

“Borderless Brotherhood”: Analyzing African Solidarity to the Igbo during the Nigerian Civil War and Their Recent Relations with Selected African Countries

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Abstract

The Nigerian civil war is ranked as the most brutal conflict of all times in Africa considering the degree of humanitarian crises that attended the war. Writers have largely focused on the humanitarian crises of the war as well as its politics. This article examines the African “brotherhood” that manifested during the war in favor of Biafra across Africa and how such African commitment strengthened relations between the Igbo and some African countries. The historical-analytical method was used in interpreting and analyzing the data gathered. Primary and secondary sources were utilized such as oral interviews, conventional archival materials, ritual archives, journal articles, and books. The Nigerian civil war was largely internationalized due to the vested interest of the West on the resources of Nigeria. Britain as the biggest ally of Nigeria mobilized other Western countries that supported Nigeria with military and other forms of assistance, leading to colossal destructions in Biafra. In the midst of the humanitarian crisis, fellow Africans demonstrated solidarity and showed concern over the destructions that took place in Biafra. Gabon, Côte d’Ivoire and Tanzania are noted for their solidarity with Biafra. The evacuation of Biafran children to Gabon and Côte d’Ivoire in 1968 portrayed their brotherhood to the Igbo. The paper finds that the Nigerian civil war was instigated and sustained by the West for its economic interest. The paper further argues that Africans deeply understand the covenant of brotherhood and cherish communal living as against the Western individualistic lifestyle. It concludes that the Nigerian civil war was part of neocolonialism.

Keywords: African brotherhood, Nigerian civil war, Igbo, Biafran children, Neo-colonialism in Africa

Introduction

The ideology of “brotherhood” as it is applied in this paper demonstrates the understanding of African belief in being one’s brother’s keeper as well as living as one indivisible race notwithstanding geographical and artificial barriers established by humans. Writers like Chinua

Achebe (2012), W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), and Franz Fanon (1963) have clearly demonstrated that Africans valued their communal life and culture and lived with a sense of purpose since the pre-colonial era. In line with their perspective, it is a fact that the partitioning of Africa into different countries was completely alien to Africans. Before the invasion of Africa by the West, Africa was a borderless space without the kind of neoliberal restrictions placed by the West on Africa upon the establishments of African countries in the 19th Century (Meredith, 2006).

The Nigerian civil war regarded as one of the deadliest civil wars in the continent of Africa in the 20th Century was no doubt influenced by the politics of the super powers of the West. It is true that African nations had complex and multifaceted challenges that erupted in the early days of their independence owing to ethnic politics and other factors. In Nigeria within this period, however, the concern for a good number of the ethnic groups was to dissolve the union and go separate ways based on their ethnicities and aspirations as a people. With the political problem that persisted in Nigeria in 1966/1967 which resulted in coup, counter-coup and massacre of the Igbo and other people of the defunct Eastern region, various African leaders intervened in order to prevent a possible outbreak of a civil war (National Archives Enugu; henceforth: N.A.E CW/CP/X9/21/4).

Still, on the attempt to prevent the occurrence of a civil war in Nigeria, a meeting was held in Ghana which was presided over by the then President of Ghana, General Joseph Arthur Ankrah, with the leaders of the two factions. During the meeting, an agreement was reached not to resort to war. The Ghana meeting recommended a confederation government for Nigeria whereby each region was to be operated with some degree of autonomy to manage its resources and affairs in order to prevent frictions in the union-Nigeria. Nonetheless, the United States and the United Kingdom rejected the recommendation and instead encouraged General Yakubu Gowon (representing union-Nigeria) to reject the agreement he reached in Ghana with Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (representing Biafra). Thus, this was the immediate cause of the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970 (Forsyth, 1977).

This paper argues that the Nigerian civil war was not preconceived by Nigerians. The involvement of Africans across different regions of the continent in mediation before and during the war was an indication of African solidarity and brotherhood. Apparently, the overwhelming neocolonial influence of the West on Nigeria and the rest of Africa compelled Nigerian leaders to opt for war against their fellow Nigerians (N.A.E. /PD/X32).

The notion of “Borderless Brotherhood” as applied in this paper was a genuine concern shown to Nigerians by Africans in those days of trouble in Nigeria from 1966 to 1970 (Achebe, 2010). The concern metamorphosed into support and solidarity by some African countries with the Biafrans during the war in view of the degree of destruction and deaths in Biafra. As demonstrated in the paper, the three countries chosen as case studies are not contiguous to Nigeria; yet, their solidarity was felt inside Biafra as if they were inside Biafra. This reflects the Borderless Brotherhood conceptualized in this study. There were, however, other countries in Africa that also stretched hands of fellowship to the Biafrans, but the impact of Gabon, Tanzania and Côte d’Ivoire on Biafrans was unprecedented (Uwasomba. 2020).

