

**WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT AND WAR PLANS IN EBIRALAND****CHUKWUMA C.C. OSAKWE, Ph.D**Dept. of Hist & Intl Studies  
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**ABSTRACT**

Wars among the Ebira were not fought with the aim of taking human life but to prove a symbolic victory. Their traditional weapon of war, the arrow, as used against human beings had a different design from the one used in hunting animals. Though the arrows were poisoned, arrow neutralising specialists were always available to offer services of applying antidotes and treating the injured in battle irrespective of which side they may belong. The Ebira had the privilege of manufacturing their own weapons by both indigenous and migrant blacksmiths who were later assimilated into the society. Though there was no standing army, a system of military training that had up to four stages however existed among the people. Traditional humanitarian rules among the Ebira pre-dates the current humanitarian norms which Francis Dunant and the rest started propagating in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The traditional humanitarian rules of the Ebira cover areas like care for the wounded, treatment of combatants, prohibition of treachery, humane treatment of women, non-combatants and medical personnel among others.

**Keywords:** War, ebira, weapon, nigeria, ebiraland.

**INTRODUCTION**

The most popular weapon of war among the Ebira before 1875 was the arrow, but there were other weapons which have been sub-divided into assault and defensive weapons. The production of these weapons was undertaken by two groups of professional blacksmiths known as *omu-uhi* and *Aningyere*. The arrow, a thin iron object with a sharp point like needle, was fortified with poison which was produced by a distinct group entirely. The poison, upon contact with blood had the capacity to kill the victim unless it was neutralised. As a result, the Ebira people used to station arrow poison neutralising herbalists close to battle fields. Wars among the Ebira were not fought with the aim of taking human life but to prove a symbolic victory. Their traditional weapon of war, the arrow, as used against human beings had a different design from the one used in hunting animals. It was because of the humanitarian concern of Ebira people that they stationed herbalists and traditional doctors at battle fields to treat the wounded. In assessing the pattern of response by the Ebira to conflict issues like treatment of wounded combatants, women and care givers among others, it is not out of place to say that while the Europeans were wallowing in the barbarism of war and combatant treachery, the Ebira were already practicing humanitarian principles.

In an attempt to delve into the issue of preparation of arrow poison, this study has been unable to identify the botanical names of the herbs used for preparation. The only practitioner available as at the time of data collection was too old to go into the thick bushes to collect samples of the plants because modernisation and structural development have overtaken the vegetation around. The attempt later on to mobilize him to the bush to collect the herbs for botanical identification proved abortive as the man was already dead. What this study has

however succeeded in doing is to help retain the traditional Ebira names of the plants so that further researches may continue from there.

### Assault Weapons

The traditional assault weapons of the Ebira were the arrow, propelled by the bow, and the short knife. The arrow is an iron object with a sharp point like the needle. A little bigger than the needle, it is about two or three centimetres long, inserted into two other items. A functional arrow, *opa*, is therefore made up of three items, the sharp iron head inserted into a thin stick called *okete*, which is further inserted into another stick (a little longer and bigger than the first) called *omo*. The length of the entire arrow is about two feet five inches, the sticks are the bamboo type and at the bottom of the *omo*, an opening is artificially created to hook the bow string comfortably.<sup>1</sup>

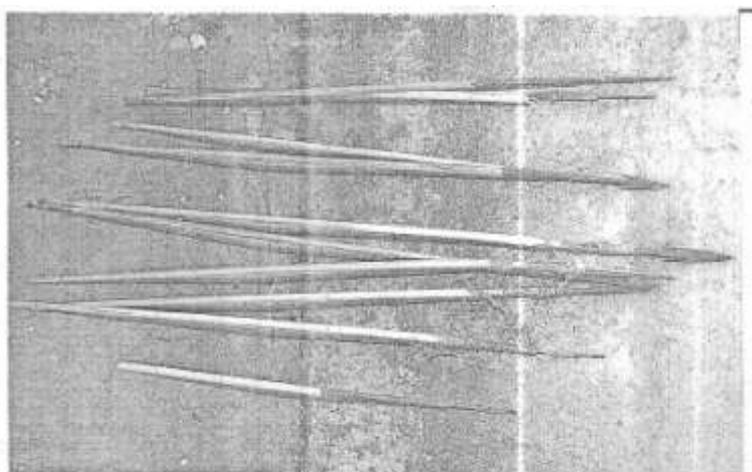


FIG. 1: ARROW (OPA)

The bow, *okita*, is made of a stick cut into size from trees like *opopanchi*, *irito*, and *akakane*. The major characteristic of the sticks gotten from the above mentioned trees is that they are tensile in nature and cannot break into pieces easily as they are put to use in a concave or convex position. The bow string, *oza*, is a product of the skin of a deer, *ocha*, twisted like a horsewhip. The bow stick is wrapped with the same animal skin so as to make for preservation and easy handling.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to give the arrow a strong force when shooting, an object in form of a ring, *iremu*, was inserted onto the right thumb. The left hand was used to position the arrow in the middle of the string while the right hand was placed directly in the front, holding the bow with the front section of the bow between two fingers. With this positioning, the *iremu* helps to pull the string backwards when released so that the arrow could go far.<sup>3</sup> The arrows are kept in a quiver, *ahaba*, which is carved out of a big bamboo sealed meticulously with animal skin; the type of animal skin determined the status of the owner. While some seal theirs with the skin of ram or antelope, considered as “lesser animals”, the powerful individuals sealed theirs with the skin of wild animals like lion, buffalo, hyena or leopard that only the professionals and few powerful hunters could kill. A quiver, depending on its size contains between six to twenty arrows and has a cover which protects it from rain or any other form of moisture that may wash away the poison smeared on the arrow.<sup>4</sup>

