nigerian Army XI by 2 goals to 1. For the Igbo, that was a watershed. The victory on the field reversed the defeat suffered by our people at the end of the war.”¹⁰¹ Hence, the cultural group received the Rangers victory as an Igbo victory over Nigeria that was illustrative of the modern Igbo mythology of perceived “common enemy” in state oppression, the possibility of a great Igbo nation, and the idea of Igbo dedication, hardwork and a dogged-determination-to-win-spirit.¹⁰² Eventually, the club became established as a symbol of the group. The Igbo were bound in a single Igbo-dominated state, the East Central State, until 1976 when it was broken up into two—Anambra and Imo States—also facilitated unified Igbo identification and massive support for one team. Players and administrators were drawn from different parts of the State. This made the Rangers a symbol of Igbo unity.

The Rangers' victories brought psychological benefits to the group. Obi-Ani summarily explains this, thus:

...after the civil war, Enugu Rangers accomplished for the Igbo people what a million psychologists might not have achieved.

¹⁰¹ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 36.

¹⁰² Onwumechili, “Nigeria” 126.

Through their exploits in the field of football, the club helped to rekindle self-confidence and the spirit of perseverance and enterprise among the Igbo. This in turn attracted the respect—sometimes envy—of other Nigerians.¹⁰³

As the people moved about their lives, the trauma of the war remained and as they interacted with other ethnic groups, the stigma of Biafra's defeat spread its venom. "The Igbos," Segun Odegbami corroborates, "were not given recognition of a people that were not conquered." The postwar battle was psychological and victory was a necessity if the Igbo would re-emerge from the ashes of the war and years of loss and devastation to a place of significance, dignity and a "new" identity in the "New Nigeria." Early the Rangers victory, unlike their rivals, endeared the team to the group, who found "another opportunity to rejoice and celebrate." This propped the club as a symbol of Igbo unity and hope.

At inception, the Rangers did not command collective Igbo support. It was not even the only soccer club in the State. However, its victories spurred massive Igbo identification and support. In Enugu, in 1974, after the Rangers' first victory of the Challenge, Eze and Okocha describe, soccer fans trooped to the streets to celebrate with the Rangers who were still in Lagos. Traditional celebrations with masquerade and gong beaters paraded the streets playing loudly. On their way back to Enugu, the team made flagship stops at Agbor, Umunede, Asaba, Onitsha, Ogidi and Awka.¹⁰⁴ Obi-Ani uses words like "carnivals," "celebration galore" to describe the mood across Igboland each time the Rangers won its matches. The Rangers thrilled spectators, won fans and inspired support by the way they played.

¹⁰³ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 149.

¹⁰⁴ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 45.

As the victories came in, the group's overwhelming joy and appreciation was cemented and demonstrated through support for the Rangers visible during the match. The Rangers matches, especially in Enugu, were assured of massive Igbo support and turn-up on match days. The stadium was usually filled and sometimes beyond. Ranger's first international fixture in Enugu in 1971 had 21,650 spectators generating more money for the East Central State government than any other soccer match in Nigeria history. At least 40,000 spectators attended the 1975 fixture against Mehalla of Egypt. Locally, its match against Spartans of Owerri (another Eastern team) at Owerri was abandoned.¹⁰⁵ Despite being abandoned after the loss of the 1975 African Champions Cup to Hafía FC of Guinea, Jim Nwobodo, of Igbo extraction and its future Chairman hosted and gifted the players at the Hotel Presidential in Enugu. Onwumechili citing Ajuzie informs that in one of the semi-final match which Shooting Stars of Ibadan lost to Rangers: "Rangers supporters immediately formed two parallel lines...and as Chukwu and Okala [Rangers' players] marched on, some [fans] laid down their clothes for them while chanting *Enyimba Enyi!*"¹⁰⁶ Another chant which Rangers sweltering mass of loyal fans roared with excitement and pride, that soon became the club "anthem" is:

Holy! Holy! Holy!
Enugu Rangers.
Another champion!

Interestingly, prominent Igbo musicians recorded tracks praising the victorious Rangers. Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe, a giant of African highlife music, in his 1976 Album, *Ogbaru Di Uso*, released "Rangers International Special" track in honor of the club's remarkable accomplishment in defeating Mehalla of Egypt in the 1975 African Championship Cup. The over 20 minutes long song, in English and Igbo, offers commentary

¹⁰⁵ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers*, Appendix.