The degree of political convulsions all over Africa, in which ethnic and religious uprisings and insurgencies have become dominant features of the continent’s political landscape, leave much to be desired. Be that as it may, the preceding verity, coupled with the unbridled corruption, intolerance, insecurity and anarchy that now pervades Africa leaves no one in doubt that Africa is what it is largely because of its misfortune (Ogbogbo, 2011). As argued in this paper, African ethos and value system in the precolonial period were rooted and driven by

brotherhood expressed through their communal lifestyle. During the Nigerian crisis of the 1960s, Africans also demonstrated such virtue to an extent. This, therefore, connotes that Africans have the capacity to chart their own course rather than running to their ex-colonial masters who exploit their resources through neocolonialism. The essence of interrogating this phenomenon is to challenge Africans to reclaim their destinies instead of blaming the West for their pitiable and deplorable condition. Africans can rely on their pristine Borderless Brotherhood for postcolonial revolutionary development in all facets of human endeavor. Without doubt, no part of the world can boast of brotherhood more than Africans, who have gone a long way in their excruciating collective experiences such as; the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonialism, and neocolonialism, among the other exploitative capitalistic agendas of the West (Ajayi & Uya, 2010).

In view of the foregoing, Africa is indeed imploding. Most institutions in African states have either collapsed or are collapsing. Instability in all spheres and structures of the modern African states have become part of their characterization. Most of these have manifested in the form of economic and political instability. Whether in Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mali, etc., the story is the same. The instabilities have produced cycles of violence across the African continent, making it the highest producer of refugees and the greatest receiver of foreign aid. The debt burden, the streams of migrants out of the continent, the dilapidating infrastructural facilities, the unprecedented elevation of corruption as part of statecraft and concomitant sociocultural decay epitomized by the professionalization of fraud as a means of livelihood are some of the manifestations of the current African crises (Ogbogbo, 2011).

Unfortunately, most African rulers by their acts of commission or omission have shown a high level of insensitivity and irresponsibility. These strongmen/rulers as in the case of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Charles Taylor of Liberia, Sanni Abacha of Nigeria, Idi Amin of Uganda, Lauren Kabila of Congo, etc. accelerated the virtual collapse of all institutional structures of their states. This picture of Africa is a sad reminder of the state of Songhai Empire after the 1591 Moroccan invasion (Ogbogbo, 2011). Consequent upon this, the current realities in Africa necessitated this paper.

The Nigerian Civil War: A Brief Background

The rampant corruption and mismanagement of the government of the First Republic of Nigeria and the subsequent illegal and bloody coup d'état of January 1966 begin the ugly story. That coup led to the deaths of mainly politicians and military officers from the North and the West and was subsequently perceived as an Igbo coup. The counter-coup of July 1966 was followed by large-scale massacres of Igbo and other easterners, movement of population back to the East, political disagreement between eastern and federal leaders, and severe social and economic dislocations. In a scramble for the prevention of the impending tragedy, some unsuccessful attempts were made in 1966 to bring leaders of the four regions of Nigeria together in meetings aimed at resolving the evident constitutional crises. Yet, mutual mistrust among the major protagonists derailed such home-grown efforts. Finally, Ghana, Nigeria's neighbor to the west, offered to host a mediation conference at Aburi, Ghana (Achebe 2012, Shepherd 1968, Kennedy, Gottlieb, Henkin et al 1972, Waters, 2004).

The Aburui meeting produced an agreement to increase the political power of the regions. The interested world heaved a sigh of relief when it appeared Ghana's mediation was about ending the political crisis in Nigeria. Had the agreement been implanted, the tragedy of Biafra

would have been averted. Instead, upon return to Nigeria, an incredulous world watched in silence as the federal military government reneged on the Aburi accord. Instead, it moved to forestall the consequent threat of secession of the East by carving up the country into 12 states, a situation that aggregated power to the center rather than decentralizing federal power as called for by the Aburi agreement. In response, the East promptly declared the new State of Biafra. The federal military government pronounced the declaration an act of rebellion. Soon, both sides were engaged in a civil war. The international community was aware of all the grievances that relentlessly piled up on both sides prior to the outbreak of the war. As a result, over two million easterners became displaced people and refugees and had to return to the East. Again, the Gowon administration was reluctant in tackling the issue of eastern refugees. Had the refugees question been addressed either by the federal military government of Nigeria or by the international community, the civil war may have been averted. It has been argued that refugees issue was one of the principal reasons why the Biafran Republic was declared (Achebe, 2012).

Research Methodology

Qualitative methodology, which emphasizes words, was used for this study. This simply implies that instead of figures or numbers, expressions in words were employed as the major linguistic token of communication. Data were gathered from primary and secondary sources which were critically analyzed and interpreted using the historical-analytical approach. In other words, the historical-analytical approach was adopted for this study. The primary sources consisted of oral interviews, ritual archives and conventional archival materials from the National Archives in Ibadan, Nigeria and the National Archives in Enugu, Nigeria.

Apart from the people who gave eye-witness accounts of their experiences on the Nigerian civil war, some of the respondents also enriched their knowledge on the Nigerian civil war through: oral tradition, myths, folklore, legends, chants, songs, etc. The Nigerian civil war was a profound and very historic experience for the Igbo that has become part of their lives and society. The war was a major milestone in their history that has shaped their existence as a people in modern Nigeria. Due to the entrenched agonies and loss associated with the war, the discourse of the war has found expression in songs, myths, oral tradition, folklore, legends, chants, images, symbols, shrines, etc. The use of oral sources is fundamental given the fact that the federal government of Nigerian has over the years discouraged and suppressed studies on the war. At the National Archives in Enugu, located in today's Southeastern Nigeria which was the capital of the defunct Biafra, some officials of the federal government stormed into the archives some years ago and carted away some vital documents on the Nigerian civil war which were alleged to have been destroyed.