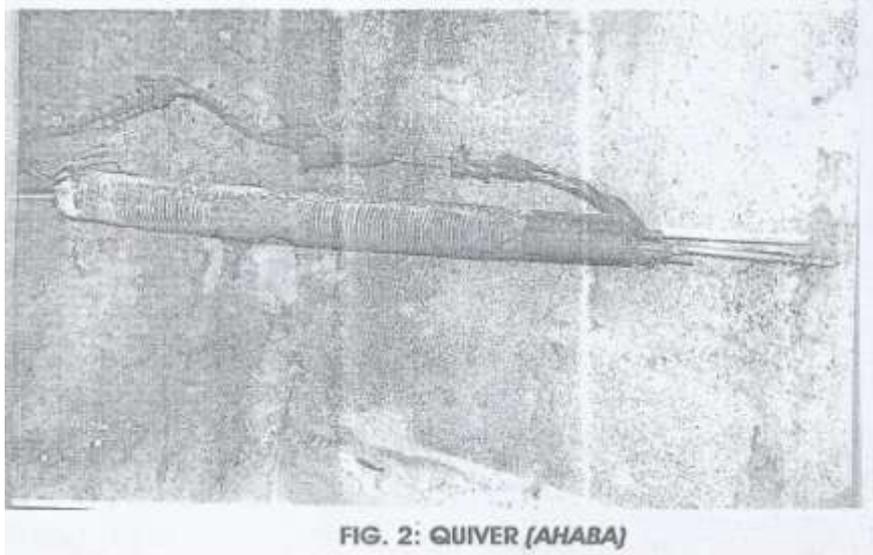


FIG. 2: QUIVER (AHABA)

The short knife, *uhuoza*, was used by the Ebira as an assault weapon mostly during major battles. The *uhuoza* is a knife of about ten inches long with a wooden handle and an animal skin rope used in hanging it on the left fore-arm. This was used for close range attack on enemies.<sup>5</sup> The use of the *uhuoza* compares favourably with the use of short stabbing spears by Zulu warriors under Shaka in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup> Just like the Zulu, the Ebira warrior used the *uhuoza* to close in on an enemy for close range combat. The period of the introduction of the *uhuoza* into warfare in Ebiraland is unknown, but the people seem to have been with the knowledge early in their history. According to oral tradition, Ebira notable warriors used the *Uhuoza* during wars with the Bassa and Owe. As early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, when the Ebira had settled in their present location, warriors used the *uhuoza*.<sup>7</sup> A masquerade known as *anivasa* was said to have originated as a result of the feat achieved by a warrior from Obangede when the Ebira defeated the Bassa.<sup>8</sup> The war against the Bassa took place when the Ebira were getting settled in their present location, therefore, it is not out of place to conclude that the use of *uhuoza* in Ebiraland for close range combat predates the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, predating its appearance in Zululand.

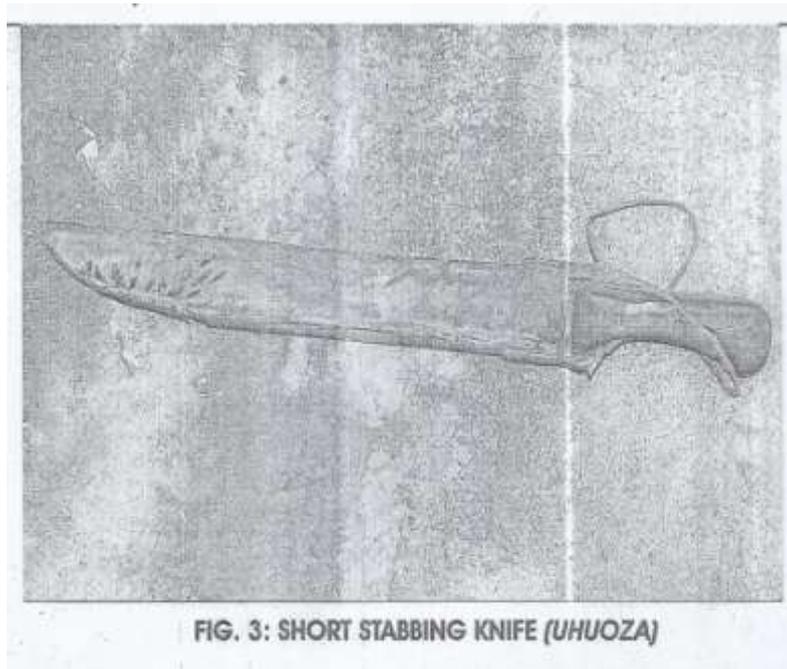
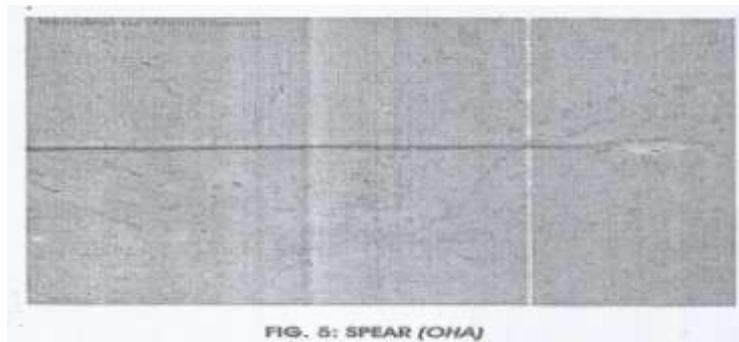