¹⁰⁶ Onwumechili, "Nigeria" 127; *Enyimba* means the mighty elephant and is used in a victory song by the Igbo to celebrate Rangers' victories. It symbolizes the elephant crushing its victims.

on the match and praises for the team. Likewise, Osadebe's protegee and former band member, Vincent Okoroego and his Ikenga Super Stars of Africa band released the "Enugu Rangers International Football Club of Nigeria" track in its 1976 *Ikengas of Nigeria* album celebrating the team and what it represented to the Igbo people. The latter sang in English.

The concept of the Rangers' motto: "Through difficulties to the heights" was felt in their "never say die" and "win at all cost" attitude on the pitch. It was a psychological indomitable will to overcome all challenges in the field. In an interview, pioneer player Dominic Nwobodo, explained that in the psyche of the players, during the early years of the team, they had a "win-at-all-cost" attitude that spurred them to make sacrifices on and off the pitch.¹⁰⁷ Illustratively, during the match against the Nigerian Army XI team, not less than four (4) Rangers players were carried off the pitch and even Dominic Nwobodo was rushed to the hospital with a gash in his head. The Rangers spirit is "the dogged determination to win in spite of odds and injuries."¹⁰⁸ This wowed many and earned the Rangers nationwide support.

However, Igbo identification with the club also put the players under a lot of pressure to win at all cost. They could not afford to lose, historian Emeka Ed Keazor reckons.¹⁰⁹ They were sometimes even harassed by their fans when they lost. The pioneer players, who had fought in the war, also shared strong sentiments. "The bitter way with which we fought the Biafran war remained fresh in our minds when we started playing for Rangers...our minds kept wondering why we lost the war" Dominic Nwobodo recounts. They went on analyzing the war and "turned round to blame" one another for why their sector in the Biafran Army capitulated. They took this "blame game" to the pitch; and Nwobodo invoked "woe betide you if we concede defeat because of your carelessness or ineptitude on your part in any

¹⁰⁷ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 27.

¹⁰⁸ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 39; Onwumechili, "Nigeria" 125.

¹⁰⁹ Emeka Ed Keazor, "Unleashed: The Enugu Rangers Revolution (1970-1977)," filmed at Igbo Conference, video, 10:09, 17 June, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOpCMNogAPc>

match.” Adorned in their white, they sang “moving” and soulful traditional Igbo songs to inspire them to play with their guts.¹¹⁰ Henri Tajfel identifies this phenomenon as the social identity theory (SIT). A situation where individuals act for the larger good and in this case, the club was motivated and driven by events to maintain the Igbo self-esteem or distinctiveness.¹¹¹ However, Onwumechili explains that after 1976 state creation, Igbo unified identity with the Rangers waned as the newly created Igbo state, Imo state established teams—including Enyimba International FC and Spartans FC formed by Chief Jerry Enyeazu among others—that rivalled the Rangers (Enugu became capital of Anambra State).¹¹² Even some top management officials and players of the Rangers also left the team to join sports in Imo state. This would impact the Rangers’ celebrated identity as the “Igbo club.

Enugu Rangers and Igbo Psychological warfare

Symbolically, the significance of the Rangers achievements cannot be overemphasized especially in spearheading psychological healing, inspiring renewed pride and identity construction, and aiding the physical re-absorption of the Igbo into the “New Nigeria.” For the Igbo cultural group, it was clear that they needed more than official rhetoric to bury the humiliation of surrender. “After the war,” explained Odegbami, “the Igbos came back using Rangers International FC as their beacon, they said that there was ‘No Victor! No Vanquish!’ but everybody knew that was not true. The Igbos were not given the recognition of a people that were not conquered. So they used Rangers FC to tell Nigerians that though you have conquered us at the war-front but in soccer, we are the Champions.”¹¹³ Perceived and equated as representing them, the club’s victory or loss was accepted as theirs too. “Whenever Rangers falter,” Obi-Ani explains, “it was equated with the faltering of the entire

¹¹⁰ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 27-28.

¹¹¹ Henri Tajfel cited in Onwumechili and Akindes eds., *Identity*, 120-121.

¹¹² Onwumechili and Akindes eds., *Identity*, 117.

¹¹³ Ego-Alowes, “Segun,” 34.

