

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MEDIATION EFFORTS OF THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY (OAU) DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970

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Abstract

The present study constitutes a survey research. The research investigated the function of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in facilitating conflict resolution amidst the Nigerian civil war that occurred between 1967 and 1970. The fundamental aims of the study were to record the diverse mediating discussions arranged by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) amid the conflict, ascertain the catalysts that prompted the OAU to intervene in the war, and scrutinise the factors that impeded the effectiveness of OAU's mediating endeavours to facilitate reconciliation between the warring factions. The present study sourced its data from primary and secondary sources, encompassing pertinent books, journal articles, newspaper publications, archival materials, and OAU resolutions. The study employed a content analysis approach to examine historical documents. The study determined that the mediatory intervention of the OAU ultimately proved to be ineffective. The failure of the mediation efforts can be attributed to various factors, including the prohibition outlined in the organisation's Charter that prohibits intervention in the internal conflicts of member states, the perceived bias of the mediators in favour of Nigeria, and the lack of trust and unwillingness to compromise on the part of the conflicting parties. The research findings indicate that although the OAU's mediation efforts did not result in the cessation of the war, the organisation should be lauded for its

collective endeavours in advancing peace not only in Nigeria, but also throughout the wider African region.

Keywords: Nigeria, OAU, Civil War, Conflict, Biafra.

Introduction

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to examining the inception, underlying factors, progression, and ramifications of the Nigerian civil war spanning from July 6th, 1967 to January 12th, 1970 (Adejo, 2008). Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of scholarly literature regarding the involvement of international organisations in preventing the Nigerian conflict from escalating into a full-fledged war, mitigating the violence, and facilitating a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This study aims to investigate the involvement of the now-defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in facilitating peace negotiations between the Federal Military Government of Nigeria and the newly declared Republic of Biafra in the Eastern Region during the period of September 1967 to December 1969.

It is imperative to acknowledge that despite the Federal Government of Nigeria, under the leadership of General Yakubu Gowon, opting to handle the civil war as an internal matter, three significant factors rendered it a matter of great significance not only within Africa, but globally. The conflict between the Federal Government of Nigeria and Biafra was fueled by the provision of arms, such as aircraft and heavy artillery, from various governments including the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, Portugal, and undisclosed sources. Additionally, Biafra was recognised as an independent state by Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast (now Cote D'Ivoire), and Zambia. The conflict was further complicated by allegations of starvation among Biafra's population, which was surrounded by federal troops and cut off from the sea. This led to a global campaign to aid the civilian population of Biafra, which was spearheaded by international organisations such as the Red Cross, churches, and other international bodies. (Aremu, 2014:7; Audu, et al. 2013:115; Cervenka, 1971:153). The aforementioned concerns garnered global attention and prompted numerous peace and mediation initiatives aimed at expeditiously and peacefully resolving the conflict.

To enhance lucidity, this manuscript is partitioned into seven distinct sections, namely: introduction, conceptual clarification, pre-OAU intervention mediatory endeavours, motivating factors for OAU's mediation, OAU's mediation discussions and their ramifications on the Nigerian crisis, causes of the OAU's mediatory talks' inadequacy, and conclusion.

Mediation: Concept and Role in Conflict Resolution

Mediation is a widely utilised approach for resolving conflicts across various domains, including interpersonal, intra-state, and inter-state contexts. Additional significant methods for conflict management include avoidance, adjudication, arbitration, and negotiation. The definition of mediation has been subject to multiple interpretations. According to Mitchell (2002) as cited by Mottiar and van Jaarsveld (2009), mediation is a process facilitated by an impartial third party with the aim of resolving disputes or reaching a mutually agreeable resolution between opposing parties. As per Bercovitch's (1997:130) definition, mediation is a conflict management process that is separate from the parties' own negotiations. It involves seeking the aid of an external party, such as an individual, organisation, group, or state, to alter the conflicting parties' perceptions or behaviour without resorting to physical force or invoking legal authority. According to Nathan (2009:2), mediation can be defined as a collaborative process involving a neutral third party who facilitates dialogue and negotiation between two or more disputing parties. The aim of mediation is to prevent, manage, or resolve conflicts without the use of force, and it is only carried out with the consent of all parties involved. According to Herrberg, Gunduz, and Davis (2009), mediation is distinct from other types of third-party intervention due to its non-coercive nature, and its effectiveness is primarily contingent upon the parties engaged in the conflict resolution process. In brief, mediation can be considered as a mechanism for resolving conflicts and disagreements among conflicting parties, which entails the involvement of an impartial third party.