FIG. 3: SHORT STABBING KNIFE (UHUOZA)

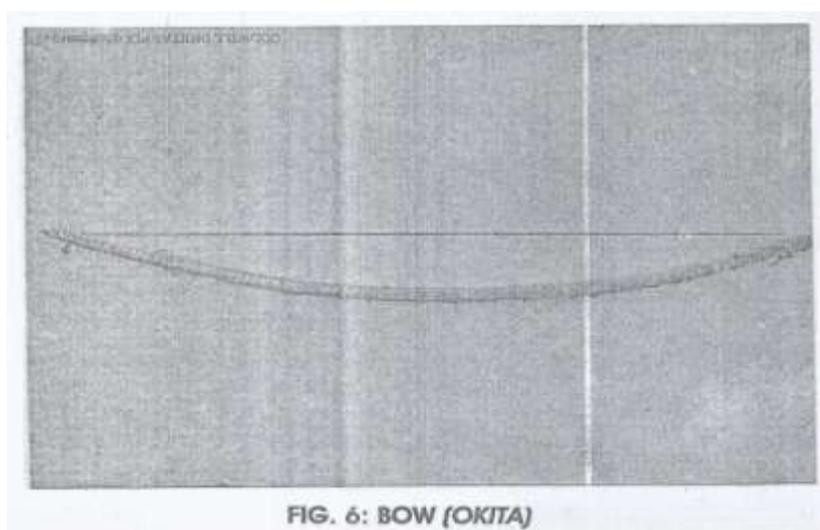
The spear, *oha*, was another assault weapon among the Ebira. The Ebira spear was made of a thin iron like a rod. It is about six feet, three inches in length with a sharp flat end. According to oral sources, the Ebira mostly used the *oha* in their wars against the Oworo as at the time they were settling down in their present location. The wars forced the Oworo to settle in areas around the northwest of Lokoja, present capital of Kogi state.<sup>9</sup>

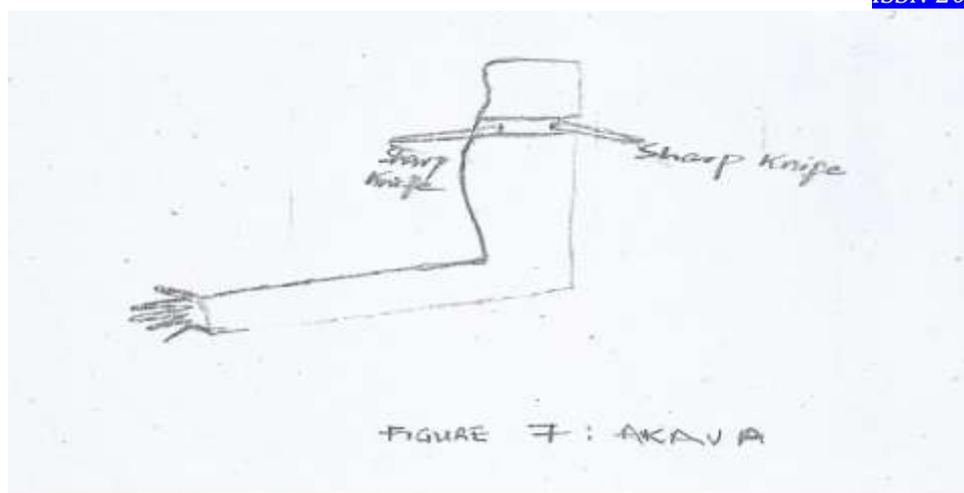
### Defensive Weapons

The traditional defensive weapons of the Ebira were *akava*, *ogonto*, and *enyaresu*. The *akava* was a round iron object with short sharp knives at the edge inserted onto the left palm or left upper arm.<sup>10</sup> The *akava* seems to be an invention of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Ebira fought the *Ajinomoh* wars against the Nupe jihadists. The Nupe jihadists were noted for capturing people they overpowered, indeed hunting for slaves, so the *akava* aided the Ebira against raiders who intended to catch victims alive. With the *akava* stationed in the position mentioned above, given minimal resistance, the victim escaped while the raider sustained injuries.<sup>11</sup>



The *ogonto* was designed as a shield and served as protection against shots of arrow and spear. The *ogonto* was a four-edged object made of hard branches of palm tree and buffalo skin. The sides were supported by sticks with a hanging and handling device in the middle. It was about two feet three inches wide and about two feet five inches in length and was stuck to the ground while the warrior took cover behind it.<sup>12</sup> Its measurement was enough to give cover to a warrior on squatting position, but could peep by the sides or jump over it occasionally to shoot at an enemy then return to take cover.



