

THE RED CROSS AND THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by MR EZEKIEL ANIEFIOK UMANAH in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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DATE

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the Almighty God, my sustainer and defense; He is the best support system one could ever have.

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THE RED CROSS AND THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The Nigerian civil war was a cataclysm that rocked the emergent Nigerian state from 1967 to 1970. The 30 months civil war was preceded by a configuration of pre-independence and post-independence crises.¹ The Origins of the civil war could be located in a complexity of factors ranging from the remote which includes the military coups d'état of January 15, and July 29, 1966. Other remote factors are the regional election crisis in Western Nigeria in 1965; the Tiv riots of 1964; the Federal Elections of 1964; the killings of the Igbos living in Northern Nigeria from May to September. The structural imbalance of the Nigerian federation; and, most importantly, the asymmetrical distribution of power among the various ethnic and geopolitical groups.²

The secession of the Eastern Region from Nigeria and its declaration of independent Republic of Biafra by Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu amidst intense political tension directly brought about the Nigeria-Biafra War in 1967. Before this declaration, the Nigerian polity was geographically divided into 3 regions. These are the Northern, Western and Eastern regions. The Igbos is of Eastern extraction. Thus, it was the effort of the federal government of Nigeria to truncate the eastern region secession from the federation and Ojukwu's desire to ensure the survival of Biafra that started the civil war on the 6th July 1967.³

At the wake of the war was the expectation that victory would be quick in few weeks on the Nigerian side and a belief of invincibility on the part of Biafra but, the war defied both the expectation and the belief, and dragged on for almost two years and about seven months. A lot of issues came with the war, the most challenging being the deplorable humanitarian condition that arose therewith. Throughout the war wanton starvation and suffering amongst the civilian population were most grave and generated serious international concern. The news and images of suffering and dying children and women particularly on the Biafra side circulated abroad, and attracted not only pity and condemnation but, also, action. Cross sections of individuals, groups, organizations and governments made spirited efforts in contributing relief assistance to mitigate or possibly avert the implosion of an impending humanitarian disaster.⁴

In the summer of 1967, following the Republic of Biafra's proclamation of independence, the Federation of Nigeria took up arms to stop the secession. This singular act led to the outbreak of a war against the secessionist republic and the entry of the International Committee of the Red Cross also known as the ICRC. The International Committee of the Red Cross is a humanitarian organization that operates globally to provide assistance, protection, and support to victims of armed conflicts and other situations of violence. Established in 1863, the ICRC's primary goal is to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and to alleviate human suffering. It's operates independently and neutrally, offering aid to all parties involved in conflicts without taking sides. The Red Cross

movement, including both the International committee of the Red Cross and its affiliated National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, was founded by Henry Dunant and Gustave Moynier in response to the horrors witnessed on the battlefield of Solferino in 1859 . Their efforts led to the adoption of the First Geneva Convention in 1864, which established rules for the humane treatment of wounded soldiers on the battlefield.

The International Committee of Red Cross core activities include visiting detainees, providing medical care, restoring family links, promoting and disseminating international humanitarian law, and working to ensure the protection and dignity of those affected by armed conflicts and other emergencies. It's operates in war zones, disaster areas, and other crisis situations, striving to alleviate suffering and preserve human dignity. The International Committee of the Red Cross became involved in the war zone by offering its services to the belligerents. The first step was to inquire after the fate of prisoners of war and to support the activities of the local Red Cross by providing equipment and medical staff. At the end of 1967, the International Committee of the Red Cross also started relief operations for civilians affected by the war on both sides of the front line. When famine took hold in Biafra in 1968, this became the organization's main focus. The challenge was to feed a population of several million people in complex circumstances. For the ICRC, the main stumbling block was the difficulty of obtaining the consent of the belligerents to bring aid into Biafra, which was blockaded by the Nigerian government. While the government accepted the

principle, it wanted control over what was delivered and how, in order to assert its sovereignty over the breakaway province. Conversely, the Biafran authorities tried to impose their own conditions on relief efforts in order to show that they were not subject to the whims of the federal government. In addition, for each belligerent, humanitarian aid was strongly linked with questions of military strategy.⁵

Despite these difficulties, in September 1968, the International Committee of the Red Cross was able to establish an airlift for Biafra. In accordance with the principle of impartiality, and to avoid operating only on the Biafran side, it also set up and coordinated a relief operation in the areas recaptured by the federal army, where it had to contend with major logistical problems. This operation lasted until the summer of 1969, at which time the Nigerian government took an increasingly hard line. The International Committee of the Red Cross commissioner general of the Nigeria–Biafra operation was declared *persona non grata* in Nigerian territory; an aircraft, part of the Red Cross airlift, was shot down; and the Nigerian government decided to take over the relief operation in federal territory. This change in attitude forced the International Committee of the Red Cross to reconsider its involvement and, unable to negotiate an agreement between the belligerents, the organization suspended the Biafra airlift.

The second half of 1969 therefore saw the International Committee of Red Cross gradually winding down its activities in the conflict, although it pursued its traditional tasks and maintained its medical teams in Biafra. The surrender of Biafra in January 1970 put an end to humanitarian operations in Biafra. The

International Committee of the Red Cross assessment of its role in the war was mixed. It had conducted a large-scale operation, but had been forced to stop most of its activities before the conflict ended. It had been an expensive operation, requiring a large and highly trained workforce and rigorous management, particularly when it came to negotiating with the belligerents. This had quickly highlighted the need for the International Committee of the Red Cross to undertake reforms if it wished to reaffirm its role as an organization that assisted people affected by war. Three areas were central to this process: the functioning of the organization, staff management, and the organization's relationship with other humanitarian actors and the media.⁶

Aim and Objectives

This study examines the role of the Red Cross in the Nigeria Civil War of 1967- 1970, while the specific objectives are;

1. To examine the genesis of the Nigeria Civil war.
2. To examine the nature and dimensions of the Civil war.
3. To examine the impact of the conflict on both Biafra and Nigeria.
4. To examine the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the Nigeria- Biafra conflict.
5. To assess the significance of Red Cross' involvement in the Nigeria Civil war

Scope of the Study

The project covers the nature and implications of the Nigerian Civil war of 6th July 1967 - 15th January 1970 which prompted the involvement of different national and international organizations in the conflict such as the Red Cross.

Methodology

The research methodology is on the historical method base on time and space. The study will rely on data from both primary and secondary sources. The Primary sources include Memoir and interviews. While the secondary sources are Journals, Articles, Monograph, Publications and Newspapers.

Literature Review

The Nigeria- Biafra conflict of 1967- 1970 had been a global phenomenon that had generated wide spread attention of both States and Non States actors across the globe. While there are literatures on the impact and nature of the Nigeria Civil war: Origins, Causes and Consequences, Few works had discussed the role of the Red Cross in the Nigeria Civil war.

Wole Soyinka's work "The Man Died" and ElechiAmadi's piece "Sunset in Biafra," both delve into their experiences of wartime captivity, Soyinka in a federal prison and Amadi in a Biafran confinement. When compared, these works offer insights into the distinct ways Nigerian intellectuals coped with the war's emotional impact.⁷

Chinua Achebe's work "There was a Country," discusses his personal experiences growing up in a fragile new nation and witnessing its tragic destruction during the Nigerian civil war (also known as the Biafran War) of 1967-1970. Despite maintaining silence on these events for over forty years, Achebe touches upon them subtly through his poetry. The book offers a significant account of a disastrous event in modern African history, leaving a lasting impact on the continent and beyond. Achebe's work delves into the causes, nature, and aftermath

of the war, prompting reflection on whether Nigerians have truly learned from their past and are willing to come together as a united nation, free from prejudice and issues such as corruption, divisive politics, nepotism, and ethnic intolerance.⁸

Chimamanda Adichie in her novel, "Half of a Yellow Sun", winner of the Orange Prize for fiction, examined a poignant tale of the conflict of interests between the Igbo and Hausa tribe of Nigeria and their struggle for power, convincingly and factually brings to focus the misery of the ordinary lives caught in the conundrums of petty politics. The life of Odenigbo, a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Nigeria and a radical man is engulfed in the fires of hatred set ablaze by the political interests of the power hungry militia. What begins as a fairy tale of a little boy Ugwu, a boy from a poor village, enchanted equally by the luxurious lifestyle of his master Odenigbo and his girlfriend Olanna, develops into the most intricate plot of entangled lives and emotions caught in the web of prevailing circumstances. Nigeria is torn apart into two—the Muslim dominated state of Nigeria ruled by the Hausa tribesmen and the state of Biafra ruled by the rebelling Igbo tribe. Biafra which appeared on the African map for less than a year chose for its emblem a half sun in yellow colour. All the soldiers had to bear this emblem on their sleeves. The civil war that ensued between these two states has been presented to the readers on multiple levels.⁹

David P Forsythe, in his Book, "The International Committee of the Red Cross and humanitarian assistance: A policy analysis" examine the role of The International Committee of the Red Cross in Conflicts, with emphasis on the cold.