Oral sources are very appropriate for this study because they offer a fresh perspective on the subject matter and, at the same time, feature the voices of the original participants/victims of the war in one way or the other, or those who had the benefit of being told the account of the war by the direct participants/victims of the war. A total of 21 persons were interviewed who have deep knowledge on the Nigerian civil war and the involvement of the Igbo people, and how their experiences during the war led to the evacuation of their children to the selected countries of this study. Put differently, some of the persons interviewed have their children or some of their relatives living in those selected countries in the post-Nigerian civil era.

The strengths of the research methodology lie in the primary sources of the data which included conventional archival materials, ritual archives and oral interviews. The conventional

archival materials, ritual archives and interviews gathered added newer perspectives to the discourse on the Nigerian civil war, especially with respect to the perspectives of the people who experienced the Nigerian civil war in one way or the other.

In spite of the utilization of archival documents for the reconstruction of African history, there were still aspects of the African past that were not utilized in the task of trying to document the past. Toyin Falola has identified a body of texts, oral performance, symbols, etc. as critical sources which he identified as “Ritual Archives.” His concept of the ritual archives challenges the Western episteme in the conceptualization and use of archives in the reconstruction of the African past. For Falola, ritual archives are the conglomeration of words, as well as texts, ideas, images, performances and, indeed, objects that document as well as speak to those religious experiences and practices that allow us to understand the African world. This should not be limited to Africa because there are other non-African societies that engage in ritual performances (Falola in Ogbogbo, 2023).

Ritual archives address the peculiarities of African societies that are non-literate. They embody a complex mix of interdisciplinarity that encapsulates tremendous amounts of data that bestride the fields of History, Literature, Philosophy, Languages, and much more. In a very fundamental way, his ideas on ritual archives as a source for the reconstruction of the African past entail an expansion of the epistemological corpus available for the study and understanding of the African past. They also have far-reaching implications for knowledge production in Africa and have further enriched the corpus of sources for reconstructing the African past (Ogbogbo, 2023). The major limitation of the research methodology is the course of obtaining oral sources. Apart from the cost of travelling and other costs associated with using national archives in Nigeria, getting people to offer their views on the Nigerian civil war was not an easy task. Another challenge was the inability to travel to those selected countries. Nonetheless, the views of those who had travelled to those countries or lived there before were obtained.

Gabon’s Solidarity to the Igbo during the Nigerian Civil War and Their Relations

During the Nigerian civil war and at the end of it, scholars in Africa and other parts of the world paid great attention to the political dimension of the war and the destruction that attended it. Most of these scholars wrote from different perspectives which reflect their sentiments on the war. Apparently, with the positions of most African political leaders who did not support the idea of secession for their personal interest, these leaders covertly influenced the opinion of the media and African people. This in a way influenced the thoughts of some African scholars. In the same vein, a good number of countries in the Western world also opposed the call for secession by Biafra as Nigeria is their “protégé” (Ademoyega, 1981; Alabi-Isama, 2013; Chukwurah, 2015). In other words, the study on Nigerian civil war has been deeply influenced by political forces such that the aspect that borders on the response of some African countries to the plights of the Igbo during the war and their relations in the post-war era are largely neglected.

During the Nigerian civil war, the people of the defunct Eastern region which consisted mostly of the Igbo were at the verge of annihilation due to the nature of the war. With the total blockade of the region by the federal government and the military support it garnered from the super power countries of the West and other countries, such as Britain, Russia, and Egypt, Biafrans became endangered. This period of the war was the darkest era for the Biafran people considering the rate of deaths, the outbreak of the deadly kwashiorkor disease that killed millions

of children in Biafra, and other forms of destructions occasioned by the bombardments of Biafra (Davis, 1972).

Also, by November of 1968, about one million Biafrans had perished in the war, most of them children. Between September and October of that year, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was feeding 750,000 refugees. Two months later, in December, the Red Cross figures showed that 1.2 million Biafrans were being fed in feeding centers, 800,000 in refugee camp, and 20,000 in hospital care. Within 12 months of the commencement of the war, nearly half a million Biafran children were facing death from kwashiorkor. As a result of the unprecedented life-threatening conditions of the children, the Biafra government in conjunction with some international humanitarian organizations began to airlift affected children out of Biafra, in many cases without the consent of their parents. Some of the children were taken to Gabon (Ibeanu in Osaghae, Onwudiwe and Suberu, 2002).

As established in this discourse, the forces behind the federal government were overwhelming for Biafrans who had limited support around the world. Few countries that supported Biafra only offered moral support. The solidarity from Gabon's government and the people of Gabon was a typical character of African people. Albert Bongo who was the head of state demonstrated courage in accepting the Biafran children into his country. These children were not treated or handled as refugees in Gabon. Rather, they were seen as African children. Bongo appealed to the conscience of Gowon who was the head of state of Nigeria during the war (Kamalu, 2024).