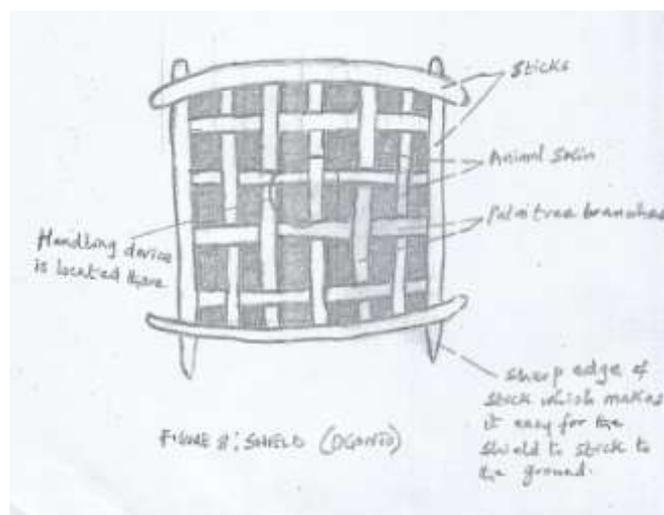


The *enyaresu* was a helmet made of calabash and the skin of ram as seal. Part of the ram skin was projected in a position that enabled the user to fasten it round his chin. The *enyaresu* was strong enough to prevent arrows and spears from penetrating.<sup>13</sup>

In the traditional setting of the Ebira, there were specialists in the production of all other accessories like bow, quiver, shield, and helmet. They took it upon themselves to source for all the items needed before converting them into finished products.

### The Role of Blacksmiths

Metal objects used as weapons were among others produced by blacksmiths, arrow heads, the *iremú*, *uhuoza*, and *akava* were all produced by them. The Ebira seem to have been endowed with the knowledge of iron working before migrating to their present location in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> Traditional blacksmithing is called *uhi* in Ebiraland while those that practice it are called *omu-uhi*. As the Ebira settled down in their present abode, a set of migrants who specialised mostly in smiting arrived, probably in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century from Epe in present Edo state.



By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, two other migrant groups who equally have their roots in present Edo state arrived Ebiraland, they are the *Uneme* and *Ingyere*.<sup>15</sup> Search for occupational opportunities have been attributed as the reason for the migration of these iron specialists, perhaps coupled with the large concentration of iron-ore in the area of

Ebiraland. The *Ingyere* were the more dominant and specialised in terms of skills, they appeared also more dedicated, and therefore, they soon overshadowed the rest. This is responsible for the use of the word *Aningyere*, that is, people from *Ingyere* by the Ebira to refer to all traditional iron workers.<sup>16</sup>

The secret of the survival of the Ebira throughout their history has been attributed to the self-sufficiency they enjoyed in metal objects like hoes, axes, cutlasses, arrow heads, short knives, among others.<sup>17</sup> The services of the blacksmiths no doubt contributed to the successes recorded by the Ebira in warfare in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Preparation of Arrow Poison

The arrows used by the Ebira in hunting and by extension warfare were coated with certain substances that can best be called poison. The Ebira did not initially prepare the poison for human beings, they were meant for hunting of animals. As a result of self defence, it became expedient for the Ebira to use such poisoned arrows for human beings. In a bid to minimise the effect on human beings or to ameliorate human sufferings, they developed antidote for arrow poison which will be treated under traditional humanitarian rules or principles elsewhere in this paper.

Each clan had its own arrow poison producing specialists. The composition of the poison of one clan could differ from another and that equally determined the antidote. The antidote of arrow poison from *ehemi* clan for instance differed from that of *uka* clan.<sup>18</sup> A day was usually set aside for its production which took place in the bush, a reasonable distance from human habitation.<sup>19</sup> On that day, owners of arrows and other people assembled there, the exception being women, people with open wound, and men who had sexual intercourse the previous night. The presence of women and men who had sexual intercourse was believed to have the capacity to spoil the preparation while the odour of the poison could aggravate the pains of any open wound.<sup>20</sup>

The ingredients of arrow poison are herbs and roots like *irege*, *apasa*, *irihi*, and *agere*, put together in a large clay pot for boiling. Simultaneously, a big tuber of yam was roasted on the fire beneath the pot. The roasted yam was shared among those present; they were under obligation to eat their share there and not to allow any portion out of the area. As the case may be, a cockerel or he-goat was killed for the purpose; the meat of the sacrificed animal was also not allowed to be taken out of the area, consumption must be total as the bones were to remain there.<sup>21</sup>

As soon as the contents of the pot were satisfactorily cooked, a member stepped forward, put fresh leaves in his mouth and chanted some incantations. The incantation reflected the way the victim (traditionally an animal) was expected to react when shot with an arrow bearing the poison. Among the incantations chanted were phrases like *uye ani oyma jine oze* or *uye ani oyma jine okuhua* ( which literally means its animal does not cross road or its animal does not cross stream or river). While chanting the incantation, he demonstrated the expected action of the animal or the victim when shot. At the end of his incantations and demonstrations, those around put down the pot from fire in a very careful manner, allow the content to cool down before being rationed among owners of arrows. They in turn rub the liquid contents on their arrows carefully to avoid being injured as that could be fatal. The arrows were then allowed to dry under the sun, after which the owners will put them back into their quivers and depart.<sup>22</sup>

## Method of Military Training

Like many traditional African societies, the Ebira had no standing army, it was however part of a child's upbringing to know how to use the bow and arrow. The nature of pre-modern life necessitated individual military prowess in order to be able to participate in hunting activities and as a means of self defence. Despite the absence of a standing army in Ebiraland, military training was however a general and obligatory activity that had stages of graduation.