In today's armed conflicts and complex emergencies more civilians suffer than combatants. After the Cold War one could identify a zone of turmoil in which civilian suffering was acute. But one could also identify a zone of stability from which operated a complicated system of humanitarian assistance designed to respond to civilian suffering. Media coverage emphasized the suffering, but never before in world history had such a kaleidoscope of humanitarian actors tried to provide emergency relief during armed conflicts and complex emergencies. Inevitably calls were heard for better organization and coordination, and in 1991–92 the United Nations created a Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA).¹⁰

Laurie S Wiseberg in her work "Christian churches and the Nigerian civil war" examines the role of Churches in the Nigeria Civil war 1967- 1970. The role of churches" in the Nigerian Civil War has been and remains a matter of considerable controversy. For some, church involvement-particularly in the Biafran airlifts—represented a manifestation of “pure humanitarian concern” for the starving; for others, Christian commitment was an attestation to the political and institutional interests that Western churches had, and were seeking to protect, in eastern Nigeria. The conclusions I have reached through an extensive study of the Nigerian-Biafranrelief operations suggest the need for a position that is somewhat less “moral” and somewhat more “analytical” than is evinced in the two aforementioned judgments." His work is an effort to examine the role of the churches from that more detached social science perspective.¹¹

. M.S Audu, Uzoma S .Osuala, Baba Isaac Ibrahim, in their work, "Contextualizing the International Dimensions of the" Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970" re- examine the international dimensions of the Nigeria Civil war. They view War as a phenomenon which has ravaged human society. At any time war erupts, efforts are geared towards stemming it. Attempts to forestall such occurrence could be internally induced or externally motivated. In 1967, Nigeria was embroiled in over two and half year's war. The civil war in the country was the offshoot of the myriad of problems which had confronted the nation in the early 1960s. It ranged from census crises, ethnic politics, and Federal election crises, electoral manipulations to economic and political sleaze. The Consequences was the Civil War which began in 1967. The war resulted in intervention from 'outside'. However, the involvement of international actors had been said to have been dictated by economic as well as political reasons. Thus, the protracted war lasted for almost three years. The discourse, therefore, revisits, re-examines and reflects the international dimensions to the Nigerian Civil War. It posited that the motives for intervention was dictated by economic neo-imperialism and therefore, Eurocentric. The paper submits and recommends that Nigeria and Africa's problems could only be solved from within through devoted leaders rather than leaders who enslave themselves to the West.¹²

James F Phillips, Charlotte M Roy, MulugetaGebregziabher, in their work "The international humanitarian response to famine in Tigray, Ethiopia: lessons from the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970" discussed the humanitarian

disaster caused by the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia and the humanitarian response to the conflict. The Tigray crisis in Ethiopia is a grave humanitarian catastrophe with causes and consequences that resemble the Nigerian Civil War that ended with the defeat of secessionist Biafra five decades ago. As in the Biafra example, an ethnically distinct and embattled enclave is surrounded by hostile forces and cut off from commerce of any kind, producing starvation, forced migrant encampments, and pervasive dependence on externally provided food relief. Relief action strategies developed during the Nigerian Civil War were comprised of operational components that were often insufficiently integrated into a unified system for nutritional screening, referral, acute care, nutritional rehabilitation, and team deployment. This lack of strategic integration for post-conflict relief actions, merits review for possible lessons that could avert its recurrence in Tigray. If evidence-based systems for relief organization had been comprehensively applied in Biafra, the pace of post-conflict nutritional recovery could have been accelerated. Although component strategies of the Biafra-Nigeria Relief Action are being replicated by various agencies that are providing humanitarian assistance in Tigray, their collective impact could be enhanced if these strategies were integrated into a unified, evidence-driven systems response to the emergency.¹³

Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko, in his work "Our Agony, Their Victory: The Impact of the Nigerian Civil War on the Women and Children of Biafra" analyzed the impact of the Nigeria Civil war on Women and Children. He believes they constitute the groups which were more adversely affected by the

conflict. The concept of armed conflict the world over is always perceived from the perspective of the belligerents. The impacts of these conflicts are most often measured in terms of the strategic and economic losses. But the underprivileged, which fight the most; the women, children and the aged, who suffer and sacrifice the most, are often not recognized nor considered. His work examines the untold effect of the highest form of deprivation, suffering, agony and despair of the weak in Biafra, the vulnerable, the women and children of Biafra.¹⁴

Nwanko and Ifejika in their work "The Making of a Nation: Biafra", Focused on the mistrust which existed between the Igbo and the minorities, the favoritism Ojukwu accorded his Nnewi kinsmen, the civil servant against the intellectual, the professional soldier against the mercenaries, and the manipulation of the masses by the elite, Akpan lays bare some of the forces that occasioned the Biafran defeat. In the final analysis, however, Akpan blames Ojukwu because he and he alone occupied the seat of power. Emeka is in the saddle, and holding firmly the reins of affairs affecting the fourteen million people of Eastern Nigeria, who must helplessly go wherever he leads them—through hills and dales, over rough and smooth, towards life and death. When other Eastern Nigerians write their stories, Ojukwu may appear in a different light, but thus far the key actors have chosen to remain silent. When we turn from the reflections of Nigerians to the research of Euro-Americans, we find a number of studies which have recently appeared that merit attention .¹⁵

Thierry Hentsch's French monograph, "Facing the blockade", stated that insofar as the Nigerian/Biafran relief operations, particularly the illicit airlifts to Biafra, were the focal point of much of the passion that the war generated outside Africa, it is noteworthy that this is the first serious publication exclusively treating the relief drama. Hentsch's study concentrates on the role played by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), especially the manner in which the ICRC dealt with the federal blockade against the secessionists. He is concerned, therefore, with why and how Operation INALWA was mounted in the summer of 1968, and why and how it was dismantled in June 1969.¹⁶

Suzanne Cronje in her work "The World and Nigeria", also focuses on external dimensions of the war. Published three years after Biafra: Britain's Shame (1969, co-authored by Auberon Waugh), *The World and Nigeria* is a disavowal of her wartime polemic, at least in style and tone if not completely in substance. Here, Cronje no longer appears as the spearhead of the Biafran/British lobby, as the crusading conscience of Britain; instead, she is a serious political journalist. Cronje's sympathies are still evident: "The people of the East were the injured party, and they had a good case: an equally good case has yet to be made for the federal side in the war." The passion is still there, often manifest in irony. Gone, however, are the lurid photographs of kwashiorkor children, the sweeping charges of genocide, and the recitation of unsubstantiated Biafran claims and statistics? Cronje goes so far as to admit that "Nobody can blame the Nigerians for not wishing to feed the troops they were fighting against." She also notes that the

Biafrans made some incredible claims, and that they had their share of opportunists. The contrast between the two books is obvious from their last paragraphs.¹⁷

Zdenek Cervenka's in his work "The Nigerian War 1967-1970" is less to be valued for its 200 pages of textual analysis and notes than for the 70 pages that the author devotes to what he considered his primary task: to prepare "an introduction to a bibliography" to guide further studies.¹⁸

Chinua Achebe's "Girls at War²," Omotoso's "The Combat," Munonye's "Wreath for Maidens, and S.O. Mezu's "Behind the Rising Sun" will also enrich Nigerian historiography, since fiction interjects the human factor that usually eludes academics. Additionally, a few of the political dramatis personae have written accounts of their involvement, some in the heat of battle and some in the search for reconciliation. Ojukwu's Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts, though only a collage of speeches, memoranda, and interview fragments intended as a propaganda weapon, comprises primary data for the scholar. It may not unravel the enigma of Ojukwu's charisma, but it will remain the only personal account we have by him, unless Ojukwu puts pen to paper in his exile on the Ivory Coast.¹⁹

Insights into the way Ojukwu exercised his power are, of course, better found elsewhere, for example in Ralph Owechue's "Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War", published in 1969 and reissued, with an epilogue, in 1971. For this Mid-Western Igbo, who so skillfully served as Biafra's Paris representative until the end of 1968, Reflections was written both to explicate his break with Ojukwu

and to plead for a negotiated settlement? A poignant statement of the Igbo dilemma, it is nonetheless more than special pleading. Uwechuedenies that Igbo security was tied to Biafran sovereignty in a Gordian knot; and by arguing that compromise was essential in the face of mounting starvation and military deaths; he suggests the artificiality of Biafran unity. The Biafran masses, enslaved by an extremely efficient propaganda network and cowed by the iron grip of a ruthless military machine, had neither the facts nor the liberty to form an independent opinion. The case of the elite was different.... Those who had access to the facts knew that the time had come to seek a realistic way to end the war. In private they expressed this view but proved too cowardly to take a stand and tell Ojukwu the truth.²⁰

Another study which throws light on the dissensions in the Biafran camp is N.U. Akpan's "The Struggle for Secession". This, too, is an insider's view, though from a different vantage point. Akpan was Chief Secretary to the Biafran Government, Head of the Biafran Civil Service and, therefore, the linchpin that held together Biafra's amazingly resilient wartime administration. He was one of the few minority people highly placed in Ojukwu's entourage—in fact, one of the hand-picked half-dozen men who fled with Ojukwu in the eleventh hour flight to the Ivory Coast on the eve of the Biafrancollapse. About that he tells an interesting tale. However, the disappointment with Akpan's work is that he is not very candid about his own critical role. Akpan's claim—that he was not trusted and consequently isolated—may be valid, but the reader is left with the feeling that he tells only what is expedient for him to tell.²¹

These books, and articles reviewed have been able to cover only some parts of my research. This research seeks to fill that vacuum that has been created for a long while by various scholars.