The government of Gabon without any aid took upon the burden of Biafrans whose innocent children were caught in the web and inferno of the bloody civil war fueled by the Western powers. At the places where the Biafran children were kept, efforts were made to revive them to life having been badly affected by kwashiorkor caused by insufficient nutrition. In the real sense, borders are not considered as barriers to the African sense of brotherhood. This reality was demonstrated by the people of Gabon during the Nigerian civil war. Africans are always known for their communal life and sense of brotherhood and sisterhood since the precolonial era. The culture of communality is in itself a product of brotherhood and sisterhood. Despite the introduction of borders and restrictions by the colonial powers, the people of Gabon wholeheartedly embraced the Biafran children who were airlifted into their country during the civil war (Eze, 2022).

A good number of the children who were brought back to Nigeria at the end of the brutal war remain grateful to the people of Gabon. Although most of the children were brought back to Nigeria after the war, there were a few of them that were integrated into the Gabonese society for one reason or the other. With the level of solidarity of Gabon's people with the Biafran people during the war, positive sentiment was built between both parties. Despite the geographical distances between the people of Gabon and the Igbo, both parties relate like people of the same country. Thus, the African brotherhood and sisterhood solidarity from Gabon has made the Igbo people of Nigeria to see Gabon as their second home (Eze, 2022).

According to Eric Offorjiogu, since the Nigerian civil war ended in 1970, a good number of Igbo people from different Igbo communities have migrated to a number of countries in Africa. One of the prominent countries he mentioned is Gabon, which has become a very comfortable abode for the Igbo since the war ended. He added that the perception of other Nigerians on the Igbo in the post-war era has not been favorable. Some of the socioeconomic and political issues that led to the outbreak of the war are still experienced in Nigeria (Offorjiogu, 2023). Obi Okafor (2023) noted that in African countries such as Gabon, the Igbo are warmly

welcomed and often integrated into the larger society. Unlike some parts of Nigeria, according to him, the Gabonese show deep and sincere African brotherhood and sisterhood to the Igbo.

The African brotherhood and sisterhood demonstrated toward the Igbo during the war has become common knowledge in Igboland (Uchenna, 2024). The older ones constantly pass their experience of the Nigerian civil war to the younger ones. This goes a long to show how far the Igbo people appreciate the kind gestures of the Gabonese to them in their days of trials and difficulties (Uchenna, 2024).

Chike Obiora (2023) affirmed that due to the understanding he has on the supportive roles of the Gabonese toward the Biafrans during the war, he often saw himself supporting the national football team of Gabon during the Nations Cup tournaments in Africa being organized by the Confederation of African Football (CAF). According to him, he was not born during the Nigerian civil war, but he has heard a lot on the intervention of Gabon by accepting the Biafran children who were struck by deadly kwashiorkor disease (Obiora, 2023). Still on this aspect, Ugochukwu Celestine (2024) confessed that he would gladly support Gabon in any tournament they are competing with Nigeria.

In view of the preceding situation, Chukwuka Emeke (2021) asserted that Africans share a common heritage with one another, irrespective of the artificial boundaries established by the Europeans. He asserted that division and discrimination among Africans were mostly promoted by the Western world in order to keep oppressing Africa. Emeke was also of the opinion that the action of the Nigerian government and citizens against the Biafrans was primarily instigated by the Western forces who encouraged Gowon to wage war against the Biafrans.

Côte d'Ivoire's Solidarity to the Igbo during the Nigerian Civil War and their Relations

Côte d'Ivoire played a prominent role in brotherhood and sisterhood and solidarity with the Igbo during the Nigerian civil war. Despite being a country far away from Biafra in the West African sub region, Côte d'Ivoire and its people offered uncommon support to the Igbo such that one would think both countries share boundaries. Based on the position of Côte d'Ivoire on the war and its role in absorbing Biafran children who were evacuated into the country, it could be argued that Côte d'Ivoire was one of the most supportive countries in Africa that demonstrated African brotherhood and sisterhood with the Biafrans (Ike, 2024).

Unlike some other countries in the West that supported Biafra for their selfish gains, Côte d'Ivoire gave Biafra significant support borne out of empathy, love and African brotherhood and sisterhood. Attempts have been made to explain the courage of the four African heads of state that recognized Biafra in 1968: (1) Julius Nyerere of Tanzania on April 13, (2) Albert Bongo of Gabon on May 8, (3) Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast on May 16, and (4) Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia on May 20. It is interesting that some of the most cogent writings and commentaries on the international politics of the civil war have not directly linked these recognitions to considerations of national interest of the four states. Instead, the personal characteristics of the heads of state of the four countries have been the focus of analysis (Onwudiwe in Osaghae, Onwudiwe & Suberu 2002).

At the time of the war, Houphouët-Boigny represented a huge political figure in Africa. His personality and philosophy were such that he resented the carnage unleashed on the Biafrans through the Western powers driven by the British. In view of the political dynamics of that period, it is a fact that Côte d'Ivoire's disposition to Nigeria was not motivated by the desire to

exploit Biafra in any way. Côte d'Ivoire did not derive any profit whatsoever in its recognition of Biafra. The general consensus appears to be that the recognition was first and foremost motivated by the need to force the federal government to negotiate with Biafra and thereby avoid the prolongation of the war and the suffering of Biafrans. Ralph Uwechue (2002) persuasively argues that a review of the reasons given by the four states for according diplomatic recognition to Biafra shows that. The recognition of Biafra as an independent state came from the countries concerned principally as a reaction to their disappointment and frustration at the failure of the federal government to respond to appeals to try to settle the conflict peacefully instead of by force. It was the magnitude of the war and enormity of the suffering it produced that made the leaders of these countries revolt against the method adopted by the Nigerian government to solve the problem (Uwechue in Osaghae, Onwudiwe & Suberu 2002).