Igbo people. When they sparkled, their performance was seen as an example of the prodigy of the Igbo nation.”¹¹⁴ Remarkably, through its victories, the shame and stigma of war defeat began to fade and wear out among the people, who now embraced a renewed winning identity. “The overwhelming joy shown by the Igbo people towards Rangers.” Obi-Ani reiterates, “was not as much for the trophies won as for what they symbolized. To the Igbo, the exploits showed that in losing the civil war, the Igbo had not lost their manhood and drive. The Rangers, therefore, qualified to represent Nigeria in the African Champions Cup in 1975.”¹¹⁵

Significantly, the psychological condition—of defeat or dignity—of the group was fundamental in defining the success or failure of the reintegration effort. If national reintegration would be successful, the group not only had to feel a sense of acceptance by the others but also helped to overcome its fears, sense of defeat, humiliation, war trauma and identity crisis. Otherwise, poor self-esteem would affect their interactions with other groups and their potential to rise from their prewar glories and even exceed it. Systematic responses from the government, in the postwar reconstruction years, succeeded in inflicting more pains on the impoverished people through its “negative and anti-Igbo” policies—Banking Obligation (Eastern States) Decree of 1970, Public Officers (Special Provisions) Decree No. 34 of 1970, Indigenization Decree of 1972, Revenue Allocation Formula, State Creation and Federal Presence, ban on the importation of second-hand clothing, the destruction of Igbo technological know-how.¹¹⁶ To reintegrate proud Igbo people—who since colonial days were described as successful, rich, envied and feared by other groups—in a marginalized fashion, would not count as successful.¹¹⁷ Hence, devastated by the war, including in terms of

¹¹⁴ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 144.

¹¹⁵ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 143.

¹¹⁶ See Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* for elaboration on these.

¹¹⁷ Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966–1976)* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 16; Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983), 46.

unimaginable loss of lives and property, the people hinged on the Rangers' success in the soccer field to re-enact memories of prosperity, boost their self-esteem and re-emerge to a dominant position. The "Rangers' victories," Obi-Ani asserts, "acted as a psychological balm that gradually soothed, if not healed the wounds of the civil war." Onwumechili corroborating notes that Rangers' strings of victories bolstered the group's self-esteem and its belief in its superiority and strength.¹¹⁸

The federal government, through its national unity mantra, justified its war effort, created propaganda that rejected the Igbo survivalist mission for secession. They replaced it with the derogatory tag of the Biafran leader, Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, as a rebel who was forcing the Igbo people into secession/war they did not want.¹¹⁹ The undertone of Gowon's symbolic "No victor. No vanquish" sustained this narrative. Through official policies, the FMG attempted to continue the process of controlling the mainstream narrative and image of the Igbo in the "New Nigeria." It was however an attempt to give the people a new identity that was not riddled with memories of defeat but of a people coerced by their rebellious leadership into an unwanted war but now restored into the united fold. While it's important to address the question of Igbo status and identity in postwar Nigeria, the group also recognized the problematic nature of undermining their collective struggle against perceived state oppression and condemned the government's lip-service rhetoric and marginalistic attempts. They however resorted to self-help projects including launching the Rangers. This further highlights an important prerequisite for effective nation-building in the "New Nigeria"—reconstructing the image and identity of the Igbo.

In the postwar reconstruction years, the most controversial aspect of Igbo identification with the Rangers, that was more unnerving for other cultural groups, was that

¹¹⁸ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 144; Onwumechili, "Nigeria" 126.

¹¹⁹ "War diary," *New Nigerian* WAR SOUVENIR EDITION, 1970

the club victories presented a new Igbo identity. This undermined the image of Igbo defeat as well as revealed the possibility of the group's re-emergence as a dominant force in Nigeria. This concern was spelt out by the Northern socio-cultural and political forum, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) communique to the Oputa Panel, Nigeria's Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in 1999, many decades later. They sustained the Northern defence of the "Igbo genocide" and concluded that Igbo marginalization in Nigeria was deservedly appropriate to stem the tide of perceived irreverent Igbo domination.¹²⁰ Therefore, the Igbo capitalized on the Rangers to symbolize their victory and other groups recognized this as well. It is unsurprising, as Onwumechili notes, that perceived Nigeria state oppression against the club was both met with protests as well as the assertion of a "common enemy" by the Igbo.¹²¹ Interestingly, the success of the Rangers inspired the founding of other clubs, some along ethnic lines. Bendel Insurance of Benin, Rovers of Calabar, Sharks of Port Harcourt, El Kanemi Warriors of Maiduguri, BCC Lions of Gboko, Bauchi Wunti. Odegbami explained that though these clubs did not perform to the level of the Rangers and Shooting Stars, they cropped up in their footsteps.¹²²

For the Igbo people, the Rangers was a movement to exemplify the group as self-fashioned and powerful agents whose identity was not contingent on their war loss. In the Rangers, the group saw a vehicle of self-reintegration on their terms, challenging the failures of the national government. For the sake of national integration and a Nigerian national identity, the Rangers surely stirred emotion by seeming to elevate the Igbo cultural group above the nation. Significantly, at that moment when other groups wished to acknowledge only the "Nigerian" aspect of the team's identity, the team demonstrated the

¹²⁰ The Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) position is cited in Ukaogo, "Igbo Challenges" 311. Read Oputa Panel report: "Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission Report (aka Oputa Panel Report)," accessed on October 7, 2021, <https://www.dawodu.com/oputa1.htm>
The war did not end all rivalries and it still has not. Cite sources on persistent ethnic rivalry.

