

## The Extinction of Menai

# Prologue

Notes from the National Historian  
Nigeria Archives, Abuja

6th March, 1990

Today, six Menai children died from the effects of the 1980 Trevis inoculations in Kreektown. A half-naked procession of a few hundred men and women carried their dead twenty kilometres to the Sontik State capital in Ubesia. Police trucks arrived to keep order, pouring out dozens of armed men, but the topless mourners were tragic, not threatening, and they flowed past checkpoint after checkpoint, chanting Menai dirges, provoking sympathy from policemen and an unprecedented empathy from the public, so that by the time the six bodies were laid out by the gates of the Governor's office in Ubesia, the numbers of topless mourners had swollen into the tens of thousands. . . .

No mass hysteria of this nature had ever been reported in Nigeria before, or since.

22nd April, 1990

An attempted coup led by Major Gideon Orkar failed to unseat the government of General Ibrahim Babangida, which had been in power since 1985. It was the bloodiest coup attempt in Nigerian history. Many of the plotters were from Sontik State in the Niger Delta region of the country, and the coup had been inspired by the feeling of exploitation of the region's minority ethnic nations. After the failed coup there was increasing talk of secession in Sontik State.

17th May, 1990

Denying any connection with the coup of April 1990 or the secession agitations, the government established several commissions and enquiries to attend to minority issues, including the Petroleum Communities Development Fund (PCDF), the Department of Research and Cultural Documentation (DRCD), and a certain Psychiatric Enquiry by Dr. Ehi Fowaka. . . .

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*Extracts from the 1990 Interim Psychiatric Evaluation  
of the Menai People*

*Executive Summary:*

*The Brief:*

*As the notorious Topless Procession case demonstrated, the Menai ethnic nation manifests an insular clannishness and resistance to modernity. Is this a symptom of an underlying psychiatric condition afflicting the entire ethnic nation? Are those traits likely to spread to Nigeria's three-hundred-odd ethnic nations? Do they threaten Nigerian nationalism? Is this condition treatable, and if so, by what means?*

*The Subject:*

*The Menai is a minor ethnic nation whose global population at the date of this interim report is about one thousand. Ninety-five percent of all Menai live in Kreektown, an impoverished village on Agui Creek in Sontik State. Although there is only one known instance of public nudity among them, they are pathologically incapable of adapting to city life. They are victims of a group indoctrination that prevents them from emigrating from Kreektown. This made them particularly vulnerable to the defective Trevi inoculations during the 1980 Lassa fever outbreak. They address themselves as Menai, call their language Menai, and (although apparently of average intelligence) stubbornly speak Menai to the exclusion of the official Nigerian language in their village square.*

*Extract from the Glossary:*

*It is a feeble language, as I have mentioned elsewhere. There is actually no word for 'suicide,' which is understandable, I suppose: before this trauma of their imminent extinction, they had no cultural memory of Menai taking*

*their own lives. Their word for 'death' is a portmanteau word that opens up into the English equivalent, sleepcatastrophe. Quaint, that. Sums up their entire world view.*

*Chief (Dr.) Ehi A. Fowaka*

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