Côte d'Ivoire acted under the dictates of idealism and not on national interest targeted at Biafra. In other words, the people of Côte d'Ivoire saw the Biafrans as their berths and sisters, irrespective of geographical location. By so doing, they shared in their grief and pain during their most difficult moment of war. Foreign powers used African states in the conflict to support one of two primary positions. First, they argued that the conflict was not subject to foreign intervention because it was a domestic affair. Second, they claimed that it was an African affair and, therefore, belongs only to the jurisdiction of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nevertheless, as Suzanne Cronje is noted as pointing out in her frequently-cited book on the international diplomacy of the war, the two positions are inconsistent, for if the war was an internal Nigerian matter, then the OAU was no more qualified to interfere than any other international entity. Britain and the United States were heavily behind this diplomatic hoax aimed at starving Biafra of international military and political assistance (Uwechue in Osaghae, Onwudiwe & Suberu 2002).

The intervention of Côte d'Ivoire in favor of Biafra was very critical considering the support Nigeria had already amassed from the super powers of the world as aforementioned. Nevertheless, the President of Côte d'Ivoire was determined and solid in his support to the Biafrans who he considered as victims of international conspiracy through the instrumentality of capitalism. Such resolve of the people of Côte d'Ivoire is a clear reflection of pristine African brotherhood and sisterhood devoid of the colonial crave for vanities (Onwudiwe in Osaghae, Onwudiwe & Suberu 2002).

The solidarity and brotherhood and sisterhood of the people of Côte d'Ivoire were quite outstanding and could be considered as one of the factors that encouraged the defunct leader of Biafra, Ojukwu, to flee to Côte D'Ivoire at the twilight of the existence of Biafra for refuge during the war. At that period, the feelings in Biafra were that the world had abandoned them in ruin, agony and misery. With the support of the Western powers that also controlled the actions of African leaders, the young republic felt most unsecured. Nevertheless, in the midst of the chaos in African politics dictated by the West, Ojukwu summoned courage to seek refuge in Côte d'Ivoire (Odumegwu-Ojukwu, 1989). Ojukwu's speech to the Biafrans before fleeing to Côte d'Ivoire sheds light on the condition of Biafra before his departure to Côte d'Ivoire:

You have borne the brunt of the strains of this fight. You have suffered unmentionable privations at the hands of an enemy that has used every conceivable weapon, particularly the weapon of starvation, against an innocent people whose only crime is that they choose to live in peace and security according to their own beliefs and away from a country that had condemned and

rejected them...You have had your villages and homes ravaged and plundered, your assets destroyed, millions of your sons and daughters murdered in cold blood, and your youths condemned to misery by the enemy's recent movements and indiscriminate shillings and bombing of hamlets, villages and refugees in their camps and on the roads (Kirk-Greene, 1971, 1).

The arrival of Ojukwu in Côte d'Ivoire in 1979 marked the beginning of his 13 years' exile in there. He was welcomed to the warm embrace of his host, the President of Côte d'Ivoire. Such moments were very defining after bearing the burden of his people who he left in destitute and despair. Be that as it may, the people of Côte d'Ivoire rose to the occasion by giving him the desired support at that critical time. In demonstrating African brotherhood and sisterhood, his host ensured that Ojukwu and his team enjoyed the true expression of African brotherhood and sisterhood according to African culture which consider all Africans as brothers and sisters, irrespective of ethnicity. Ojukwu himself further shed light on this reality by stating the following:

When I met with my host, President Houphouet-Boigny, for the first time after the tragic news, it was he who saw through the falling and scattered debris of a lofty dream and rather than commiserate, he congratulated. I still remember his wise words which sounded much more inspiring in their original French. He said, 'Welcome, my friend, welcome. You are home amongst friends, my family is your family-welcome home. You are the luckiest of all men, Congratulation. You are young, your past is little compared to the promise of your future. You have a short past to forget and a long future to look ahead to. Again, my son, congratulations (Kirk-Greene, 1971, 1).

The preceding expression from Ojukwu typifies the belief system of the African people who see their fellow Africans as their own family members, no matter the country to which they belong. It is this very understanding that encouraged him to choose an African country for the exile instead of flying to a European country that equally showed interest of welcoming him when it became obvious that Biafra would collapse at some point during the war.