¹²¹ See Onwumechili, *Identity* 125.

¹²² Ego-Alowes, "Segun," 34.

possibility of being Igbo *and* Nigerian simultaneously. The team's history, origin and widespread orientation, major supporters, among others just as readily signalled Igboness *and* Nigerianness as against Igboness *over* Nigerianness. Therefore, in the symbolism of the Rangers victory and Igbo identification, Igboness was not subordinated to Nigerianness but, more powerfully, was staged as Nigerianness.¹²³

Rangers, Igbo Self-reintegration and Nation-Building

Several scholars on the Rangers not only pin the team as Igbo in origin, orientation and success but also describe it as embodying beliefs of the “continuation of the war.”¹²⁴ Like Onwumechili highlights, some of these deductions have been made based on some “unspoken policy” not through an official communique, hence it leaves room for further debate, arguments and conclusions that are either corroborative or contradictory.¹²⁵ Further research challenges this Igbo ethnic assertive argument of the Rangers and reveals that from inception, the Rangers embodied a national reintegration vision of the Igbo with other groups in the “New Nigeria.” This study argues that while the Igbo people identified with the club and its victories was a “psychological balm” that soothed their war wounds and inspired their success again in postwar Nigeria, the Rangers was fundamentally an integrating factor as this also proves. The club was accommodating and instrumental in promoting ethnic interactions, peaceful coexistence and nation-building while reconstructing a new dignified Igbo identity.

The Rangers through its vision, club composition, attitude inspired national integration. In a January 15, 1980 interview recorded in a local newspaper, *Daily Star*, Chief Jerry Enyeazu, expressing his excitement at the Rangers' success, revealed the true intentions

¹²³ Illustrated in relation to the Civil Rights Movement in the USA in Martin A. Berger, *Seeing Through Race: A Reinterpretation of Civil Rights Photography* (California: The University of California Press, 2011), 141-156.

¹²⁴ Onwumechili, *Identity* 117; Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War*, 137.

¹²⁵ Ibid Onwumechili

for the formation of the Rangers and the idea he also sold to Igbo philanthropists, who supported the club. According to him,

I felt that since Rangers of war could not shoot us into International recognition, then Rangers Football Club should play us back into the Nigerian scene...

My remote aim of forming the Club was to provide an immediate vehicle of expression of national awareness and belonging for the I[g]bo-man [and woman], whose future and faith in the national course was then still uncertain.¹²⁶

At the very heart of the leadership of the Rangers was the programme of nation-building, however, through self-integration. Like its intelligentsia predecessor during the war was responsible for sustaining the war through psychological rejuvenation, the club had the difficult task of forging a future for the Igbo people in postwar Nigeria. It would secure psychological victory, group and national awareness, and “play us back into the Nigerian scene,” that is foster national integration. “The founding of Rangers FC,” Eze and Okocha illuminates, “was a strategy towards integrating the Igbo people into the mainstream of political and social relevance in Nigeria.”¹²⁷ Therefore, the Rangers was a movement and vehicle for dignified Igbo interactions with other groups in postwar Nigeria. How it achieved this intended purpose and more is the subject here.

The composition of the Rangers team has been a major benchmark for its ethnicization or categorization as an “Igbo club” as well as the group’s identification with it. Onwumehili refers to this as an “unspoken policy” of exclusionary recruitment of players

¹²⁶ Jerry Enyeazu interview, *Daily Star*, Monday 15th January, 1980 cited in Okwudili and Ugwuera, “Strategies” 195.

¹²⁷ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 41.

based on ethnic belonging, and by that, players of Igbo extraction.¹²⁸ Since “unspoken,” I challenge this conclusion and assert that, in the light of some factor, this exclusion is not an official management policy or a “continuation of the war”. In the postwar reconstruction era, the East Central State, with lean resources, could only commit to relief efforts and few reconstruction and rehabilitation projects. Hence, Rangers took off, lacking the financial wherewithal to engage in competitive soccer as Obi-Ani noted. They trained and played without adequate training kits, barefooted and with un-identical jerseys. Therefore, at inception, the Rangers depended on the donation and generosity of the Igbo people and businesspeople. The players played with food stipends until they were eventually employed by the East Central State.¹²⁹ This is certainly not a condition to expect the recruitment of players outside of the region, where more thriving clubs exist. When Vasco da Gama was launched, some Rangers players migrated to the club including Alphonsus Ikyume, Ezekwesili etc because Ogufere paid better.¹³⁰ Remarkably, until the Rangers saw success in games outside the State, it did not enjoy massive Igbo support. I argue that the debate of a perceived exclusive recruitment policy based on an “Igbo club” could only begin from this point. Interestingly, by 1975, the club still depended on Igbo philanthropists like Jim Nwobodo to host and gift the players after their loss to Hafia FC of Guinea in the African Champions Cup final. It's safe to remark that the Rangers was not a rich club. It subsequently began to lose its player to better opportunities via international scholarships in the US and Canada. As early as 1975, one of its star players, Luke Okpala left to continue his education at the University of Winnipeg, Canada.¹³¹