CHAPTERIZATION

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The first chapter serves as a preamble to the entire work. It introduces the work and gives an insight of the entire body work with , Background to the study, It's aim and objectives, Scope of the study, The methodology used in carrying out this research, Literature's Review, Chapterization and endnotes.

CHAPTER TWO

GENESIS OF THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR 1967- 1970

This chapter examines the evolution the Nigeria- Biafra conflict of 1967-1970. The chapter discusses the Political and Economic relations include Conflict of interest that transpired between the various Parties in the conflict during this period. It digs into the root causes of the conflict from historical perspective and discusses both the remote and immediate cause of the Civil War after Amalgamation and Independence in 1960.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF RED CROSS IN THE NIGERIA- BIAFRA CONFLICT

This chapter focuses on the role of Red Cross Organization in the Nigeria Civil war. The chapter also elucidates on event such as the Red Cross humanitarian airlift and other function carried out by the Red Cross during the period of this study.

CAPTER FOUR

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT OF RED CROSS IN THE NIGERIA- CIVIL WAR

This chapter examines the effects of Red Cross involvement in Nigeria Civil war. The chapter mainly focuses on the relevance of the Red Cross in the Conflict with emphasis on the significance of Red Cross in the Conflict. The Chapter also evaluates the impact of the involvement of the Red Cross on both the Red Cross and also the warring factions.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This is the concluding chapter which gives a general summary of the entire research.

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CHAPTER TWO

GENESIS OF THE NIGERIA CIVIL WAR 1967- 1970

When examining the origins of the Nigerian civil war, it becomes apparent that various sources and layers contribute to its genesis. One can attribute its beginnings to factors such as intense political rivalry, economic competition among regions, internal conflicts within the elite class, and possibly even struggles based on class or religion. Military unrest and ambitions, personal and ethnic clashes, as well as regional disputes, further complicate the picture. Alternatively, the war's roots might be found in societal discontent and disillusionment with the unfulfilled promises of a post-colonial “golden age,” or even as a consequence of fifty years of colonialism marked by division and manipulation. In essence, the war's origin can be understood as a complex interplay of expectations that were ignited, thwarted, and ultimately descended into a state of despondency and fierce rivalry.¹

The war's origins can be traced not only through different perspectives but also by different types of observers. Various theories about its beginning have been put forth by those involved in leadership roles, both winners and losers, often influenced by polarized viewpoints. These ideas have also been presented by internal political commentators, external analysts from Africa and abroad, and historians analyzing events retrospectively, benefiting from the hindsight of history and access to increasing archives. None of these interpretations can be considered entirely accurate, but few are likely to be completely irrelevant. Similar to

interpreting the Genesis story, different viewpoints find proponents. For instance, the Federal Military Government's analysis attributes the Nigerian Constitution's failure to recognize minority and other communities' self-determination aspirations in 1960 as a factor that disrupted power balance at the Center, which in turn plagued the First Republic throughout its existence.²

The Gowon government also identified a general disillusionment with the ruling political class. The same leadership was attacked by pre-war Ojukwu in his celebrated 'Away with the Old Guard' speech of 25th January 1966, an infamous catalogue of chicanery all of which led inevitably to the complete loss of moral and political authority by the former regime. For Ironsi, it was not so much the content as the structure that was to blame, "that rigid adherence to the regionalism which was the bane of the last regime and one of the main factors which contributed to its downfall".³ Later of course, the Eastern Region's tune had to change to that of "Biafra did not secede, Biafra was pushed out", of Hausa/Fulani bullying and Gowon's bad faith: such are the keynotes of Ojukwu's decisive address to the Eastern Consultative Assembly on 26 May 1967 and of the Assembly's consequent resolution to proclaim the Republic of Biafra. They also account for the Enugu historians' choice of vocabulary, "The Survival Edicts and the Push".⁴ Azikiwe, not quite living up to the title of his essay on the origins of war, takes his enquiry little beyond the immediate causes of the armed Conflict. He glosses over the escalating confrontation before 1966 and prefers to see the tragedy as a constitutional violation and a "shameless premium on double-talk."⁵

Nigerian intellectual circles, not necessarily looking back with the gift of hindsight, declared of the coup d'etat that the surprise was not so much the fact of intervention as the time that this took place. The ease with which the First Republic was toppled showed how rotten its structures were: it had only to be shaken for it to fall. And, then, if they were asked to give a single reason for that rottenness, it was that the leaders of the regime had a warped sense of social justice.⁶ The intelligentsia was not slow to see that the real problem was not that of having to endure military rule but of the constitutional snags in the back-to-barracks process: "The problem is not one of ideas but of the right type of ideas". The old leadership was accused of having shown itself more interested in maintaining the status quo than in finding real solutions for the debilitating series of political crisis. Many of the ills came about because the members of the political intelligentsia had settled among themselves to suit their interests and convenience. In their key summary, Nigeria's intellectuals wrote off the First Republic because the rulers used power that they held constitutionally to do unconstitutional things. Nigeria had censuses that were not censuses, elections that were not elections, and finally governments that were not governments.

Nigerian columnists - those who were more than hacks paid by party newspapers had their own views on the root cause of the trouble. For Peter Pan and Tai Solarin, the fault lay not with our stars but with our leaders.⁷ The world press also made its assessment of what caused that 'explosion in Nigeria' on January 15th: the gamble of the whole federal idea, the fatal division" of the south which

guaranteed the political supremacy of the North, the unholy alliance of arrogance between Akintola and Ahmadu Bello, and that Achilles heel of the Tafawa Balewa administration: it had allowed public corruption to flourish almost with official approval and it had failed to assess with sufficient seriousness the attitude which this was breeding among the emerging radical youth in the universities and other places of future leadership. Inevitably, it was smart-alecky Nkrumah who had least doubts about the simplicity of why Tafawa Balewa was overthrown.⁸

Among these selected interpretations of the genesis of the Nigerian civil war, none does total justice to the hairspring delicacy and complexity of the Nigerian political system. Indictment is by itself no explanation. To quote Sklar, “Governments are rarely if ever overthrown because they are abusive or incompetent. Revolutions are not automatic. They are made by men who believe in themselves and feel frustrated by the political order”.⁹ It could be that we can find no higher common factor than that there was something rotten in the state of Nigeria in 1965 and that someone was determined to do something about it. And it may well prove that to determine exactly what that action should effectively have been is far more complex than the simple determination never again to risk a repetition of the days and ways of the *ancien régime*.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONFLICT

The Colonial Structure

Historically, the Nigerian administrative norms have been those of keeping one's ethnic distance. Leaving aside the arguable existence of 'One Nigeria' or of

'Nigerian political history' before 1900, there has been in the colonial period and beyond sufficient evidence of the inclination towards the several rather than the one Nigeria. The Selborne Committee of 1899, having conceded that "the object to be aimed at is the eventual establishment of a Governor-General for the whole territory", went on to advise the Crown to administer its new territory "through the medium of provincial governors" and proposed the division of what was to be Nigeria into, significantly, a Maritime Province and a Soudan Province. In 1914, Lugard's blueprint was care- fully inscribed as the amalgamation, not the political unification, of the two administrations.

In obedience to the report of the Niger Committee earlier stated, Lord Frederick Lugard in 1914 amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorate and he assumed the position of Governor-General of Nigeria. This amalgamation as expected was primarily designed to maintain law and to facilitate economic exploitation of Nigeria by the colonial masters. It was meant to integrate territories not to unite the people. For instance, even after the amalgamation the administration of the Northern and Southern Nigeria continued to operate as they had under the formal protectorate era. They continued to operate as two different countries. The areas which came under centralized administration were areas that were geared towards achieving British interests. These areas are custom, judiciary, police, treasury, military, railways, posts and telegraphs, survey and audit which came under the direct control of the Governor-General, Lord Lugard and other colonial officials discouraged real union of the North and South. They emphasized

the differences between the two Nigerian areas and encouraged the divisions that were to plague Nigeria in later years.¹⁰

For instance, the British officials did not create the atmosphere to bring the country together. Lugard left Nigeria in 1919 and his successor Sir Hugh Clifford which gave Nigeria another constitution that excluded the North from the legislative council, whereby strengthening the division. Governor Bourdillon who succeeded Cameron also took a step which further strengthened the lack of emphasis on unity which the Richard Constitution of 1946 that created three regions officially entrenched regionalism and kept the people more world apart. The central administration in Nigeria was organized in such a way that local differences were strengthened by the constitution and administrative arrangement of the colonial period. Nigerians in the north and the south had little opportunity to interact in fashioning the affairs of the country. In fact, until the 1940s, the central legislature was mainly an affair of southerners. The colonial structure did not encourage nationalism and unity; some people argued that such measure would have been counter-productive for the colonial interest.¹¹

This is because it would have united them to fight a common enemy, the colonial masters and assert their right to self-determinism much earlier. Of course, to a reasonable extent people that held this opinion were right because from middle 40s that Nigerians were given some political space to mingle the agitations and pressures for independence by Nigerians was very high, which culminated in the motion moved by Anthony Enahoro in the floor of the House of Representative on

1 April 1953 demanding self-government in 1956. The first manifestation of tribalism in Nigeria was the formation of political parties along regional enclave. For example, NCNC whose leader is Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe an Igbo from the east dominated the Eastern Region, while Action Group whose leader is Chief Obafemi Awolowo from Yoruba dominated the West Region and NPC whose leader is Alhaji Abubaka Tafawa Belewa and Hausa dominated the northern region which they not objected, existing unpreparedness and domination.