The first stage was a system known as *ovo*.<sup>23</sup> The *ovo* was a game practiced by children of between the ages of eight and fourteen. They fabricated sticks and branches of palm trees to form bow and arrow. The children formed groups and challenged themselves either in the farm or in the village. Two groups engaged each other at once and arranged themselves in rows facing each other at reasonable distance. An unripe pawpaw or melon ball was rolled towards group A by group B; group A members took shots at the object. It will then be the turn of group B to take shots, so members of group A took an object, rolled it towards group B who all aimed and took shots. That marked the end of round one, the number of shots taken by each group was counted and the winner determined. More rounds were played and since one group must emerge victorious, challenges were made against other times.<sup>24</sup>

Upon graduation from the *ovo* stage, the young Ebira boy moved to the second stage which involved the shooting of static objects like trees with un-poisoned arrows.<sup>25</sup> This stage was practiced in highly isolated environments and under the strict supervision of elders so as to avoid hitting human beings in case targets were missed.

The third stage was for the boys to go into the bush still with un-poisoned arrows and took shots at small animals like rabbits, rodents, and squirrels. The three stages were supposed to have been completed by the age of fifteen.<sup>26</sup>

The fourth and final stage was when as from fifteen years the boys were allowed to join large hunting parties, having perfected the art of using un-poisoned arrows to kill small animals.<sup>27</sup> At this stage, he was still not allowed to handle poisoned arrows but was allowed to understudy adults in practical hunting life and carry out other ancillary activities associated with hunting. This final stage stretched up to ten years because the average age for participation in battle was about twenty-five.<sup>28</sup> At the age of twenty-five therefore, the young adult, having perfected the use of the arrow was considered ripe enough to participate in battles. Military training was a discipline instilled in every youth by the Ebira society under strict supervision of adults; the ability of one person to master the art of shooting more than the other however depended largely on individual ability.

## Traditional Humanitarian Rules

The Ebira had traditional rules that governed the conduct of armed conflicts among themselves. The rules were mutually respected by the people mostly because they regarded themselves as people of a common origin. Founders of the six clan groups are regarded in tradition as children of one father who are forbidden to shed each other's blood. This, by extension, is informed by their general belief of the sanctity of human life which made them to view war as a demonstration of symbolic superiority in archery and not to destroy life.

The traditional Ebira society viewed war from the agonistic point. Agonistic combat is a type of war fought not to destroy the enemy or to appropriate coveted values, but to achieve a symbolic victory. Agonistic contests are regulated by customs, norms, and rules that are

shared and ceremoniously respected by the combatants.<sup>29</sup> The Ebira held life with utmost care and reverence and would stop at nothing to preserve it, even in times of war. Causality in battle did not depend on the number of deaths, rather, injury to one, two, or three warriors signified an end to it. The military objective of war was to display dexterity in terms of use of arms, directed only at those who bore arms.<sup>30</sup>

A wounded warrior was either carried on another person's back or on a stretcher, *odoro*, to a poison neutralising herbalist, *ovaropa*. A first aid measure of drawing blood from the opening of an arrow wound was carried out before heading to the place of the *ovaropa*. The services of the doctor was humanitarian, he did not charge the victims for the work done and could treat anybody from any side. The wounded remained with the *ovaropa* until such wound was healed.<sup>31</sup>

In the traditional Ebira society, a combatant was any person bearing arms and was on the battle field. The Ebira regarded any other person outside this as non-combatant and therefore was not subject to attack. Battles do take place on the battle field known as *okuji* with a full participation of members of both sides. All able bodied male went to the war front as failure to do so was seen as cowardice, except if permission was given by the clan head, chief-priest or a diviner of repute.<sup>32</sup> Matters of war were settled on the battle field and not outside it, that is why only combatants were targeted.

Treachery or deceit was not part of the method of prosecution of warfare in Ebiraland. The Ebira did not believe in swindling an enemy to attain victory as such acts were viewed as blatant exhibition of cowardice, level playing grounds were always provided for combat actions. The Ebira have an adage, *iresu eyama nwehi yoza ji*, which literally means that 'you cannot sever an enemy's head in your own house'.<sup>33</sup> It is believed that in your own house, you have all the advantage of securing a victory over your enemy, so, any victory in that respect is not justifiable. The Ebira people carry this principle as far as the battle field where all efforts were made to allow combatants operate on an equal footing.

After identifying a cause, one side was naturally more bent on going into battle, especially the side that felt deeply offended. Wars were usually between one clan or village and the other, as the Ebira villages were patterned towards clans. Wars among the Ebira were fought on clan basis and various causes like masquerade festival crisis, personal rivalries, and dispute over land or woman could act as possible causes.<sup>34</sup> Information about an impending war was spread by members of a clan or village who went out for marketing or other issues. Women who were married to members of opposing clans or villages do inform their own kinsmen of the preparedness of the other group for war.<sup>35</sup> When both sides had finalised preparations, announcement was made in the evening preceding the battle day by the clan head or chief-priest through a town crier. In the morning, war situation was brought to the notice of every one through the blowing of a horn, urging the people to prepare and move to the battle field, it was not the tradition of the Ebira to attack each other by surprise.