At inception, the Rangers Sports Club, the parent body of the Rangers FC, was established to cater to displaced Igbo athletes and players, many of whom were too

¹²⁸ Onwumechili, *Identity* 123.

¹²⁹ Victor Ude, “Black Rocks now in camp feed from relief materials,” *New Nigerian*, 10 September, 1970, 5.

¹³⁰ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 21.

¹³¹ “In life, in death; two Rangers legends remain inseparable,” *VanguardNGR*, October 3, 2014, 30.

traumatized and afraid to return to their prewar cities and clubs, where they fled during the pogrom. Onwumechili notes that top Igbo players who had remarkable success in their careers like Godwin Achebe (described as Nigeria’s best player of his time and captain of Nigeria’s national team only after his second national game in the 1960s) alongside Luke Okpala had won twice the Nigerian Cup with Railways in 1964 and 1965. John Nwosu, who like the others fled and fought for Biafra, remained back for fear of what might happen outside the only Igbo-dominated state.¹³² This fear and concern was not peculiar to the Igbo soccer players either; the war did not end all intergroup rivalry. However, the Rangers provided a platform for intergroup interactions, through inter-club matches, despite ethnic fears and tension.

“Notably,” Onwumechili explains that before the war, “Igbo homeland teams tended not to be ethnically mixed because non-Igbo ethnic groups were not as mobile as Igbos and so non-Igbo players were rarely based in Igbo homeland.”¹³³ Although rival Vasco da Gama FC was owned by a non-Igbo, Ogufure, it also fielded many Igbo players and alongside the Rangers recruited players who won the 1972 Academical Cup. Unlike other groups, Igbo players were “highly mobile, resourceful, and independent” hence, in the postwar era, those who could migrate became top players in teams outside of the Igbo-dominated East Central State..¹³⁴ Aloysius Atuegbu and his three brothers—Aloysius Atuegbu and his three brothers—Matthew, Nicholas, Andrew—also played for rival teams in Northern Nigeria.¹³⁵ Some future Rangers players were recruited from teams in other States like Ufele and Okpala from Lagos ECN, and Paulinus Ezike and Aloysius Atuegbu, who prominently played for Mighty Jets of Jos against the Rangers in the 1974 Challenge Cup. Some others include

¹³² Onwumechili, *Identity* 122.

¹³³ *Ibid* 120.

¹³⁴ *Ibid* 118.

¹³⁵ “Fidelis Atuegbu: I’m like the odd man out of the Atuegbu brothers,” *Vanguard*, published on 26 September, 2020, 30.

Harrison Okagbue (Sharks) and Humphrey Okechukwu (Alyufsalam Rocks).¹³⁶ Though the Rangers was dominated by players of Igbo extraction, the presence of Igbo players in rival teams outside of the East Central State supports the group's reintegration vision. It remarkably challenges the narrative of Igbo “continuation of war” through soccer.

From inception, the Rangers appointed a non-Igbo, Chief JB Ogufero as a top management official. This is illustrative of the Rangers’ inclusive vision over pure ethnic exclusivity. Over the years, the team fielded non-Igbo players including Adokiye Amiesiemaka (who joined in 1978 as the first non-Igbo to play for the Rangers), David Ngodigha, Iyalla Iyalla, Mike Boateng, Kofi Badu, David Owumi, Taribo West, Hakeem Ashirum and Olatunde Alatishe among others.¹³⁷ Onwumechili identifies this as a shift that occurred after the 1976 state creation exercise. He argues that after state creation, collective Igbo identification with the Rangers continued to diminish.¹³⁸ Thus, as the Rangers’ specific Igbo identification continued to suffer, the recruitment of non-Igbo players would establish the club with a national outlook. It's important to note that exclusive ethnic orientation in club side soccer was not peculiar to the Rangers. As Odegbami pointed out, WNDC was also “a movement of the Yoruba people.” In 1977, the club had only four non-Yoruba in the team—an English Coach Hawkes, two Ghanaians: Phillip Boamah and Sam Ashante, and Best Ogedegbe, an Urhobo man.¹³⁹

Ethnic rivalry in soccer predates Nigeria’s independence. Although the Nigeria-Biafra war accentuated ethnic differences and tensions, it is historic to situate its rise in Nigerian clubside soccer properly to avoid assumptions that this is a peculiar feature of soccer in postwar Nigeria. While ethnic rivalry could be pegged on some matches like between the

¹³⁶ Onwumechili, *Identity* 123.