Tanzania's Solidarity to the Igbo during the Nigerian Civil War and Their Relations

When the Nigerian civil war started, Tanzania was a very politically-active country in Africa. Julius Nyerere as the President of Tanzania during the Nigerian civil war was a very vocal and passionate figure on the political affairs of Africa, especially as it concerned the development of the continent. Nyerere symbolized and epitomized the true aspiration of Africa on brotherhood and sisterhood. Based on the African belief system which he advanced, Nyerere was able to influence the response of Tanzanians on the challenge of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war. Therefore, his disposition naturally made his people to accept the Biafran people as their own African brothers and sisters in West Africa (Ike, 2024). The following excerpt sums up the position of the Tanzanians with regards to Biafra and African brotherhood and sisterhood:

We in this country believe that unity is vital for the future of Africa. But it must

be a unity which serves the people, and which is freely determined upon by the people. For 10 months we have accepted the federal government's legal right to our support in a 'police action to defend the integrity of the State,' On that basis we have watched a civil war result in the death of about 100,000 people, and the employment of mercenaries by both sides. We watched the Federal Government reject the above advice of Africa to talk instead of demanding surrender before talk could begin. Everything combined gradually to force us to the conclusion that Nigeria unity did not exist (Kirk-Greene, 1971, 1).

The preceding narrative on Tanzanian's perspective continues as follows:

Tanzania deeply regrets that the will for unity in Nigeria has been destroyed over the past two years. But we are convinced that Nigerian unity cannot be maintained by force any more than unity in East Africa could be created by one State conquering another. It seemed to us that by refusing to recognize the existence of Biafra we were tacitly supporting a war against the people of Eastern Nigeria-and a war conducted in the name of unity. We could not continue doing this any longer (Kirk-Greene, 1971, 1).

The brotherhood and sisterhood commitment of Tanzania to the Igbo people was quite uncommon. Most African countries adhered to the doctrines of the OAU, which supported Nigeria for the following same reasons espoused by the great powers:

Allowing Biafra to secede would result in the destabilization of the entire continent" There were prominent nations in Africa that openly declared support for the Biafran course for humanitarian, ethical, and moral reasons. Tanzania's Nyerere, one of the few survivors of the cold war tussles on the continent and a towering African statesman of the era, saw Biafra's attempts to secede through the lens of the "the Jews seeking a homeland following the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and elsewhere in Europe (Achebe, 2012, 1).

Indeed, President Nyerere was the first African head of state to recognize Biafra. His statement was published by the government printer in Tanzania's capital, Dar es Salam, on April 13, 1968 (Achebe, 2012).

Achebe sheds light on the brotherhood and sisterhood commitment of Tanzania to Biafra: The day we heard that Tanzania had recognized Biafra "was a fantastic day." Achebe remembered it vividly when he wrote the following:

I was sitting in my home with my wife; we were feeling very depressed, I don't know why, then suddenly somebody ran in and told us (the good news), and we said, 'Don't be silly,' because we (did not believe him). And then we heard (the same news) on the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), and my wife rushed up to tell me. She was so elated and said she was going to teach in Tanzania. Soon after that streets were filled with people dancing and singing. For the first time in months, you found dancing again, and the radio was playing Tanzania music. People were reassured again that there was justice in the world, because we were

already becoming quite cynical about the outside world, saying, ‘Don’t imagine anyone would come to your rescue-they know you’re –they know you’re right, but it doesn’t pay, so they won’t do anything. We were more or less persuaded that we would have to fight on our own, (Nyerere’s gesture meant nothing in military or material terms but it assured us-the effect it had on us-was electric’ (Achebe, 2012, 1).

At the end of the Nigerian civil war, Igboland was left in total destruction and deprivation. With the enormous support Nigeria amassed from the Western powers that wanted a “One Nigeria” for their interest, Biafra not only suffered a devastating defeat but also suffered rejection. The war was fought with much fury and hatred such that even when it ended, it was difficult to truly integrate back the Igbo into Nigeria. Therefore, with the political atmosphere of Nigeria at the immediate post-Nigerian civil war, most Igbos felt dejected and rejected. This was the period Ojukwu was in exile in Côte d’Ivoire after fleeing the Republic of Biafra at the twilight of the existence of the republic (Okafor, 2023). Nonetheless, there were other Nigerians who showed some sympathy to the Igbo people during the post-Nigerian civil war having considered their pathetic socioeconomic condition. The condition of the Igbo at the immediate post-war period was heartbroken and unimaginable (Achebe, 2012).

Given the disposition of Tanzanians to the Igbo during and after the Nigerian civil war, the Igbo began to relocate to the East African country, a place they also considered home and a people they have taken as their own people (Amadi, 2023). According to Chukwuka Nzeribe (2024), the acceptance of the Igbo in Tanzania is incredible in that one would think Tanzania is an indigenous country of the Igbo people. Their relationship is based on mutual understanding of their Africanness as brothers and sisters whose cultures stem from the African heritage (Nzeribe, 2024).

On the part of the Igbo, the commitment of Tanzanians to them during the war is always appreciated. Most of the people who witnessed the war as active participants are now well aged while others are no longer alive. Nevertheless, the profound expression of brotherhood and sisterhood to the Igbo by Tanzanians during the war is very much a resonating story among old and young people in Igboland (Kamalu, 2024). In Nigeria, since the end of the Nigerian civil war, the political class ensured that the teaching of the war is relegated to the background. This implies that the curricula of Nigeria’s primary and secondary schools exclude the history of the war (Ogbogbo, 2018). Be that as it may, as established in the foregoing, the relationship between the Igbo and the people of Tanzania is much more alive. Thus, the preservation of the history is achieved and also through oral history that has now become oral tradition among Igbo people of Nigeria.