Traditional restrictions on sex for warriors naturally ruled out the issue of rape and sexual assault. Among the precautions taken by warriors was abstinence from sex for a certain number of days, the number ranged from about two to seven days before battle.<sup>36</sup> Sexual harassment or rape were extremely uncommon among the Ebira, they were not even the norm during peace times. During war situations however, legitimate sex was forbidden, therefore, it was not possible for the Ebira to take advantage of women as a result of war.

During battles, some brave women do stay behind warriors and pick stray enemy arrows for their men. The general belief was that such women possessed some magical powers which they directed towards the victory of the men in front. Such women were automatically rated as having fought a battle. The rules forbade their capture or torture just as the injured received humanitarian assistance even from the opposing side.<sup>37</sup>

The Ebira have an adage that protects messengers under any circumstances, *ozoma wu onu utu*, meaning 'a messenger must not be killed'. In war situation, there were two types of messengers, a physical messenger and a divine messenger. The physical messenger was any bearer of message between one village and another while the divine messenger was the arrow poison neutralising herbalist. These two group of people were given protection at all times.<sup>38</sup> Under tense atmosphere when opposing sides were on security alert, a messenger was set free upon the utterance of *utu atuni ni, ozoma wu onu utu*, meaning 'am a messenger, a messenger must not be killed'. On hearing this, vigil keepers only interrogate him before allowing him to carry on his duties. The arrow poison neutralising herbalist, *ovaropa*, was highly respected because he was there to treat the injured indiscriminately and throughout the stay of the injured in his place, he was neither victimised nor attacked.<sup>39</sup>

### **Basic Rules of the International Humanitarian Law**

The International Humanitarian Law or Law of Armed Conflicts is designed to regulate the conduct of armed conflicts. It is inspired by consideration of humanity and the mitigating of human suffering. The aim is to "protect persons and property/objects that are (or may be) affected by armed conflict and limit the rights of parties to a conflict to use methods and means of warfare of their choice".<sup>40</sup> It is therefore designed to "balance humanitarian concerns and military necessity, and subjects warfare to rules of law by limiting its destructive effect and mitigating human suffering".<sup>41</sup>

The following are the basic rules of International Humanitarian Law: Persons outside of combat and those not taking part in hostilities shall be protected and treated humanely. It is forbidden to kill or injure an enemy who surrenders or who is outside of combat. The wounded and sick shall be cared for and protected by the party to the conflict which has them in its power. Captured combatants and civilians must be protected against acts of violence and reprisals. They shall have the right to correspond with their families and to receive relief. No one shall be subjected to torture, corporal punishment or cruel or degrading treatment. Parties to a conflict and members of their armed forces do not have an unlimited choice of methods and means of warfare. Parties to a conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants. Attacks shall be directed solely against military objectives.<sup>42</sup>

### **Humanitarian Law Compared to Ebira Traditional Rules**

Since war became a phenomenon in human life, it has been associated with pain, horror, suffering and death, leaving behind a legacy of unmitigated physical and psychological torture on the sensibility of survivors. It is in view of this that humanitarian principles and rules were developed by most societies in pre-modern times. Contemporary humanitarian law as propagated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and ratified by the international community aims at mitigating human suffering caused by war, or to humanize war.<sup>43</sup> War, with all its gruesome ramifications has been accepted as a normal way of conducting disputes between political groups, otherwise, all known humanitarian rules and

laws would have criminalised war rather than humanizing it.<sup>44</sup> In a bid to give war a human face therefore, and cushion its corrosive effect on man and his environment, International Humanitarian Law evolved.

However, war began to assume a rapidly dangerous dimension in Europe before spreading to other parts of the World from the Napoleonic era. The Napoleonic wars of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century brought to an end the practice of sparing enemy field hospitals and leaving both the wounded and medical personnel untouched. Instead, medical personnel, their equipments and the wounded came under fire while it equally became risky to treat the wounded by inhabitants of nearby localities, as such acts could incur the wrath of an invading army.<sup>45</sup> Competition for overseas empires and influence among European nations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century aggravated the menace of war, coupled with the invention of more devastating weapons. More recently, the horrifying new dimension introduced into warfare by the German war machine under Hitler and the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki through the use of atomic bomb generated a lot of humanitarian concerns.<sup>46</sup> In view of this, the World began to think of enforcing humanitarian laws.

Codification of humanitarian norms was initiated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through the efforts of people like Francis Lieber, Florence Nightingale and Henry Dunant. Francis Lieber, a German immigrant to the United States drew up a code of conduct in 1863 during the American Civil War, later known as the Lieber Code for the Northern army. Included in the code were the humane treatment of civilian population in areas of conflict and the forbidden of the execution of Prisoners of War (POW). Florence Nightingale was also committed to the saving of lives and offering humanitarian services during the Crimean War. The most outstanding personality in the efforts towards the humanizing of warfare was Henry Dunant, a Genovese businessman who had worked with wounded soldiers at the battle of Solferino in 1859. In his book titled 'A Memory of Solferino', he described the horrors he had witnessed and his reports led to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1863 and the convening of a conference in Geneva in 1864 which drew up the following Geneva Conventions: the first is the Convention 'for the Amelioration of the condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field'; the second Geneva Convention is 'for the Amelioration of the Condition of Wounded, Sick, and Shipwrecked Members of Armed Forces at Sea'; the third is 'Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War'; and the fourth is 'Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War'.<sup>47</sup>