The structure of the colonial state that operated with the police of Divide and Rule of the indirect rule sowed that the culture of “Parochialism” and “Ethnocentrism” in national affairs which has grown and become a major problem in the Nigerian state⁹. And all the post independent crisis that plagued Nigeria stemmed from the colonial state structures and aggravated by tribal bigots called “nationalities” that assumed the rein of power bequeath by the colonial masters.¹²

Political factor

As aforementioned, the Nigerian political actors before independent had already been baked in the ovens of ethnicity and parochialism which have drained them any iota of nationalistic flavor. Hence, are now ethnic bigots with selfish appetite for power and who are willing to do anything to cling unto power, were foot loosed to grace the political environment of Nigeria? Under this atmosphere, the 1959 federal election was held to usher in the political independence of Nigeria. And the result of this election showed that a coalition is needed to form a government and Chief Awolowo of AG had agreed to enter on alliance with

NCNC, then the North threatened that if the Southern parties allied to capture power at the federal level, that the North will secede. In this political imbroglio, the constant British character to support the North coupled with the latent antipathy of some NCNC leaders against the AG led the NCNC to team up with the NPC to form the government in December 1959.¹² The structure of this government at independent was like thus, Alhaji Abubakar of NPC who had led the party since 1954, because the Prime Minister and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who was the pioneer leader and premier of Eastern Region gave up his positions as Premier and became the Governor-general while Awolowo the leader of AG and Premier of the Western Region gave up his premiership and became the leader of the opposition in the federal parliament.

Amidst all the political hiccups such as the minority agitations for more status on 1st October 1960, Nigeria was granted independence. From the earlier political compromise reached, it appeared it seemed as if the political equation of Nigeria had been balanced, but consciously or unconsciously a tribal and political time bomb was planted in the heart of Nigerian polity. This time bomb started ticking in 1962 with the cancellation of the census of 1962, by the Prime Minister when the NPC led government discovered that the figures were trickery in favor of the South. This cancellation was made to avoid a political scenario where the south will have more seats in the federal constituencies and stand on a better ground to challenge the domination of Northern NPC led government or even overtake it. Furthermore, the imprisonment of Awolowo and Enahoro on the charges of treason

and the subsequent arbitrary creation of Mid-West Region out of Western region heated up the political environment.¹³

These politicians instead of embarking on policies that will trigger national unity and development, embarked on ventures to stop their fellow politicians or the opposition party. They reinforced the divisions created by the British among Nigerian. The political parties they formed were nothing more than tribal associations that breed rancor among Nigerians. This anomaly was not just between the North and the South but also between the West and the East and also intra-regional political tussle was having its way. These politicians through unguided utterances and acts drummed up the concept of domination into the ears of ethnic or sectional groups. Karin on the political situation rightly asserted that, "By 1964 the federal structure was failing, ethnic minorities were revolting, rival political factions were fighting in the western region regional governors were attempting to inflate population numbers in national census, and elections were both boycotted and rigged". Conflict was endemic in the related twin factors of Nigeria's deliberate choice of political centrifugalism and the manifestly composite nature of her socio-ecological history. "One thing only I wish for you", Abubakar Tafawa Balewa said to Harold Wilson as they drove to Lagos airport a few days before the former's death, "that you never have to become Prime Minister of a federal and divided 12 country".¹⁴

This scenario culminated into a wanton destruction of lives and property. In fact, there was gross breakdown of law and order. But the federal government

was at a loss of what to do. Hence, this political rascality reached an intolerable crescendo which both the masses and the politicians became so weary of the events and longed for an alternative; which the military that appeared uninterested though highly interested as a result of participating in the government through the state of emergency declared on the Western Region, readily provided through a coup on 14-15 January 1966.¹⁵

Economics as a source of conflict

The economic plight of most new states too many calls on too little capital and too exiguous capacity, too many 'educated' persons chasing too few jobs as the sluiceways of a controlled colonial education policy are enthusiastically raised, too much jealousy over the 'fair' distribution of mineral or agricultural wealth located in one part of the country was in Nigeria exacerbated by viruses of specific Nigerian malignance. For instance, a politically necessary program like that of Northernization in which priority for employment in the North's bureaucracy, local government, trade and industry discriminated against non-Northern Nigerians in favour of foreigners made economic nonsense of Nigeria's total manpower situation. It created artificial surpluses of skills where nationally none existed. While there was too much jam in the Eastern region or butter in the Yoruba-speaking areas of the Northern Region, there was not even dripping on some crusts of the Northern loaf. - The National Economic Development plan was placed in constant jeopardy by the politicians' habit of scrutinizing every project for signs of its Regional gain or discrimination instead of for evidence of its

contribution to national integration. For instance, the eventual decision on the siting of the iron and steel complex plumbed the depths of economic absurdity, with agreement on one site in the Northern region, another in the Eastern region, and the likelihood of a third in the Western region to keep it happy, thereby exceeding the total steel requirements for the whole of West Africa.¹⁶

There were other examples, e.g. the Sokoto Cement Works and the Regional TV companies, all economic undertakings enforced by political considerations. The Federal Government, essentially the convener and coordinator of the national economy, was - at least until 1962, when its no-nonsense intervention into the affairs of the West showed the Regional Governments that there could really be some bite to back up the Federal bite - obliged to step gingerly for fear of treading on Regional toes. The criteria of 'What is there in it for this Region?' and 'Why should that Region benefit?' replaced those of the national interest as a formula for economic planning. Thus the North feared that the Eastern region and the Mid-western region would gain unfairly from their immense oil wealth and was unhappy at so much money being spent on the 'wrong side of Carter Bridge; the South envied the North for the unending subventions made to enable it to 'catch up with the rest of the country'; the Western region was getting tired of the economic disadvantages in being politically the odd man out; the Eastern region was jealous of the Western region and Lagos having the only two federally financed universities and of the siting in the Northern region of the major military installations such as the ordnance factory, the army depot, the air force

base, and the defense academy: "Take a look at what they have done with the little power we surrendered to them" ran the preamble to a NCNC catalogue of economic discrimination released in March 1964. In short, the primacy of politics (sometimes even local politics) in the formulation of national economic decisions threatened to give rise to a chequer-board of over- and under- development.¹⁷

Society as a source of conflict

It is a tenable thesis that the tragedy at the all-pervasive level of societal relations was enacted not so much in the commonplace terms of undiluted tribalism or polarized Marxist class conflict as in terms of involute ethnicity. The Moslem Hausa/Fulani v. Ibo Christian stereotype of the civil war could be easily broken down by an analysis of the tribal composition of the Nigerian army, with its high proportion of non-Moslems officers and men alike from the Middle Belt areas of the North. If the Ibo had a monopoly of senior posts Nigerian intellectuals as "the worst peddlers of tribalism" is applicable to a far wider circle of leadership. To defend our way of life and to preserve our proud heritage', unexceptionable as a culture-wish, could be twisted by an unscrupulous leadership into a rallying-point sufficient to challenge the needs of modernization and to check economic good sense.

It became too easy to interpret any unwanted move, by the center or by another Region, as an abuse of authority and to reject it as a disruption of traditional cultural values. Thus, the demands of national interest became subordinated to the dictates of Regional and sub-Regional ethnicity. The

fundamental economic fear of not getting an equal share (the cynic might say of not getting at least an equal share) of the national amenities was based on the exploitation of ethnic and social inequality. Its attempted resolution at the political level proved to be the signal for conflict.¹⁸

Elites as a source of conflict

The syndrome of education employment elites provided one of the most conspicuous areas of conflict in pre-1966 Nigeria. Without being prognostic or too pessimistic, it is possible to foresee the same desperate competitiveness for jobs becoming as major and disintegrative a force in the new multi-state structure as it was in the old Regional one with, if the worst comes about, the merit principle being diluted by a quota factor of 12 instead of the previous 4. Under the political system of the First Republic, the masses might vote, but it was self-perpetuating elite they were apparently voting for. The rewards did not percolate very far down the social scale. The political class up to 1966 held on tightly to the positions that assured them of control over three vital elitist desiderata: power, prosperity, posterity. Nowhere was the politics of patronage more conspicuously played than among the political and to a lesser extent the professional elite.

Within six years of this tragic colonial manipulation Nigeria was a cesspool of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth. Elections were blatantly rigged. The subsequent national census was outrageously stage-managed; judges and magistrates were manipulated by the politicians in power. The politicians themselves were pawns of foreign business

interests.¹⁹ The social malaise in Nigerian society was political corruption. The structure of the country was such that there was an inbuilt power struggles among the ethnic groups, and of course those who were in power wanted to stay in power. The easiest and simplest way to retain it, even in a limited area, was to appeal to tribal sentiments, so they were egregiously exploited in the 1950s and 1960s.