The Igbo people are eternally grateful to Tanzanians which accentuates the height of Tanzania’s brotherhood and sisterhood with the Igbo people during and after the war. As a result of this historic commitment to African love, Tanzania is naturally attractive to the Igbo while Tanzanians naturally endear themselves to the Igbo in their interaction across the globe. It should be noted that this perception and reality constitute a mutual feeling between both groups (Ejiofor, 2024). To further lay credence to the points being made, Ikenna Kamalu of the Department of English Studies at the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria said the following:

I was a young boy during the Nigerian civil war. I am aware of the commitment of Tanzania to the Igbo people of Nigeria. We are always eternally grateful for the

kind intervention of Tanzania during the Nigerian civil war which the Igbo were victims. The world abandoned us in the midst of deprivation, hardship, starvation and genocide. United States of America, Russia, United Kingdom, etc. supported Nigeria for economic reasons. Tanzania showed us Africans love and even recognized the young Republic of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war (Kamalu, 2024, 1).

In a similar vein, Albertus K. Onyiego of the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, recalls the following:

When I was in the United States of America, I observed the strong bond and a sense of warm appreciation from my Igbo friends on knowing that I am from Tanzania. I could describe them as being friendly and brotherly. In fact, that sense of friendship motivated me to do research on the origins of the Igbo people. I wanted to explore whether there are any historical, cultural or linguistic connections between Igbo and Luo people of Tanzania. There are many unproven claims among the Luo people that they descended from the same ancestry together with the Igbo. Those claims were as a result of similarity in cultures and names of both groups. Of course, you could see that my name sounds like an Igbo name (Onyiego). Even the spelling of my name and its pronunciation appear Igbo. You taught I am an Igbo the first time we had a conversation because of my name. Here in Tanzania, we are using some of the Nigerian novels, especially the ones authored by Achebe, the legendary novelist from the eastern region of Nigeria-the ancestral home of the Igbo. It will also interest you to know that we have a famous ground in Dar es Salaam University called 'Biafra.' It was so named in commemoration of the Biafran crisis of 1967 to 1970 (Onyiego, 2023)

The demonstration of brotherhood and sisterhood by the people of Tanzania toward the Igbo as affirmed by Onyiego speaks volume of the relationship Africans have with one another based on their origins. Despite the location of Tanzania as an East African country, the people of Tanzania did not find it difficult to connect with their brothers and sisters from West Africa or Biafra/Nigeria as the case may be. The similarity in names and cultural practices among Africans is not a historical coincidence. It has been proven by scholars that Africans are one people bound by ancient culture before their encounter with the outside world (Falola, 2016). The culture of Africans in the form of language, clothing, food, belief systems and a host of other aspects are living proofs that cannot be disputed. According to S. A. Ajayi of the Department of History, at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, the division of Africa into countries and by using the instruments of politics are simply tactics/instruments of neocolonialism that should be reviewed in the spirit of African brotherhood and sisterhood (Ajayi, 2021).

In view of the revelation made by Tanzanian Onyiego, it is unfortunate that Biafra and the civil war itself are not being commemorated in Nigeria despite being the theater where millions of people perished during the war. The governments of Nigeria since the end of the war have been suppressing awareness of the narrative and realities of the war. Nevertheless, it has been recorded by various historical accounts that an estimated three million people (a majority of them children from Igboland) perished during the war (Ezeani, 2013). Such a tragedy indeed deserves a national remembrance and commemoration in the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood

and as a way of avoiding future catastrophes of that magnitude. The attitude of Nigerian leaders toward the event of the Nigerian civil war is “un-African” and does not align with the value system of Africa hinged on justice.

Based on the nature of Nigeria’s politics, Edwinus C. Lyaya of the University of Dar es Salaam in the Department of History emphasized the need for the politics of inclusion in Nigeria. He affirmed that many Igbo people in Tanzania relocated to Tanzania in order to escape discrimination and deprivation. In addition to Tanzania, the Igbo and the people of Tanzania relate cordially like people of the same country in places like Canada, the United States, South Africa, etc. (Lyaya, 2019). This should be a lesson for Nigeria as a heterogeneous country that has suffered so much ethnic bickering and clashes before and after independence. The Tanzanian spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood could be replicated among different ethnic groups in Nigeria (Lyaya, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper is about the response of three countries to the plight of the Igbo people during the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970 (N.A.E. /FRP/D2, N.A.E., MM/X9, N.A.E/SD/M2, N.A.E./CW/CP/X9/21/4. N.A.E./SD/0/6, N.A.E./PD/X32). The three countries are Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, and Tanzania. These countries demonstrated African brotherhood and sisterhood to the Igbo people who were involved in a brutal and bloody civil war instigated by the super powers of the West that included United Kingdom and the United States, and Russia (Okocha, 2012). Given the neocolonial influence of the Western powers on African leaders under the auspices of the OAU that were expected to genuinely intervene in the war, but rather aligned with the Western powers and the federal government of Nigeria against the Republic of Biafra, the Biafrans became victims of international conspiracy of the capitalistic West. (N.I.E/FRP/D).