¹³⁷ Eze and Okocha, *The Ranger* 23.

¹³⁸ Onwumechili, *Identity* 117.

¹³⁹ Iwedi Ojinmah, “Nigeria's greatest ever matches- part 1,” Super Sports, published on 10 June 2011, https://supersport.com/football/nigeria50/news/110201/the_greatestgame_ever_part_1

Rangers and Shooting Stars of Ibadan, which mirrors rivalry between Igbo and Yoruba cultural groups, it is also important to highlight that the strength of these teams, the two biggest clubs in Nigeria, typifies the fight of two elephants. In 1940, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo were at loggerhead over soccer competition. Awolowo had accused Azikiwe of stirring ethnic sentiments in his *Pilot* newspaper publication following the 5-4 defeat of St Gregory's College, Lagos by Christ the King's College (CKC) soccer team, Onitsha in Lagos in a "Win the War" (World War II) match. Adding that Azikiwe tried to exploit the sporting victory of the Eastern Nigeria team to build Igbo ethnic superiority.¹⁴⁰ Also, between 1948 to 1957, the Alex Oni Cup was organized and contested between ethnic nationalities.¹⁴¹ It was created purposefully based on ethnic selections and hence soccer clubs were not allowed to participate. The two best teams were the Igbo and Yoruba representatives but the latter often won the contests, but with frequent aggression and fighting. As a result, the tournament was stopped.¹⁴² Therefore, in Colonial Nigeria, Igbo and Yoruba rivalry in soccer was commonplace. In the postwar reintegration era, despite the ethnic rivalry generated by the Rangers and Shooting Stars match, this did not subordinate the national integration goal of the Rangers and the Igbo. Ethnic rivalry in soccer was not a product of the war but long-standing ethnic concerns. Also, club rivalry was more predominant than ethnic rivalry in postwar Nigerian soccer. This club rivalry was visible in the Rangers match against rival Enugu Vasco da Gama and Mighty Pillar of Jos, where the club's top players, like Aloysius Atuegbu, were Igbo. It is probably normal for interactions among the groups in pluralistic societies to be tense sometimes.

Without a doubt, the Rangers enjoyed massive Igbo support for what it symbolized to the group, however, it also enjoyed nationwide support for its victories and "never say die"

¹⁴⁰ Awolowo, *Path* 135. Football was used for nationalism and identity formation. See Boer, *The History* 43-49.

¹⁴¹ It was named after the Chairman of the Lagos Football Association, Alex Oni.

¹⁴² *Palgrave Handbook*, 410; Godwin Simeon Sadoh, *Samuel Akpabot: The Odyssey of a Nigerian Composer-Ethnomusicologist* (iUniverse, October 2008), 109.

attitude with which it played. Though accounts of ethnic mistrust and tensions are available, some instances corroborate the club's widespread support outside of Igboland, even among non-Igbo. Despite protests against playing some matches outside of Enugu, the matches played outside of Igboland promoted intergroup relations.¹⁴³ Matches played in other parts of Nigeria including Lagos and Kaduna impacted Igbo migration and intergroup relations especially between "migrant" Igbo and their host communities. Shaping other cultural groups' perception and acceptance, gave the Igbo a fresh sense of belonging in the host communities and encouraged renewed Igbo migration. While the "outside" matches fast-tracked the Rangers' national popularity and support beyond the East Central State, the interaction it stimulated for groups across the country was significant in the reintegration efforts. Soccer in general and the Rangers, in particular, provides various groups in Nigeria this opportunity, irrespective of the tone or mood it takes. Though the Rangers 1977 Championship semi-final match against defending champions, Shooting Stars at the National Stadium, Lagos was characterized by ethnic tension, it evidences a soccer-enabled playground for intergroup relations. It is also important to reiterate that though the Rangers had been winning matches in the East Central State since its inaugural match with another "non-Igbo team," P & T Rockets, Igbo massive collective identification and support only rose when the Rangers began to win matches outside of the State, in national and continental competitions. Therefore, though the Rangers lost some important matches played outside the region, it recorded scores of victories in games played elsewhere too. This fundamentally shaped both ethnic and national perception of the team and eventually aided the national reintegration efforts. For example, the 1971 Amachree Cup was held in Lagos. Total blame on state oppression and ethnic mistrust in the Rangers' loss in the 1975 African Cup match against Hafia FC was absolved as Jim Nwobodo, a spectator, "well recognised that they lost