The original idea of one Nigeria was pressed by the leaders and intellectuals from the Eastern Region. With all their shortcomings, they had this idea to build the country as one. The first to object were the Northerners, led by the Sardauna, who were followed closely by the Awolowo clique that had created the Action Group. The Northern People's Congress of the Sardaunians was supposed to be a national party, yet it refused to change its name from Northern to Nigerian People's Congress, even for the sake of appearances. It refused right up to the end of the civilian regime.²⁰ The prime minister of Nigeria, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who had been built up into a great statesman by the Western world, did nothing to save his country from impending chaos. The British made certain on the eve of their departure that power went to that conservative element in the country that had played no real part in the struggle for independence.²¹

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CHAPTER THREE

THE ROLE OF RED CROSS IN THE NIGERIA- BIAFRA CONFLICT

The Red Cross, established in 1863 in Switzerland, is an international humanitarian organization dedicated to charitable goals. Operating as a private non-profit entity under Swiss law, its purpose is to provide aid and relief to individuals in crisis, including those affected by warfare and other urgent conflicts. Following the formulation of the Vienna Conventions in 1949, the Red Cross was entrusted with the responsibility of upholding the principles of these conventions and their supplementary protocols in global conflict scenarios.¹

Despite the presence of Red Cross Societies in various nations, they drew inspiration from the Geneva-based Red Cross (International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC) and maintain affiliations with it. The Nigeria-Biafra War posed a significant trial for the Red Cross in its humanitarian efforts. Scholars suggest that following the Berlin Airlift in 1948, the ICRC had not embarked on a humanitarian mission of comparable magnitude until the Nigerian conflict. This implies that the Red Cross's involvement in Biafra was notably strenuous and demanding.²

Following the war, appeals were directed to the International Committee of Red Cross in Geneva, urging them to undertake humanitarian efforts. However, the organization encountered significant challenges due to the highly divisive and politically charged conflict filled with propaganda. Despite its commitment to political neutrality and the protection of civilian welfare and rights, the organization needed approval from both the Nigerian and Biafran Governments. While consent was eventually obtained, it came with certain conditions. The Nigerian Government opposed the direct airlift of relief into Biafra by the ICRC and instead suggested that the responsibility be entrusted to the Nigerian Government

or, at the very least, the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRC), overseen by the Nigerian military.³

John Okpoko highlighted the substantial pressure exerted by the Federal Military Government on the NRC, pushing them to support the Federal Military Government's Army Medical Corps program rather than launching independent initiatives. The ICRC was concerned that its independence from the government could be jeopardized, and it worried that the entire mission might be placed under the control of the Nigerian forces' objectives in the war. Therefore, it was unwilling to agree to the terms proposed by Nigeria.⁴

Amidst a worsening civilian crisis, there was a growing urgency for international humanitarian organizations to quickly respond. Consequently, the Geneva-based Red Cross had to reconsider its stance and cooperate with the Nigerian Red Cross Society, leading to a joint relief operation. Kevin O Sullivan points out that the ICRC's relief supplies reached Biafra in November 1967, and within five months, the organization took on a central role in coordinating relief efforts in areas controlled by the federal government.⁵

Exploring Biafra: The Need for Global Humanitarian Aid

The Nigeria-Biafra War was preceded by a severe humanitarian crisis. In the initial months of the conflict, starvation and economic hardships within Biafra led to the deaths of thousands, surpassing those caused by Nigerian weaponry. The influx of refugees and violent displacement of Easterners, mainly from the North, into the Eastern enclave created a distressing humanitarian catastrophe. Even before the outbreak of war, Eastern Nigeria was facing dire economic and humanitarian challenges. Between May 1966 and January 1967, approximately one million Igbo refugees, both materially and emotionally stripped, were compelled to escape from the North and parts of the West to the East. The Eastern region, with a population of over 12 million, was already consumed by fear and a desperate search for safety due to the anti-Igbo violence.⁶

The aftermath brought about significant challenges and societal disruptions for the people of the Eastern region. On one hand, the Easterners faced hardships and upheaval, while on the other hand, the Eastern Regional Government dealt with severe financial and security pressures. Igbo returnees and refugees displayed signs of anxiety and hunger, placing a heavy burden on their relatives who took them in. The critical point is that even before the commencement of the war, the Biafra enclave was grappling with severe humanitarian crises. As the Nigeria-Biafra War erupted, the Nigerian military initiated a comprehensive 'blockade' against Biafra, effectively sealing off all major entry points by sea, air, and land, and enforcing control with Nigerian forces.

Geographically, Biafra was roughly square in shape. While the central plateau region was predominantly inhabited by the Igbo population, the eastern and southern areas were home to minorities who played a significant role in the country's food production. The region largely sustained itself in terms of food, supplying carbohydrates, palm oil, and fruits, but it relied on Northern Nigeria for cattle and Scandinavian countries for imports of meat and dried stockfish (okporoko). While goats and chickens existed within the region, their numbers were insufficient to provide the necessary protein for the well-being of over thirteen million people in Biafra.⁷

The conflict led to a severe shortage of food and significant economic disruption in Biafra. The Nigerian military's blockade prevented the import of vital protein-rich food and other necessities into Biafra. This blockade also halted economic support from neighboring countries and regions. Consequently, the food crisis in Biafra was exacerbated, resulting in widespread starvation and a dire humanitarian catastrophe. Malnutrition-related illnesses such as anemia, pellagra, and kwashiorkor became widespread, leading to numerous civilian casualties, with the majority being women and children. In an attempt to address the issue, Biafra's authorities promoted the establishment of intensive poultry farms to increase protein

production. However, the loss of key territories and an influx of refugees from the Cross River Valley and Uyo province, significant food-producing areas, into central Igbo regions, made these emergency farming efforts appear inadequate.⁸

As of February 1968, the refugee count surged from approximately one million to around two and a half million. Tragically, over 268,000 civilians, averaging about 2,100 per day, lost their lives due to malnutrition, related illnesses, and frequent Nigerian air attacks. This led to a devastating situation where a significant portion of the former Eastern Region's territory had to provide for 50-60% of its initial population.⁹

The worsening humanitarian situation in Biafra became impossible for the global community to ignore. The urgency of the situation called for active intervention from the international community. What truly captured the world's attention during the Nigeria-Biafra War was the widespread starvation and suffering of the civilian population in Biafra. By early 1968, distressing images of malnourished and sick children and women in the war-torn region gained significant coverage in Western media. This spurred awareness and mobilized compassionate individuals in America and Europe to form various humanitarian groups in support of Biafra's civilians. Despite attempts by the Nigerian Military Government to dismiss the civilian tragedy as mere 'Biafra propaganda,' independent reports from experts and representatives of respected humanitarian organizations operating in both Biafra and Nigeria confirmed the severity of the issue. Concerned foreign governments and international institutions commissioned multiple fact-finding missions, whose reports overwhelmingly confirmed the gravity of the situation.

Role of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Biafra war

After the Republic of Biafra declared its independence, the Federation of Nigeria used military force to prevent the secession. The ICRC became engaged in the conflict by extending its services to the warring parties. Initially, it focused on locating prisoners of war

and supporting the local Red Cross through supplies and medical personnel. By the end of 1967, the ICRC commenced humanitarian relief for civilians affected by the war on both sides of the front line. In 1968, the organization's primary focus shifted to addressing the famine in Biafra, which posed the challenge of providing sustenance to millions in complex conditions. The ICRC's main obstacle was securing consent from the warring parties to deliver aid into Biafra, which was under blockade by the Nigerian government. While the government accepted the principle of aid, it sought control over its distribution to assert sovereignty over the breakaway region. Conversely, the Biafran authorities attempted to dictate conditions for relief efforts to demonstrate independence from federal government influence. Moreover, each party viewed humanitarian assistance as intertwined with military strategy.¹⁰

In spite of these challenges, the ICRC managed to initiate an airlift for Biafra in September 1968. Adhering to the principle of fairness and to prevent working solely on the Biafran side, the organization also orchestrated a relief effort in areas reclaimed by the federal army. This endeavor faced significant logistical hurdles and continued until the summer of 1969. However, as the Nigerian government adopted a more rigid stance, the ICRC's role underwent a transformation. The head of the ICRC's Nigeria-Biafra mission was declared unwelcome in Nigerian territory, a plane from the Red Cross airlift was shot down, and the Nigerian government assumed control of the relief operation in federal areas. This shift in approach compelled the ICRC to reevaluate its participation, and since it couldn't broker an agreement between the conflicting parties, the organization suspended the Biafra airlift.¹¹

During the latter part of 1969, the ICRC gradually scaled back its involvement in the conflict, though it continued its traditional duties and maintained medical teams in Biafra. The conclusion of Biafra's surrender in January 1970 marked the end of humanitarian operations there. The ICRC's evaluation of its wartime role was mixed. It executed a large-

scale operation but had to curtail most activities before the conflict's conclusion. The operation was costly, demanding a sizable and well-trained workforce, along with meticulous management, particularly in negotiations with the warring parties. This emphasized the ICRC's need for reforms to reaffirm its role in aiding those impacted by war. Three key areas for reform emerged: the organization's functioning, personnel management, and its interactions with other humanitarian entities and the media.¹²