Based on the definitions mentioned above, mediation can be defined as a consensual procedure wherein conflicting parties come to an agreement to seek the aid of an external party, which could be an individual, a group, an organisation, or a state. The primary objective of this approach is to alter the attitudes or conduct of conflicting parties without employing physical coercion or invoking legal power, as noted by Bercovitch (1997) and cited in Nyambura's (2015) work (p. 6). According to Nyambura (2015), mediation can be viewed as a continuation of the negotiation process, in which a suitable third party intervenes to alter the direction or result of a specific conflict. This concept is supported by Bercovitch (1997), as cited by Nyambura. According to Nathan (2005:2), the mediator plays a dual role of mitigating the hostility and distrust that hinder the conflicting parties from collaboratively resolving the substantive issues in dispute. The mediator acts as a buffer and a bridge between the antagonists.

It is noteworthy that mediation is a highly attractive method of resolving disputes due to its ability to foster enhanced relationships among and between disputants through collaborative problem-solving and improved communication strategies, as well as its expeditious resolution of disputes. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this approach is

contingent upon the mediator's neutrality and the degree of confidence established between the conflicting parties. Mediation is appealing to disputants due to its request-based initiation and its preservation of ultimate decision-making authority with the disputants themselves (Folberg and Taylor, 1984, as cited in Nyambura, 2015:6). While the results of mediation are not legally enforceable on the involved parties, it can facilitate a re-evaluation of their respective stances and foster a commitment to the peace process, ultimately leading to a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Assefa, 2004:51).

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU): Establishment, Principles and Involvement in African Conflicts

The initiation of efforts towards achieving African unity can be traced back to the series of pan-African congresses that were convened between the years 1919 and 1945. The emergence of numerous independent African states from 1957 to 1961 marked a significant turning point for the concept of African unity. Kwame Nkrumah, the former Prime Minister and President of Ghana, and Sekou Toure, the former President of Guinea, were the pioneers of the contemporary movement towards African unity. Several organisations emerged to promote the cause of unity in Africa, with the participation of numerous African nations in the struggle. The states were organised into blocs, namely the Brazzaville, Casablanca, and Monrovia blocs. The resolution of ideological differences among the aforementioned groups of states was ultimately achieved through the shrewd diplomatic manoeuvres of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria. The aforementioned event resulted in the convening of the peace conferences in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in May 1963, which were attended by 32 African nations that had achieved independence. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was established on May 25, 1963, with the signing of its Charter by all Heads of State and Government present at the event.

Article 2, Section 1 of the OAU Charter outlines the primary objectives assigned to the OAU, which involve the advancement of African states' unity and solidarity, as well as the collective safeguarding of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The members of the organisation have pledged to abide by several principles in their pursuit of organisational objectives. These principles include refraining from intervening in the internal affairs of member states, upholding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, and resolving disputes through peaceful means such as negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration.

In 1964, a Protocol was signed to establish the OAU Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration. According to Ajayi (2000) and Aremu (2007), the Commission consisted of 21 members who served a term of five years, with the possibility of being re-elected. In 1993, the

Cairo OAU summit made a decision to establish an OAU Mechanism for Conflict Prevention and Resolution. The primary aim of this initiative was to proactively anticipate and prevent conflicts. In the event that conflicts did arise, the initiative was tasked with undertaking peace-making and peace-building activities to facilitate their resolution. To achieve this objective, it is possible to organise and implement observation and monitoring missions of restricted scale and duration, which can be carried out by both civilian and military entities. Based on the aforementioned, it is enlightening to note that the involvement of OAU in African conflicts has exhibited several distinct features. One of the primary limitations of the intervention is that it can only be carried out to a limited extent in matters that are considered internal affairs by member states. The statement made by Justice M.A. Odesanya of Nigeria during the inaugural meeting of the commission at Addis Ababa in 1968 indicated that the commission did not have the authority to address internal disputes, as reported by Amadi (1998:99). The OAU's notable contribution to the amicable resolution of interstate conflicts in Africa is likely attributable to this phenomenon, although its efficacy in addressing intrastate disputes has been comparatively modest.

Furthermore, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) heavily relied on negotiation and mediation strategies to resolve conflicts within the African continent. These have been manifested as direct negotiations among the states involved, as well as the designation of ad hoc representatives.