The biased position of most African leaders and their Western allies strengthened the federal government of Nigeria which enjoyed supplies of weapons of mass destruction cum machineries. Therefore, the Biafrans were overwhelmed and overpowered through superior weapons of mass destruction and blockade policy resulting in starvation and deaths estimated at three million. In addition, with the blockade policy, Biafran children were exposed to a deadly disease called kwashiorkor caused by the acute shortage of protein. The condition of Biafran children and the general state of devastation in the young republic attracted sympathy across the globe, mostly from NGOs such as the Red Cross, Caritas, Doctors Without Borders, World Council of Churches, and a host of other organizations (Mudge, 1970).

Given the humanitarian crisis that engulfed Biafra, the aforementioned African countries took the bull by the horn by playing profound roles in favor of Biafra geared toward ameliorating the suffering of the people of Biafra who were at the verge of annihilation. As established in this study, the three African countries played an unprecedented role that no other country played for the Biafrans during and after the war.

The three selected countries in this study demonstrated the philosophy of African brotherhood and sisterhood, despite borderlines restrictions and other neoliberal political policies driven by capitalism/individualistic lifestyle. Despite the geographical locations of the three countries which are not contiguous to Biafra, their leaders who upheld an African sense of brotherhood galvanized their people for the support of the Igbo in West Africa considered as their brothers and sisters.

As a result of their commitment to African brotherhood and sisterhood and the unflinching selfless solidarity to the Igbo during the war, the Igbo and the three countries still maintain a cordial relationship to date 54 years after the war ended (Obasi, 2024). The selflessness and African humanistic response to the Biafrans are still quite appreciated by the Igbo people, a development that has also established affinity between the Igbo and those three countries in Africa. In other words, the kind gestures of the three countries to the Igbo people is a clear demonstration of the pristine African Borderless Brotherhood that existed in Africa prior to the eras of colonialism and neocolonialism driven by the capitalism of the West (Uzor 2024).

Africa is in a state of comatose and steady backwardness when compared with other continents like Asian. This reality of Africa could be linked to its relationship with the West since the colonial era. Through the instrument of colonialism and neocolonialism, the West has succeeded in setting Africans against themselves, thereby making Africa a continent of chaos with echoes of disunity. Thus, this was the case in Africa during the Nigerian civil war (Onumonu, 2023). Despite the ideological differences between Russia and the United Kingdom supported by the United States, Russia rather rallied round the United Kingdom and the United States in support and solidarity against the Republic of Biafra. Not only that, Russia became a supplier of weapons to Nigeria as well as sent its personnel to Nigeria as mercenaries to help fight Biafra during the Nigerian civil war (Ezeani, 2013).

With the surplus supply of weapons to Nigeria and other forms of support from the West, Biafra became a graveyard and theater of destruction (Bourne, 2016). The sudden romance between Russia and capitalist countries was indeed motivated by a move to suppress Africa, knowing that if Biafra emerges as a country, and given its technological exploit during the war, the rest of Africa would be inspired by Biafra which could lead to the liberation of Africa and its development like the Asian Tigers (Ezeani, 2013).

Thus, the implications of the points being made is that if African leaders fail to assert themselves and begin to unite as a force, the cycle of dependency and underdevelopment would continue, possibly till another century. It is important for African leaders to begin to promote African brotherhood and sisterhood beyond their borderlines, knowing that Africans are one people separated by artificial boundaries and designed maps introduced by the West.

The need to trace back the African value system of brotherhood and sisterhood of the precolonial era is of great essence. The dependency mentality of African leaders since the era of independence from the 1960s till date has plunged Africans into neocolonialism and neocolonial slavery. If the rest of African leaders had treated the Nigeria-Biafra war like the three leaders of Tanzania, Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire did, the Nigerian crisis of the 1960s would have been averted.

There is therefore a need for Nigerian leaders to recognize their leadership role in Africa and set the pace for good leadership with a sense of Pan-African mentality of Borderless Brotherhood. As we pointed out, Nigerian leaders have over the years mismanaged the affairs of their country and lack the philosophy and ideology that could spark Pan-Africanism and development in Africa. This feature could be reversed by embracing the African sense of brotherhood and sisterhood of the precolonial era.

There is also a need for Africans to enact laws that promote African brotherhood and sisterhood for those contesting for political posts in Africa. This means that neoliberal policies promoting individualistic lifestyle geared toward selfish accumulation of wealth in place of the common good for all should be discouraged.

Factors that promote ethnic chauvinism should be discouraged. Emphases should be

placed on Africanism and Pan-African ideologies rooted in good governance that value the peculiarities and yearnings of Africans. Also, Africans should be able to relate to one another as brothers and sisters, irrespective of their geographical locations and, ethnic groupings or any other characteristic.

Wars should be completely discouraged in the African continent. African leaders who entertain or think of war as an option should be forced to resign by the people of their countries. Borderlines should be deemphasized by African countries. Interactions among African countries should be promoted, knowing that Africans are one people with a common history and origin. Competence and integrity should be factors to be considered for electing political leaders instead of considering place of origin and other primordial sentiments.

Finally, African youths should take up the destiny of Africa considering the fact that African leaders have failed Africa. The youths should demand good governances and less dependence on the West, especially as it concerns taking critical decisions that affect the African continent. And, efforts should be made to stop any form of neocolonialism in Africa by adopting the model of Asian countries that strongly resist neocolonialism and promote the value systems of their countries.

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