The Red Cross and the Humanitarian 'Airlift to Biafra'

The sporadic and insufficient delivery of aid by the Red Cross in Geneva, as part of the Joint Nigeria Relief Operation, had limited impact on the escalating humanitarian crisis in Biafra. Daily occurrences of diseases, malnutrition, widespread hunger, and fatalities had reached alarming levels. Protein deficiency caused by food shortages had led to the widespread presence of diseases like kwashiorkor and miasmas.¹³ Mr. Leslie H. Kirkley, during a fact-finding mission on the Nigeria and Biafra frontlines, informed the international press that if a significant quantity of food relief didn't reach Biafra within six weeks, approximately 400,000 children would succumb to kwashiorkor. To prevent this impending catastrophe, around 300 tons of food per day was needed.¹⁴

This situation indicated the looming threat of widespread mortality, and indeed, there was a noticeable increase in civilian deaths. Conservative estimates suggest a daily death toll of around 3,000, while official sources from Biafra assert figures between 20,000 and 30,000 deaths.¹⁵ While accurate death statistics were unavailable, it was evident that a significant loss of life had occurred, with children and women bearing the brunt. This situation was worsened by the influx of refugees from federal-held areas into the unoccupied Biafra enclave. In less than four months, the initial count of 1 million refugees had ballooned to over 3 million. Biafran authorities, aided by the Red Cross and Church volunteers, established a series of refugee camps to provide shelter and one daily meal for the displaced population.¹⁶

Nevertheless, a shift was imperative. This time, an unrelenting wave of publicity and a plea for coordinated global aid for Biafra, championed by numerous international journalists, church missionaries, Red Cross personnel, and humanitarian workers in Biafra, managed to awaken global awareness about the dire humanitarian crisis. The Red Cross in Geneva initiated its second call for international humanitarian support for Biafra, yielding substantial contributions from various groups, organizations, and nations in the Western world. These funds facilitated the acquisition of relief supplies destined for Biafra. However, despite numerous entreaties to the Nigerian Government for airspace clearance for "mercy planes," these appeals were consistently denied. As Tony Byrne points out, significant relief aid was procured, but the major obstacle was navigating the Nigerian airspace.¹⁷

During the month of April, Biafra received sporadic food assistance mainly transported by Hank Wharton's privately operated Super Constellations, which flew from Lisbon to Port Harcourt and later Uli during the nighttime.¹⁸ This arrangement was driven more by necessity and business rather than any collaboration between ICRC to secretly smuggle arms into Biafra. Relief organizations had to pay substantial sums to Mr. Wharton in order to fit their relief supplies into his aircraft. This experience proved to be a source of frustration for ICRC. Due to the urgency of the situation, the International Red Cross was compelled to initiate its own emergency airlift into Biafra, following the lead of Caritas and the World Council of Churches, who had already started night airlift operations from Sao Tome. Opting for proximity and neutrality, the Red Cross established its operational base on the small Spanish-colonized island of Fernando Po. On July 31st, the ICRC commenced its independent airlift operations from Fernando Po, with the coordination led by Mr. Auguste Lindt, a skilled diplomat.¹⁹

However, the initial quantity of food transported to Biafra by the ICRC during the first few months was disheartening, totaling around 712 tons.²⁰ While the Church groups

managed to bring in over 2500 tons, their ongoing reliance on Mr. Wharton posed a significant challenge due to his aircraft's inability to carry large amounts of food, making it a constant target for attacks by the Nigerian military.²¹ By the end of August, the number of fatalities among children and women due to starvation and diseases linked to malnutrition skyrocketed from roughly 500 to 8,000 per day. Additionally, more than a million displaced individuals residing in approximately 638 refugee camps struggled to find even one meal per day.²²

The situation deteriorated further when the ICRC International Airlift West Africa operation was launched for Biafra. This initiative was responsible for delivering an estimated 6,520 tons of relief from Fernando Po (Santa Isabel) in Equatorial Guinea to Uli, accomplished through eight fleets of aircraft between September and November 1968.²³ Consequently, the organization's monthly budget surged to approximately 15 million Swiss Francs, with the Lagos operation alone accounting for up to six million Swiss Francs. The ICRC's records indicated that around 4,000 tons of relief was distributed along the Nigerian frontline via Lagos.²⁴ This demonstrates that the Red Cross didn't solely focus its efforts on the Biafran frontlines, as it also worked to enhance conditions within the territories controlled by Nigeria through its Lagos operation.

The Red Cross's airlift operation was strengthened by the addition of six more aircraft: two Hercules freighters from the Canadian Government and four Stratosphere freighters (Globe master) from the US Government.²⁵ This led to a potential increase in food relief supply in Biafra. By the end of November, the kwashiorkor outbreak was controlled, but a new threat emerged – measles. UNICEF officials estimated that over a million children would be affected, with a death toll projected around 300,000.²⁶

To accommodate the growing flight operations, the Red Cross, in partnership with Biafran leader Col. Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, swiftly built a new airstrip at Obinagu. This

provided a separate relief landing point instead of relying on the vulnerable Annabelle airstrip at Uli, which was frequently targeted by Nigerian airstrikes. Unfortunately, the Obinagu airport was destroyed by a Nigerian Dakota freighter at night after a few landings. As a result, the ICRC night airlift had to continue at Uli for the remainder of the year. In early January 1969, the ICRC airlift operation in Fernando Po ended due to a change in government in Equatorial Guinea. A few weeks later, the Red Cross relocated to Cotonou in Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin) with a reduced number of flights, serving as the new base for the airlift to Biafra.²⁷

The relief flights proceeded smoothly, but later during that time period, the ICRC managed to negotiate the resumption of operations in Fernando Po. The report indicates that the total amount of food delivered each night slightly surpassed the projected estimate of 300 tons. Additionally, at least a million children in Biafra were receiving regular access to food, and there were signs that the issue of starvation was improving.²⁸

Unfortunately, the morale of the International Committee of the Red Cross was severely affected when a Nigerian MiG-17 fighter plane shot down a Red Cross aircraft on June 5th, 1969. This incident resulted in the deaths of American Captain David Brown, two Swedes, and one Norwegian.²⁹ Despite the gruesome nature of their deaths and the violation of the Geneva Conventions, there was little response from Western governments, even from those whose citizens were killed. This lack of reaction from the international community heightened the sense of impunity in Nigeria's actions, leading to more brutality and violence against non-combatant Biafran civilians. As a result, the ICRC made the decision to temporarily suspend its operations.

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CHAPTER FOUR

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT OF RED CROSS IN THE NIGERIA-CIVIL WAR

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) played a significant role during the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970). The ICRC's primary role was to provide humanitarian assistance, protection, and support to civilians and combatants affected by the conflict. They facilitated communication between separated families, ensured the treatment of wounded soldiers, and helped with the exchange of prisoners of war. Their presence helped alleviate the suffering of those caught in the conflict and emphasized the importance of humanitarian principles even in times of war.

During the war, the Biafrans were faced with many persecutions including rape/ sexual violence, which were declared even before the war in a radio broadcast in Hausa language. "Let's go kill the damned Igbos, kill of their men and boys, and rape their wives and daughters. As many injured Biafran men and women including children and orphans refugees returned to eastern Nigeria were ripped off their belongings and had little or no resources for their lives and shelter. Many people were displaced multiple times before finding refuge.¹

Marie-Luce D. explained that the plan for the genocide was established even before the war and ICRC was aware it before it actually took place.² Death list of the top Igbo military leaders was made and Military and weapon were made ready to attack the Biafrans on the day of celebrating of their sovereignty. Target

point were defined and to take place in some prominent area in the Biafran region. Before the actual the order of outright exterminates took place. The Nigerian government was accused of genocide against the Biafrans. Dehumanization can be traced in war, which was more of the consequences of the famine that resulted to a special kind of drained body and disease called kwashiorkor- pictures of which was seen across the world. These severe humanitarian disasters as a consequence of the war prompted the ICRC to action. Their involvement in tackling the humanitarian catastrophe was indeed significant, it however, had some implications.³

To understand the impact of the Nigeria- Biafra conflict on the ICRC, it is necessary to analyses the way in which it exposed the ICRC's weaknesses and prompted a process of reform. These weaknesses were particularly evident in three areas. First, the functioning of the organization itself and its ability to manage a large-scale operation were called into question. Second, its interaction with other organizations and individuals governments, other humanitarian agencies, and the media also became subject to criticism.

Third, the difficulties encountered by the ICRC in recruiting and training qualified staff were part and parcel of a new challenge: how to work more effectively in the field. In the face of these problems, the ICRC had to demonstrate flexibility and take the initiative in order to conduct such a complex operation. More generally, an analysis of this process reveals how changes in the internal structure of humanitarian organizations can be driven by action taken in the field.

Even the relatively short time period covered here suffices to shed light not only on the principles underpinning the action of such organizations but also on how they function.⁴

Significance of the ICRC in the Nigeria Biafra conflict

In the mid-1960s, the ICRC had not yet fully recovered from its difficulties at the end of World War II, when the fall in its activities led to a drastic reduction in its budget and workforce. In addition; it had been heavily criticized for its failure to help the victims of the Nazi genocide and prisoners from the Eastern Front.