¹⁴³ Onwumechili, *Identity* 125.

purely out of bad luck and not as a result of bad play.” Obi-Ani analyzed that it was fatigue and the fielding of unfit players like injured Dominic Nwobodo on the insistence and interference of officials of the East Central State while Eze and Okocha blames Coach Anyiam for the poor handling of “social problem” between Nwobodo and himself.¹⁴⁴

The Rangers support transcended ethnic barriers and they won federal support especially in intercontinental matches. The Rangers brought Nigeria glories and recognitions through its participation and victories in international games and competitions. It was the first team to represent Nigeria in the African Club Championship in 1971.¹⁴⁵ Their victories were often recognized by the East Central State government with cash gifts, naming of public places, and constructing facilities to facilitate the team’s efforts like the State’s reconstruction of the Enugu Township stadium, now Nnamdi Azikiwe stadium.¹⁴⁶ They also enjoyed federal recognition, support and help. Though the 1977 African Cup Champions, their victory against Hafía FC in the semi-final match in Senegal became violent. Olusegun Obasanjo, the military leader, dispatched the military *Hercules* to fly back the Rangers from Dakar. Also, Eze and Okocha recount that the Rangers versus RC Koumba of Algeria match on Friday, 25th Sept 1982, Nigeria’s President Shehu Shagari monitored the match. Non-Igbo supporters include: Y. Gowon, Sunday Dankaro, NFA Chairman and Anambra State Governor, Atom Kpera.¹⁴⁷

Remarkably, the presence of two of the most prominent clubs in Nigeria's history in Western Nigeria, the Shooting Stars of Ibadan and the Stationery Stores FC of Lagos with a remarkable soccer history of excellence and success that predated Nigeria’s independence, only means existing loyal fans. As of June 1970, Stationery Stores in a match against the Asante Kotoko of Ghana had over 35,000 spectators.¹⁴⁸ Typically any newcomer could only

¹⁴⁴ Ibid 145-146; Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 47.

¹⁴⁵ John Nauright and Charles Parrish eds., *Sports around the world: History, Culture, and Practice* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 96.

¹⁴⁶ Emma and Okocha, *The Rangers* 52.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 76, 80, 134, 143, 152.

¹⁴⁸ Obi-Ani, *Post-Civil War* 141, "Record Sale At Rangers Match", *Lagos DailyTimes*, June 3, 1971, p.22.

poach their supporters. Despite the Rangers' successes, it would be difficult for the club to have as much overwhelming support in Western Nigeria as it did in the East. However, the Rangers' "never say die" attitude was inspiring for the club's spectators, who could identify with the fighting spirit of the underdogs and the victory it brought the team. At a time, it seemed that the Rangers pulled "its supporters together in a shared loyalty which transcended class or politics," though initially along ethnic lines.¹⁴⁹ Over time, with its victories and "never say die" spirit, it crossed the ethnic gap both in support and recruiting players. In the Nigerian media, the Rangers enjoyed publicity and its matches received radio live commentaries that brought home to all Nigerians the proceedings of their games including international matches. Aside from newspaper outlets, federal and state radio stations including the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) ran sports commentaries. When the Rangers played in Northern Nigeria, Radio Nigeria Kaduna and Radio Plateau Jos usually ran commentaries even in the Hausa language.¹⁵⁰ This created room for accommodation among ethnic groups.

At the climax of the Rangers reintegration effort is the prompt answer of the Rangers players to national assignments. It readily supplied the Nigeria National Team, the Green Eagles, with top players for continental and world matches and competitions. At the end of the war, Godwin Achebe resumed his position as captain of the national team in 1970 and was succeeded by another Rangers player, Dominic Ezeani. The Rangers players dominated the Green Eagles. In one year, in the early part of 1975 and 1976, the Rangers supplied 7 of the 11 players in the national Green Eagles team even surpassing the Shooting Stars of Ibadan. And the Green Eagles brought Nigeria glory in the African and global tournaments and won several African tournaments including winning Nigeria's first African Cup of Nation's Cup in 1980 among others. "The secret behind my successful career as the national

¹⁴⁹ Onwumechili, *Identity* 125.