The communication and negotiation processes among Heads of States and Government committees, as well as third-party offices, are conducted during the Assembly.

In addition, it should be noted that the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U.) did not have a customary practise of engaging the services of trained mediators or arbitrators in the pursuit of a resolution. Instead, it leverages the authority of its senior members, who possess the ability to elicit respect and trust from the conflicting parties. These political leaders are commonly perceived as the epitome of sagacity, and as a result, wield significant influence. Their role is crucial in fostering a consensus among members of the O.A.U. and in convincing disputing parties to adjust their stances.

It is worth noting that the OAU demonstrated a higher degree of efficacy in the resolution of inter-state conflicts as opposed to intra-state conflicts or civil wars. The organisation in question has been effective in facilitating peaceful resolutions to border disputes between various nations, such as Morocco and Algeria, Somalia and Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, Gambia and Senegal, and Mali and Burkina Faso (Masabo, 2013). However, its intervention in the Nigerian civil war, where it provided support to the Federal Government of Nigeria in its conflict with the seceding State of Biafra, was not as successful. The present

paper features a distinct section that sheds light on the specifics of the Obafemi Awolowo University's involvement in the Nigerian civil war.

Historical Root of the Nigerian Civil War

The Nigerian Civil War, also referred to as the Nigerian-Biafran War, occurred between July 6, 1967 and January 15, 1970. It was a political conflict that arose due to the attempted secession of Nigeria's southeastern province, which declared itself as the Republic of Biafra. The genesis of the conflict can be attributed to the interplay of political, ethnic, cultural, and religious factors among the diverse populace of Nigeria, specifically in the Eastern and Northern regions (Ukpabi, 1995: 100). The crisis in question was brought about by a range of factors, including but not limited to the effects of colonialism (Adejo, 2008:3). Similar to other African countries, Nigeria was established as an artificial entity by past colonial powers who failed to take into account the variations in religion, language, and ethnicity (Aremu, 2010:549-560). In 1960, Nigeria attained independence from Britain. The country's populace was approximately 60 million individuals, comprising almost 300 distinct ethnic and cultural factions.

The Nigerian Civil War had a multifaceted set of causes. According to journalist Alex Mitchell's memoirs, the involvement of British, Dutch, French, and Italian oil companies in the battle for control over the lucrative Nigerian oil fields was a significant factor that initiated and sustained the conflict (Lloyd, 1970:12; Aremu, 2015).

In addition, it is noteworthy that on the 15th of January in 1966, Major Kaduna Nzeogwu and a group of Junior Army Officers, primarily consisting of Majors and Captains, made an endeavour to execute a coup d'état. There was a prevalent speculation that the Igbos were responsible for instigating the coup and that it was carried out for their own interests, given the ethnic background of the individuals who were targeted and killed (Elaigwu, 2005). The demise of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, and Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the Northern region, occurred. It is noteworthy to mention that the spouse of Sir Ahmadu Bello was also a victim of the coup. During this time, the President, Sir Nnamdi Azikwe, who is of Igbo descent, was on an extended vacation in the West Indies. He did not reappear until several days following the coup.

The attempted coup d'état was ultimately unsuccessful, as Ironsi was able to mobilise the military in opposition to the conspirators. Ironsi failed to adhere to military law and the demands of Northern and Western officers by neglecting to bring the unsuccessful plotters to trial. Within this particular context, it was widely perceived that the coup served as a mechanism for the Igbos to assert their authority over the governmental and military capabilities of the Northerners. Additionally, it was suggested that Aguiyi Ironsi's failure to penalise those involved in the coup may have been interpreted as an endorsement of their actions

(Aremu, 2016: 124-134). In July 1966, a counter coup occurred resulting in significant loss of life and property among Easterners residing in the Northern region of the country. The assassination of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, who was serving as the Head of State at the time, and Col. Adekunle Fajuyi, who held the position of Governor of the Western Region, occurred. The ascension of Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon to power was a result of the aforementioned coup. The emergence of the individual in question sparked a number of controversies, as Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu's appointment was perceived to be in violation of the established seniority ranking within the Army (Oyediran, 1970:16).

In conjunction with the aforementioned factors, it is imperative to acknowledge the personality discord between Gowon and Ojukwu. While this may be perceived as a subjective matter by various academics, it must be acknowledged as a contributing factor to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 (Adejo, 2008:39-40).