Although the ICRC gradually managed to overcome these difficulties, the situation in the mid-1960s remained precarious. Between 1945 and 1965, it did carry out significant operations, but generally only ones requiring relatively limited resources.⁵

Indeed, in those conflicts in which it was called on to act, the ICRC focused mainly on its traditional tasks – that is to say, activities for detainees, whether prisoners of war or civilian internees, and supporting National Red Cross Societies in cases of disturbances. While the ICRC contributed to major relief operations for civilians, this was not its primary focus and required significant resources. In this respect, the operation that took place following the entry of Soviet troops into Hungary in 1956, in which the ICRC distributed food to Hungarian refugees in Vienna, was a notable case, accounting for a significant

proportion of the aid distributed in the 1950–1960 period. In several other cases, the ICRC mainly supported the work of National Red Cross Societies.⁶

During the spring of 1967, the possibility of secession leading to a civil war became more apparent. Mr. Hoffmann was dispatched to Nigeria to coordinate with the potential conflicting parties in preparation for such an event. This responsibility was seen as a duty by him and the Committee members. The Nigerians he engaged with had discussed the Geneva Conventions and strategies for handling civil conflicts in previous years. It would have been incomprehensible to them if, during a critical crisis, the ICRC had neglected its duty. According to Article 3 of the Conventions, the Committee was obligated to extend its assistance.⁷

Therefore, in early July, when the war erupted, the ICRC's Delegate-General was already present. He timely secured commitments from the head of the Federal Military Government and Colonel Ojukwu that the Geneva Conventions would be upheld. He conveyed essential details for delivering medical supplies and uniforms to both parties as the hostilities began. Additionally, he organized the mobilization of two surgical teams through the Swiss Red Cross.

During the latter part of 1969, the ICRC started winding down its involvement in the conflict, while still maintaining its medical teams in Biafra and continuing its traditional duties. The conclusion of the Biafran conflict in January 1970 marked the conclusion of humanitarian operations in the region.⁸ The ICRC's evaluation of its role in the conflict was a mixed one. Although it had carried out a significant operation, it was compelled to halt most activities before the conflict's

conclusion. This operation had been costly, demanding a substantial and well-trained workforce, along with meticulous management, especially in negotiations with the warring parties.

This situation swiftly underscored the necessity for the ICRC to implement reforms if it aimed to reaffirm its position as an organization aiding those impacted by warfare. This endeavor focused on three key areas: the organization's functioning, staff administration, and its interactions with other humanitarian entities and the media.⁹

Implications of the Nigeria Civil War on the ICRC

The scale of the Nigeria- Biafra operation, the largest the ICRC had carried out since the end of World War II, and the new conditions in which it unfolded highlighted the amateurism of the ICRC's humanitarian response. There were two significant particularly acute problems. Firstly, there was a complex relationship between ICRC headquarters, where decisions were made, and the field, where other concerns held sway. Secondly, the unique functioning of the ICRC, with the central role played by the Committee (now the Assembly) in the decision-making process, raised issues specific to its organizational structure.¹⁰

In 1967, when the Nigeria- Biafra conflict began, the Committee had 17 co-opted members, who attended a plenary meeting once a month. They set the ICRC's policy and fixed its general direction. Alongside the Committee, the Presidential Council met more regularly every fortnight between each plenary session of the Committee and oversaw the everyday affairs of the organization. It

was composed of the president and two vice-presidents (elected by all the members), along with several other members of the ICRC. Finally, the Directorate, made up of two directors-general and a director managed the ICRC's daily activities and administration. A critical evaluation of the way in which those bodies functioned at the end of 1967 brought to light several factors that might help explain the lack of initiative taken by the ICRC in pursuing its action.¹¹

Overall, the Committee members did not seem to be sufficiently committed to their duties. Despite receiving an internal briefing document that was produced specifically for them, they did not seem to pay enough attention or know enough about the issues. Being more dynamic also meant recruiting more diverse and younger Committee members, whose average age prior to the recruitment of four new members at the end of 1967 was 65. Moreover, the distinction between the Presidential Council and the Committee was not clear, and plenary meetings put too much emphasis on the details of the implementation of ICRC policy, which was actually the responsibility of the Presidential Council and the Directorate. Finally, there was a need to boost the Directorate by appointing one or more assistants.¹²

While these problems were not linked specifically to the Nigeria- Biafra operation, they did have an impact on it. As a result, the ICRC was late to take charge of the operation. According to Thierry Hentsch, the initial difficulties encountered by the ICRC in the negotiations with the warring parties stemmed from a degree of insouciance.¹³ The Nigeria-Biafra situation was initially not a

subject of particular interest to the Committee. Uninformed about the situation, it relied primarily on information from Swiss diplomats stationed in Lagos, where it was widely believed that the federal army would swiftly overcome secessionist Biafra.¹⁴ Within the ICRC, the conflict was not given due consideration, which caused the ICRC to mishandle its dealings with the Nigerian and Biafran authorities, sowing doubt in the minds of its contacts about ‘the credibility of its humanitarian, neutral and impartial action’. Furthermore, the ICRC failed to give sufficient weight to its representations to the belligerents. It would have had more of an impact if it had sent a member of the Committee to the field.¹⁵

With people’s needs growing dramatically in the late spring of 1968, the ICRC made a public appeal entitled ‘SOS Biafra’, in which it advocated lifting the blockade imposed by the federal government. These efforts, made in haste and without informing the Nigerian government, only exacerbated the misunderstandings with the authorities. The ICRC’s amateurism not only hindered negotiations about the relief effort in Biafra, but also affected the management of the operation on Nigerian soil. With thousands of tons of aid sent by governments and organizations beginning to arrive in Lagos, the ICRC struggled to coordinate its distribution. In Lagos, this provoked considerable criticism from the Nigerian authorities, British and American diplomats, and ICRC staff who complained about the organization’s handling of the situation.¹⁶

The Swiss ambassador in Lagos was also concerned about the implications for the image of Switzerland and urged his superiors to entrust the

operation to Swiss figures who could handle it. He wrote: ‘You are probably in a position to help the ICRC find the right persons for the action in Nigeria. At the end of the day, it is our country’s reputation that is indirectly at stake, insofar as any action is to be undertaken by the Swiss.¹⁷ It would be unfortunate if the donor states and other organizations that have made financial contributions had the impression that the Swiss were not up to the task entrusted to them. Letter from the Swiss ambassador to Nigeria With images of malnourished children splashed across the Western media in July 1968, pressure mounted on the ICRC to find solutions and be more effective. Afraid that the operation would be taken off its hands, the ICRC decided to entrust it to an outsider who was able to take charge.¹⁸

Among other positions, the latter had been Special Delegate for the ICRC in Berlin and had served as UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In July 1968, he was appointed commissioner-general for the Nigeria- Biafra operation, for which he had full responsibility. When it put Lindt at the disposal of the ICRC, the Swiss government specified that he must not be hindered in his actions by the Committee. At first, his appointment appeared to be a success, since the Biafra relief effort was temporarily unblocked.¹⁹ A regular airlift was set up, carrying hundreds of tons of relief supplies every night from the island of Fernando Po (now Bioko). In addition, Lindt brought order to the operations being conducted on the federal side so as to improve the ICRC’s credibility with the Nigerian government. Finally, he was a driving force for the operation, emphasizing the need to pursue it, to plan, and to stay on track, whereas some Committee members

believed that it was too much for the ICRC.³⁸ His year-long efforts saw the ICRC commit fully to a major operation, during which it handled more than 100,000 tons of food.²⁰

Within the ICRC in Geneva, however, Lindt's taking over the operation did not entirely solve the management and organization problems. Friction was generated at headquarters by the creation of Lindt's office within the ICRC and the arrival of new staff in Geneva to cope with the operation's new dimensions. This clearly demonstrated the limitations of using external staff to manage the operation, as pointed out in hindsight by one of the ICRC directors:

The arrival in Geneva of staff from outside the organization, who came with the idea that they would teach us how to work and set themselves up with a parallel organization, like a foreign body, could only ever provoke a 'transplant rejection. Moreover, the division of responsibilities between the Lindt services and the ICRC was not clearly established and generated confusion. This had a direct impact on the management of field operations, as explained by Gerhart Schürch, head of the ICRC delegation in Lagos during the second half of 1968.²¹

In Lagos no one knew who was in charge. I wrote letters everywhere, to different services, letters which never reached the Nigeria- Biafra coordination office. Even the most urgent requests were only answered after long delays or not at all. The most critical information did not reach us, such as, for example, the decisions taken at the beginning of November as to whether or not the operation would continue. They forgot about or did not want to raise funds, which meant that

at the end of September we had no money and had to pay our drivers and people from our own pockets. There was a lack of coordination which was immediately reflected in our work, causing us many problems.