The regard for the sanctity of human life was an integral part of Ebira tradition and had reflected in the way they conducted disputes among themselves. The Ebira did not regard war as a total affair; their type of war can best be described as an agonistic combat. There were many traditional rules governing the conduct of war in Ebiraland which compares favourably with contemporary global humanitarian principles. These humanitarian principles in Ebiraland had been in practice before the *Ajinomoh* wars of 1865 and 1875, for according to available data, inter-clan or inter-village battles took place only before this episode.<sup>48</sup> Notable scholars of Ebira history are of the opinion that unity was one of the major consequences of the *Ajinomoh* wars.<sup>49</sup> This unity which was necessary against external aggression must have made the people to stop fighting among themselves but concentrate on fighting external enemies. Going by the above analogy therefore, traditional rules of armed conflicts among the Ebira which this study is espousing predates the current humanitarian law which the World is trying to practice. On this note, some areas of similarities between Ebira traditional rules and the International Humanitarian Law will be identified.

## Distinction between Civilians and Combatants

Article 43 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention states that “members of the armed forces of a Party to a conflict (other than medical personnel and chaplains) are combatants, that is to say, they have the right to participate directly in hostilities”.<sup>50</sup> Article 44 emphasises further by describing a combatant as someone who carries arms openly.<sup>51</sup> A combatant therefore is a person who bears arms and is directly involved in hostilities. The Ebira also regard a combatant as any person bearing arms in the battlefield. Arrow shots were targeted at combatants and not any other person, either within the vicinity of the battlefield or outside of it. The Ebira never believed in battle outside the battlefield and therefore did not think it wise to involve any other person or group not actively involved in action. Accounts of battle proceedings among the Ebira indicate that there was the presence of observers during combat actions; therefore, if the Ebira did not regard those outside of combat as neutral, observer would not have been present, to an extent that they could act as umpires.<sup>52</sup>

## Treatment of Medical Personnel and the Wounded

Medical personnel mean “persons assigned exclusively to medical activities, to the administration of medical establishments and to medical transportation”.<sup>53</sup> The International Humanitarian Law mandates all medical personnel during conflicts to treat the wounded irrespective of where they may belong. It is emphatically stated that the “wounded or sick-and therefore defenceless-combatants shall be respected and cared for, whatever their nationality; personnel attending them, the buildings in which they shelter and the equipment used for their benefit, shall be protected”.<sup>54</sup> As stated earlier in this study, the Ebira had their traditional medical personnel in charge of war situations known as *ovaropa*. Stretchers, *odoro*, representing modern medical transport were used to move the injured to the place of the *ovaropa*. His services were purely humanitarian and could treat anybody from any party without discrimination. The *ovaropa* and the wounded were highly protected by tradition against attack or molestation of any sort because the wounded ceases to be a combatant.<sup>55</sup> War was not fought in Ebiraland with a view to using death as yardstick for measuring casualty; a warrior who was hit by an arrow was immediately taken to the *ovaropa*. By the tradition of the people, casualty in war must not exceed three. If during the course of shooting, one, two, or three casualties were recorded, the side of the victim(s) withdrew and the battle stopped, but if casualties were on a one-one, two-two basis, the side that recorded the third casualty had to withdraw since the highest number was three.<sup>56</sup> The wounded was accorded respect and protection throughout his stay with the *ovaropa* while his family members enjoyed unfettered access to him.

## Regulation of Means of War

With reference to Article 22 of the Hague Regulations, the right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is limited.<sup>57</sup> This means that the laws of war do not recognise in belligerents an unlimited power in the adoption of means of injuring the enemy. Weapons should not cause “superfluous injuries” nor should they be employed indiscriminately against non-combatants.<sup>58</sup> In a related manner, the Ebira regulated the use of weapons in warfare. Their traditional weapon, the arrow, is of two types; the one used in hunting animals is bigger and designed to inflict deep injuries while the one permitted for use against human beings has its tip as thin as a needle.<sup>59</sup> The size used on human beings did not have the capacity to pierce through the skin, it was only meant to inflict minimal cut on the victim. The Ebira were already practicing the use of less dangerous weapons for human beings long before the Hague

Convention of 1899 which prohibited the use of Dum Dum bullets and the Geneva Protocol of 1925 that prohibited the use of asphyxiating, poisonous, and other gases and chemical/biological elements.<sup>60</sup>

### Gender Issues

Ebira traditional rules forbade any form of sexual intercourse before and during the course of battle. In view of this, the issues of sexual harassment and rape were not in existence.<sup>61</sup> The Ebira greatly abhor any form of taking advantage over opponents, even combatants, so, the issue of sexual harassment was out of combat and was not in any way part of the criminal lexicon of the people.

### CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown that the Ebira, early in their history were independent in terms of production of iron implements with particular reference to weapons of war. Due to the presence of indigenous blacksmiths, *omu-uhi*, fortified by the influx of migrant ones, *Aningyere*, they were able to produce enough weapons to defend themselves against contemporary aggressors up till the coming of the colonialists.