OAU's Intervention in the Nigerian Civil War: The Motivating Factors and Mediatory Talks

The extant records reveal that the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) exerted considerable efforts from September 1967 to December 1969 to mediate a peaceful resolution to the Nigerian civil war, despite the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of its constituent nations. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that the decision by the OAU to intervene in the Nigerian crisis was motivated by several factors. One of the primary motivating factors behind the actions taken was the desire to uphold peace within the African continent. Additionally, there was a concern to prevent the fragmentation of the Nigerian nation-state and to avoid the escalation of the crisis into a full-scale war, in accordance with the principle of peaceful dispute resolution. Another important consideration was the prevention of external involvement in the conflict.

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) undertook several initiatives aimed at resolving the inherent contradictions associated with the Nigerian Civil War. The inaugural event was the Kinshasa Peace Talks, convened from September 11th to 14th, 1967. According to Bello (2017:20), President Joseph Mobutu of Congo utilised the initiative to enhance Congo's reputation as a nation that values peace. This information was cited from Nagel and Rathbone's work in 1967 (p. 437).

Emperor Haile Selassie, the former leader of Ethiopia, presided over the peace negotiations. According to Bello's (2017) report, the peace conference was attended by delegates from seventeen autonomous African nations. The meeting focused on three distinct concerns that have impacted Nigeria. Firstly, it aimed to cease the provision of arms and ammunition to Biafra and Nigeria by major foreign powers, including the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, Portugal, and others. Secondly, it addressed the official

recognition granted to Biafra by certain members of the organisation, such as Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, and Ivory Coast. Lastly, the meeting examined the validity of allegations of genocide against the people of Biafra (Cervenka, 1977:97-98).

The summit was convened during a time when the Nigerian Civil War had garnered significant attention within the African continent, representing a critical juncture in which the conflict had emerged as a major challenge for the region. The matter of discussing Nigeria at the OAU level was a challenging decision for the Heads of State and Government due to General Gowon's persistent caution against any intervention, as it would contravene Article III (2) of the OAU Charter that forbids interference in the internal affairs of states. Additionally, Biafra's insistence on the 'Internationalisation' of the conflict further complicated the situation. Preceding the commencement of the conference, Colonel Ojukwu dispatched a delegation of significant rank to Kinshasa with the aim of familiarising the African Heads of State with the Biafran situation. Conversely, Gowon maintained that the conflict was solely a matter internal to Nigeria (Oyeweso, 1992).

In contrast to Gowon's position advocating for the OAU's adherence to the principle of non-interference, the organisation proceeded to deliberate on the Kinshasa conflict, as documented by Cervenka (1977:196-197) and Bello (2017:22). The Assembly of Heads of State and Government meticulously crafted the ultimate resolution to prevent any indication of the OAU's intervention in Nigeria's "internal affairs." The main features of the resolution include:

1. recognition of the Nigerian Civil War as an internal affair; and
2. a resolution to send a Consultative Committee of Heads of State made up of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia as Chairman. The others members were President Ankrah of Ghana, President Tubman of Liberia, President Mobutu of Zaire, President Ahidjo of Cameroon, and President Hamani Diori of Niger. Its basic mission was to assure Gowon of the Assembly's desire for the territorial integrity, unity and peace of Nigeria (Cervenka, 1977:99).

It is noteworthy that the composition of the Consultative Committee on Nigeria was a deliberate attempt to achieve a balanced representation of the diverse perspectives held by neighbouring states regarding the Nigerian conflict. It has been purported that President Ahidjo of Cameroon collaborated with Biafra in circumventing the federal telecommunications blockade. Cervenka expressed the viewpoint that a significant number of Igbo individuals engaged in commerce and employment activities within Cameroon, particularly in the western area of the country that was previously a constituent of Eastern Nigeria. The President of Niger, Diori, was cognizant of the critical role played by the Northern Nigeria Railways in connecting his landlocked country to the sea, thereby necessitating his consideration of this dependence. In

addition to the economic ties, there exists a sense of natural affinity and connection between the populace of Niger and their counterparts in Northern Nigeria, stemming from their shared Islamic faith and common ancestry. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and President Tubman of Liberia, who were also part of the mission, held significant positions as senior statesmen and exerted considerable influence in the realm of African diplomacy. General Ankrah's selection was based on his role as the host of the Aburi meeting and his personal acquaintance with Gowon and Ojukwu, as noted by Cervenka (1977:99).