This confusion had implications, not only for the daily running of the operation, but also for the decision-making process of an action that was still in the ICRC's name but was being carried out and organized almost outside of its control. Communication and coordination problems between Lindt and ICRC headquarters in Geneva arose as soon as Lindt took office. They persisted throughout his mission, as recounted at a later stage by one of the Directorate members during this period: Given the magnitude and the complexity of the task, you can understand that the head of the mission wanted a free rein. But handing over complete authority to him led to the Nigeria-Biafra operation developing in isolation, almost independently of the normal information, deliberation and decision-making channels that make up the organizational structure of the ICRC.²²

But it was the ICRC in Geneva that was accountable to its partner organizations and to the governments that had supported it, and it was the ICRC that had to answer the media's questions. Occasionally, Lindt's decisions, which were driven by a desire for effectiveness but were sometimes too radical, prompted the Committee to resume control of the operation. For example, at the end of 1968, when the authorities of Equatorial Guinea obstructed the airlift, Lindt decided to try to transfer the operation to Libreville.²³

This was totally unacceptable to the Nigerian government, given that Gabon had recognized Biafra and that from its capital not only relief but above all arms made their way to Biafra.²⁴ To avoid totally alienating the Nigerian government, the ICRC was forced to step in, creating friction but finally causing Lindt to move part of the airlift to Dahomey (now Benin) rather than to Gabon. Lindt's resolve to treat the Nigerian government and the Biafran authorities on an equal footing, and to push for the ICRC to maintain full control of the operation while some members preferred to delegate the task to other organizations, were other sources of friction between the commissioner-general and the Committee.²⁵

Overall, the commissioner-general's enterprising attitude, coupled with his strong personality, was beneficial to the operation. It helped shake up a Committee that had sometimes been overly cautious. However, it also contributed to the hardening of the Nigerian government's attitude towards the ICRC in the middle of 1969, which marked the beginning of the end of the organization's activities in Nigeria and Biafra. Many factors contributed to the government's new stance, but it initially manifested itself in relation to Lindt, who was arrested and declared *persona non grata* on federal soil.²⁶

The Nigerian government's discontent was focused on the person of Lindt, described by some as too authoritarian and arrogant, thereby demonstrating the risks of associating an operation with one individual. Besides the fact that such an approach can lead to organizational difficulties and differences of opinion, it can also jeopardize the future of entire operations. After the incidents in June 1969,

for instance, the ICRC was stripped of its role as operations coordinator in Nigeria and was unable to resume the airlift. At the end of the operation, the ICRC identified several lessons to be learned. A restructuring was required in order to be able to handle new situations as they arose.²⁷

The measures taken also fitted into a more in-depth process of reform that had already been under way, as has been pointed out, even before the Nigeria-Biafra conflict made the need for reform so flagrantly obvious. A new structure was put in place in 1970 to regroup the support services which participated in external activities in an Operations Department. This reflected the ICRC's awareness of the need to better coordinate and lead the growing number of external operations in which it was involved. It was in line with the idea of establishing a delegation service, which had already been discussed in 1968⁵⁰ and was part of a wider restructuring process undertaken by the ICRC in 1970. The decision-making and governing bodies also came under scrutiny since the ICRC was faced with the resignation of both the president and one of the directors-general between 1968 and 1970. This highlighted the need to recruit younger members who would be willing to make a long-term commitment to the ICRC's work. The distinction between the responsibilities of the Committee and the Presidential Council was made clearer in 1974, and humanitarian professionals gradually had more say in the ICRC's policies.²⁸

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafra War (July 6, 1967 through January 13, 1970), was a political-ethnic armed conflict caused by the attempted secession of the provinces of the south east of Nigeria, mostly populated by Igbo people, under the name of Biafra Republic.

The war lasted two and a half years, and included the support of powers and superpowers to the two warring sides, with arms shipping from France, South Africa and Portugal to the rebels of the south, and support of the USSR and Great Britain to the federal government. Most African governments also supported the latter.¹

It is estimated that between 500,000 and 2,000,000 people died, mostly of starvation. When this conflict became visible overseas due to the images shown by the media, the international public opinion was shaken and the great need of humanitarian assistance was exposed.²

In the absence of significant action from outside (state) powers, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and what eventually became Joint Church Aid (JCA) filled the gap, flying some 5,300 airlift sorties delivering over 60,000 tons of relief supplies into Biafra.³ These were separate efforts, with the ICRC constraining its actions along lines of legality and principle. Join Church Aid (JCA) was the culmination of efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) predominately led by Caritas Internationalism and Nordchurchaid.³ These organizations (and at times individual actors) became the funneling mechanism for getting funding and aid to Biafra, including significant support from the United States. The Biafran Airlift was not a formal, planned, or rehearsed mission from the outset. It was instead a grassroots effort that grew, gaining momentum to arrive at a scale of effort only exceeded in history by the Berlin Airlift.⁴

During the Berlin Airlift, military forces executed the operation without direct interference from the enemy. In contrast, during the Biafran Airlift civilians delivered food while being shot out of the air and bombed on the ground. The United States Air Force (USAF) has a long and commendable history of humanitarian airlift, but only a small fraction of those operations have occurred in hostile or contested environments. What airlift lacks in efficiency and economy it makes up for in access, flexibility, and small presence at the offload point. Supporting an enclave from the air is often the only option when facing the tyranny of distance and political constraints.⁵

The International Committee of Red Cross aptly played one of the most crucial roles in the Nigeria-Biafra War. Though the performance has raised some criticisms, it was selflessly heroic. They fed the hungry and starved, treated the ill and the wounded, provided makeshift shelter for the homeless, and later reported abuses in both frontlines of the war. Far from the claim that the organization implemented an international political agenda in the war using humanitarian effort as a cover, most of the actions and decisions it took in the war were primarily dictated by reasons bordering on how to save lives of millions of civilians endangered by the war.

The ICRC decision to follow the path of legality, though almost hampered its effective operation, was done to ensure that it was allowed to continue to carry out its moral obligation of saving lives of vulnerable civilians.⁶

The Biafra initial accusation that the organization was acting a script of the federal forces and their international sympathizers was uninformed and imagined out of panic. The attitude and response of the Red Cross to the increasing humanitarian tragedy was contingent to its commitment to ensure political neutrality in the war. Again, the Nigerian claims that the Red Cross International had bias for Biafra and covertly supported its secession cause which contributed to prolonging the war was unwarranted and sustained by

political paranoia. That ICRC breached the Nigeria air blockade was only done in response to the urgency for aggressive supply of relief to at least arrest the impending humanitarian disaster in Biafra. It would be morally unjustifiable to continue to pursue the path of 'ill-fated legality' while millions of children and women would continue to die. Here, humanitarian consideration supersedes every other thing.⁷

Thus, the assaults on the Red Cross flights and staff were militarily and ethically unwarranted. Both the Nigerian and Biafran sides failed to understand the nature and dictates of the Red Cross intervention in a conflict situation as much as the organization cared less about the overriding politics and interest of the two warring sides. In all, the centrality of our argument is that the Red Cross acted more of 'selfless humanitarians' than 'political meddlers' in the Nigeria-Biafra War.

In conclusion, applying Neutrality and Speaking out during the Biafran war posed significant challenges due to the war's intricate nature. This conflict left a historical mark through extensive human casualties, political maneuvering, food blockades, and the devastating famine experienced by the Biafran people. The study revealed discrepancies between the ICRC's policies and its public stance during the war, complicating its expected humanitarian role. The ICRC grappled with various dilemmas, including pressure from its field personnel, safety concerns, the urgency of the situation, and the need for greater public awareness of its actions. These challenges could have justified the ICRC's need to voice its concerns. However, the organization initially hesitated to appeal to public opinion, but this changed as the consequences of its actions became more apparent. Nevertheless, the ICRC's limited experience in relief aid at the time, along with shortcomings in negotiation, political and public relations, and effective media communication, hindered its ability to speak out promptly during the Biafran war. The study underscores the significance of Neutrality and Speaking out as essential humanitarian principles, albeit challenging to implement,

particularly in complex settings. It also highlights the importance of autonomy and independence of action for humanitarian organizations to effectively fulfill their mission.⁸

The case study of the Biafra humanitarian intervention revealed certain shortcomings in how the ICRC approached neutrality and adhered to humanitarian guidelines. Despite having established their code of conduct prior to the Biafra war, it was anticipated that the ICRC would have made greater efforts to align with these guidelines. Improved coordination, communication, and negotiation skills were expected, particularly in critical situations like the "Biafra observation project," initiated and organized by the Nigerian government without ICRC supervision. This indifference appeared contradictory; especially when the ICRC reacted differently after their flight was bombed and sought a new agreement with the Nigerian government. Additionally, the conflicting media and counter-media publications by the ICRC created confusion worldwide regarding the true situation in Biafra, resulting in further hardships for aid workers and leading some French doctors to denounce the genocide and advocate for the Biafrans.⁹

Overall, the Red Cross played a significant role in alleviating the suffering of civilians and combatants during the Nigeria Civil War and worked to uphold humanitarian principles in a complex and challenging conflict environment. However, Its effort was hugely confronted by various political interest in the conflict, especially the Federal Military Government which viewed the Red Cross's activities as vital to the Biafra faction and became increasingly suspicious of the Red Cross's role, leading to the implementation of blockade in 1968 and ultimately resulting in the Biafra Airlift.¹⁰

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