Though the Ebira had no standing army, military training was however compulsory on every young male, partly as requirement for hunting, and partly for self and communal defence. Wars among the Ebira were not fought with the aim of taking life but to prove a symbolic victory. Their traditional weapon of war, the arrow, as used against human beings had a different design from the one used in hunting animals. Though the arrows were poisoned, arrow neutralising specialists were always available to offer services of applying antidotes and treating the injured in battle irrespective of which side they may belong. Traditional humanitarian rules like care for the wounded in battle, distinction between combatants and civilians, prohibition of treachery, treatment of messengers and medical personnel, and humane treatment of women existed among the Ebira. The prevalence of these rules which predate the development of the same rules elsewhere ranks the Ebira among societies that practiced humanitarian norms in history.

### Notes

1. Sule, S., "War and Society among the Ebira in the Nineteenth Century"(unpublished B.A. dissertation, B.U.K Kano, 1991), p.52.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p.53.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. P. Curtin, S. Feierman, and L. Thompson with J. Vansina, *African History*, Sussex: Longman, 1982, p.305.
7. Oral interview with Lawal Omoricha, 70+ years, retired civil servant and traditionalist, Obangede, October 8, 2013.
8. Oral interview with Salihu Jonjoro, 70+ years, retired civil servant and community leader, Obangede, October 15, 2013.
9. Mohammed Jimoh, 65 years, ex-service man, interviewed at Obangede, on March 10, 2014.
10. Sule, "War and Society..." p.54.

11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p.55.
13. Y.A. Ibrahim, "The Search for Leadership in a Nigerian Community: Igbirra-Tao, c.1865-1954" (unpublished M.A. thesis, A.B.U. Zaria, 1968), pp.49-50.
14. A.A. Okene, "The Transformation of Ebiraland: 1880-1960" (unpublished PhD thesis. B.U.K. Kano, 1995), p.94.
15. *Ibid.*, p.95.
16. *Ibid.*
17. M.J. Bajehson, *Blacksmithing and Aningere in Ebiraland*, Kaduna: Ohi Printers, 2010, p.29.
18. Oral interview with Kekere Adiva, 80+ years, farmer and community leader, Ogaminana, October 22, 2013.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Sule, "War and Society...", p.57.
21. *Ibid.*, p.58.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Y.A. Ibrahim, "Igbirra Traditional Institutions", in *Nigeria Magazine*, Kaduna, Gaskiya, No. 119, 1976, p.61.
24. Oral interview with M.K.A. Ibrahim, 75 years, retired civil servant, diplomat and politician, Okaito, November 7, 2013, attested to by Lawal Omoricha, 70+ years, retired civil servant and traditionalist, Obangede, on October 8, 2013.
25. Sule, "War and Society...", p.59.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Ibrahim, "Igbirra Traditional Institutions", p.62.
28. *Ibid.*
29. J.P. Smaldone, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate, Historical and Sociological Perspectives*, Cambridge: C.U.P, 1977, p.70.
30. Oral interview with Kekere Adiva, 80+ years, farmer and community leader, Ogaminana, October 22, 2013, and Lawal Omoricha, 70+ years, retired civil servant and traditionalist, Obangede, October 8, 2013.
31. Ibrahim, "Igbirra Traditional Institutions", p.63.
32. Sule, "War and Society...", p.31.
33. Oral interview with Kekere Adiva, 80+ years, farmer and community leader, Ogaminana, October 22, 2013.
34. Ibrahim, "The Search...", p.49, also Sule, "War and Society...", p.27.
35. Sule, "War and Society...", p.32.
36. *Ibid.*, p.29.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Oral interview with Lawal Omoricha, 70+ years, retired civil servant and traditionalist, Obangede, October 8, 2013, and M.K.A. Ibrahim, 75 years, retired civil servant, diplomat and politician, Okaito, November 7, 2013.
39. *Ibid.*
40. F. Kalshoven, *Constraints on the Waging of War*, Geneva: ICRC, 1991, p.1.
41. M. Howard, *The Causes of Wars*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London: Temple Smith, 1983, p.7.
42. Kalshoven, *Constraints on the...*, p.8.
43. J.M. Roberts, *Modern History*, London: Duncan Baird, 2007, p.604.
44. [http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_humanitarian\\_law](http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/International_humanitarian_law), (accessed on 6 June 2013).
45. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*

48. Sule, "War and Society...", p.33.
49. Okene, "The Transformation of...", p.134, and Y.A. Ibrahim, "The Ajinomoh Invasion of Igbirra", *Igbirra Students Association Magazine*, Vol.8, No.1, Zaria: Gaskiya, 1969, p.8-10.
50. Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, Geneva: ICRC, 1996, p.30.
51. *Ibid.*, p.31.
52. Sule, "War and Society...", p.29.
53. F.D. Mulinen, *Handbook on the Law of War for Armed Forces*, Geneva: ICRC, 1987, p.15.
54. *Ibid.*, p.17.
55. The humanitarian concern practiced by the Ebira as tradition preceded the current International Humanitarian Law which had its roots in the initiative of Henry Dunant in the aftermath of the battle of Solferino in northern Italy in 1859.
56. Ibrahim, "Igbirra Traditional Institutions...", p.64.
57. Kalshoven, *Constraints on the...*, p.29.
58. S.R. Chowdhuri, *Nuclear Politics; Towards a Safer World*, USA: New Dawn Press, 2004, p.92.
59. Oral interview with Lawal Omoricha, 70+ years, retired civil servant and traditionalist, Obangede, October 8, 2013.
60. Chowdhuri, *Nuclear Politics; Towards...*, p.93.
61. Sule, "War and Society...", p.29.

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