Upon their arrival in Nigeria on November 23, 1967, Gowon explicitly stated to the delegation that their purpose was not to engage in mediation. During his introductory speech, General Gowon outlined the conditions under which he was willing to consider the objectives of the mission. He said:

...We have always insisted that our friends are only those who are firmly committed to the maintenance of the territorial integrity and unity of Nigeria. Our true friends are those who publicly and genuinely condemn the attempted secession by the few who have imposed their will on the former Eastern region of Nigeria. The Kinshasa resolution of the OAU summit on the Nigerian situation proves that all African states are true friends of Nigeria. I wish to take this opportunity to express formally our appreciation of the brotherly spirit of the OAU summit in recognizing the need of Nigeria to be preserved as one country. It is in the interest of all Africa that Nigeria remains one political and economic entity. The OAU has rightly seen our problem as a purely domestic affair and in accordance with the OAU resolution; your mission is not here to mediate (Press release by the Federal Republic of Nigeria on 23 November, 1967; Cervenka, 1977:206).

The statement released by the delegation subsequent to its trip to Lagos indicated concurrence with General Gowon's stance, reiterating that the resolution of the Nigerian predicament must prioritise the preservation of Nigeria's unity and territorial wholeness. The Biafrans expressed bitter disappointment when the OAU's intervention did not meet their expectations. They had initially requested the OAU's mediation, with the condition that Biafra's sovereignty would not be subject to negotiation and that Biafra would be invited to the peace negotiations as an independent state, rather than as a constituent part of Nigeria. The Kinshasa Summit represented a significant hindrance to the Biafran movement. As per Cervenka's account in 1977, Biafra publicly declined the approach and result of the Consultative Committee on Nigeria and criticised the OAU for merely recognising the concerns of Gowon, thereby labelling it as a "rubber stamp".

The Biafran government's initial refusal to recognise the Consultative Committee on Nigeria prompted the convening of the first peace negotiations under the auspices of the Commonwealth secretariat,

rather than those of the OAU. The aforementioned event was labelled as "The Kampala peace talks" according to Cervenka's publication in 1977 (p. 99). The organisation was coordinated by Arnold Smith, a Canadian diplomat and Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, in conjunction with George Thomas, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth (John de St Jorre, 1972:193; Cervenka, 1977: 199). Preliminary discussions were conducted on May 6, 1968, between Chief Anthony Enahoro, who served as Nigeria's Federal Commissioner for Information, and Sir Louis Mbanefo, who represented Biafra. The location of the meeting was London. On the 23rd of May 1968, an agreement was reached to commence peace negotiations in Kampala, Uganda. The agenda for these negotiations would include matters such as the presence of foreign observers, the terms for cessation of hostilities, and the establishment of a lasting settlement.

President Obote of Uganda inaugurated the peace negotiations in Kampala, emphasising the need for prompt resolution of the conflict through the cessation of hostilities as a fundamental prerequisite for a more comprehensive accord. Although both proposals presented ample opportunities for negotiation, a fundamental disagreement persisted between the parties involved. Specifically, the federal government stipulated that Biafra renounce secession prior to a ceasefire, whereas the Biafrans sought an immediate ceasefire without any such prerequisites. Here are the outlines of the proposals for settlement put forward by the Biafra:

- I. Unconditional cease-fire and withdrawal of troops to their pre-war positions;
- II. The maintenance of order and respect for law should remain the responsibility of the Biafra government;
- III. The Biafran army should remain under the control and command of the Biafrans and not the federal government;
- IV. Biafra would join international organizations in its own right and preserve a capacity for concluding international treaties and agreements;
- V. Biafra would control its currency and its economic resources and determine its own policies on economic development.

The federal government's condition for a settlement can be summarized as follows:

- I. Withdrawal of the declaration of independence by the Eastern Region;
- II. Public acceptance and recognition of the authority of the federal military government over the Eastern Region;
- III. Public acceptance of the twelve new states created in Nigeria;

IV. The acceptance of civilians as commissioners in the federal executive council and as members of the state executive councils, as a major step in the return to civil rule;

V. Agreement to the holding of talks on the future of Nigeria by accredited and equal representative of the twelve states (Oyeweso, 1988: 652).

The challenge of reconciling the three underlying objectives of the Nigerian crisis, namely cessation of hostilities, preservation of Nigeria's unity, and provision of adequate safety guarantees to the Igbo people, proved to be an insurmountable hurdle to any potential resolution, as evidenced by the failed peace negotiations prior to and during the war.