¹⁵⁰ Eze and Okocha, *The Rangers* 67-68, 77.

coach to the Nigerian National Team the Super Eagles,” remarks Nigeria’s foreign national coach Clemens Westerhof (1989-1994), “is tied to my more than ample invitations to camp extended to Igbo boys. For me to win, I drafted some seven of these Igbo boys into the National Team and coupled with their extraordinary determination and will to contest and win every match, I’m always assured of victory. These Igbo boys do not need any further coaching and I understand the majority of them come from the Rangers International FC, Enugu.”¹⁵¹

At that time, the Rangers produced some of the greatest players in Nigerian soccer history. The likes of Christian Chukwu, who succeeded Dominic Ezeani as Green Eagles’ captain. The Rangers and Green Eagles goalkeeper, Emmanuel Okpala was the first Nigerian to be named African Player of the year in 1978. Also, by 1972, Enyeazu was appointed Director of the National Sports Commission for his outstanding performance with the Rangers and in 1973 organized Nigeria’s first National Sports Festival. Remarkably, the NFA also demonstrated its desire to see the Rangers succeed in international matches. In the 1975 African Winner Championship, the body drafted the national team coach, Tiko “Father Tiko” Jelisavic (1974-1978), to also help prepare the team before the departed to play against the Police FC of Senegal in 1977. Fortunately, the Rangers emerged trophy winners of the African Championship Cup. Away from the traditional focus of the Rangers as merely an Igbo club used to continue the war, neglected concepts of how the Rangers induced psychological healing was significant for dignified reintegration efforts and how they played the Igbo back into Nigeria is a significant discourse.

¹⁵¹ “Rangers Int’l Football Club (6): The Second Generation of Rangers,” VanguardNGR, published on July 16, 2017, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/07/rangers-intl-football-club-6-second-generation-rangers/>

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The prominence of the Rangers in the annals of Nigeria's club soccer cannot be overemphasized. Neither does it stand just as a soccer team but as a movement of a war-torn people, the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria. Its remarkable feats transcended winning matches, raising trophies to winning hearts and championing causes. The circumstances for the formation of the Rangers and subsequent realization of its founding vision have imprinted the club in club soccer history and Igbo historiography. As a source of psychological healing, an avenue for group pride and renewed dignity, and a catalyst for self-reintegration, the history of the Igbo people in postwar reconstruction Nigeria is incomplete without the Rangers.

At the end of the Nigeria-Biafran war in 1970, the Igbo rebuilt their lives and land, however, with defeat, shame and humiliation. To heal wounds of war and restore a dignified Igbo, the Rangers FC was created in 1970 in the Igbo-dominated East Central State. While it started without unified Igbo support, subsequent victories especially in intra-state competition triggered massive Igbo identification and support, the first in Igbo history. The Rangers became symbolic of Igbo unity, exemplifying the group's myth and becoming the source of psychological healing from their war defeat. The group, in turn, showed their appreciation through mass turnout to their matches, widespread celebrations and support.

Remarkably, the Rangers FC was central to restoring the dignity of the Igbo people in postwar Nigeria. Government talks of "No victor. No vanquish" were not backed with proactive action that would help bury the woes of the wars. Hence, the people had to recourse to the Rangers. Through the exploits of the team, winning matches and trophies, the Igbo drew immense inspiration in a critical reconstruction and reintegration era. They felt a sense of pride, restored self-esteem and rekindled their genius for self-reliance and perseverance.

The Rangers was again another example of Igbo self-help projects for reconstruction and rehabilitation in postwar Nigeria.

The psychological condition of the Igbo remained significant for an effective reintegration programme. A defeated psyche would have defeated the purpose of true reintegration. However, for the Igbo, who was reputed as highly successful that other groups envied them, only a new identity not riddled with war loss, defeat, humiliation and shame would guarantee a dignified mind and effective reabsorption in the “New Nigeria.” Therefore, it is remarkable how the Rangers, who did not waste time to win matches and by 1971 won a national championship—the Challenge Cup, presented to the people a new identity they wore so proudly as they interacted with other groups in Nigeria.

Through its matches, the Rangers spearheaded a full psychological and physical reintegration and re-absorption of the Igbo into Nigeria’s mainstream social life. It created a platform for interaction of equals and projected Igbo capacity to contribute significantly to the development of Nigeria. Several of its matches were played outside of the Igbo heartland and were crucial in triggering interactions across the various ethnic groups. Rather than the narrative of the Rangers as an Igbo medium for the continuation of the war, Ranger instead brought glory to Nigeria in winning and representing Nigeria in continental championships, recruiting players and management officials from other ethnic nationalities and contributing significantly, sometimes more, players into the national team that brought Nigeria glory. The Rangers characterized how Igboness is not anti-Nigeria but through its exploits, it promoted Igboness *and* Nigerianness against Igboness *over* Nigerianness.

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