Regrettably, the Kampala peace negotiations were unsuccessful on May 31st, 1968. The reason for this outcome can be attributed to the presence of insurmountable disparities between the representatives of the conflicting factions involved in the negotiation for peace. According to Sir Louis Mbanefo, the federal delegation engaged in exploitative behaviour by leveraging their military position during negotiations. Additionally, they were accused of prioritising dictation over negotiation and utilising the talks as a means of propaganda. Finally, the Biafra delegation was unfairly blamed for the breakdown of the negotiations. The speaker proceeded to level allegations against the Nigerian delegation, asserting that they had resorted to obstructive measures, evinced a lack of interest in pursuing peaceful dialogue, and presented proposals that were deemed wholly unacceptable. In contrast, Chief Enahoro expressed that the Biafran request for an unconditional cease-fire lacked feasibility, and the demand for the retreat of federal troops to their pre-war locations was deemed entirely intolerable. According to Cervenka (1977: 203), Mbanefo made an announcement that the Biafran delegation would be departing and subsequently, the delegation from Biafra left the peace negotiations on May 31, 1968.

The distressing state of the Igbo populace in the regions affected by the war garnered global attention, which can be attributed to the humanitarian concerns that prompted Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia to reinvigorate the efforts of the OAU Consultative Mission on Nigeria. As per Streamlau's (1977) account, a meeting of the members was summoned by him in Niamey, the capital of Niger Republic, on 15th July 1968. Ojukwu conveyed his willingness to travel to Niamey in the event of an invitation. The mission comprised of all six members, with the Heads of State representing five of them, namely Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia, and Niger. Solely President Mobutu of the Democratic Republic of Congo dispatched a delegation headed by a deputy foreign minister.

During his testimony to the Committee, General Gowon asserted that the leaders of the rebel faction, along with their foreign supporters, were utilising the issue of human suffering for political and military gain.

The speaker asserted that the rebellion had been largely quelled from a military standpoint. Additionally, he argued that a one-sided cessation of hostilities by the federal government, absent any assurances from the secessionist leaders renouncing their separatist agenda, would enable the secessionists to reorganise, rearm, and resume the conflict. The speaker contended that a unilateral ceasefire enacted solely for humanitarian purposes would not effectively alleviate the plight of the innocent individuals impacted by the ongoing conflict. Gowon demonstrated a greater level of comprehension regarding the apprehensions of the Igbo people regarding their security by consenting to the implementation of external monitors to guarantee that the federal military would refrain from committing acts of violence against the Igbo population. The individual in question displayed a resolute stance regarding the parameters outlined for the observers. Specifically, the observers were instructed to refrain from engaging in peacekeeping endeavours and instead focus solely on observation and testimony.

The OAU Consultative Mission expressed its commitment to providing ongoing assistance to the federal government in its efforts to maintain Nigeria's unity as a single political entity. However, the mission also passed a resolution that prioritised relief efforts in the troubled regions of Biafra, rather than focusing solely on reconciling the conflicting parties. According to Bello (2017:25), who cites Cervenka (1977), the OAU Consultative Committee on Nigeria released a communiqué subsequent to the Niamey talks, in which both sides reached an agreement regarding the establishment of a permanent settlement, the conditions for the cessation of hostilities, and specific recommendations for the provision of food and medicine to the civilian casualties of the conflict. Representatives of Biafra and Nigeria further agreed on a follow-up meeting of the Consultative Mission in Addis Ababa with the following agenda:

- a. arrangements for a permanent settlement;
- b. terms for the cessation of hostilities;
- c. proposals for the transport of relief supplies to the civilian population in the war areas (Streamlau, 1977).

On the 5th of August 1968, Emperor Haile Selassie inaugurated the Addis Ababa peace negotiations. According to Cervenka (1977: 108), the meeting was conducted in a private setting. Despite the absence of a political settlement between Biafra and the Federal, Emperor Haile Selassie capitalised on the situation to facilitate the establishment of feasible arrangements for the transportation of relief supplies to the areas affected by the conflict. The commendable actions and humanitarian approach of the individual towards the conflict were acknowledged by Pope Paul and endorsed by the International Red Cross. August Lindt, the special envoy of the Red Cross, visited Addis Ababa with the aim of facilitating an agreement between the two parties

regarding a "mercy corridor" that would expedite the delivery of relief supplies (Cervenka, 1977). In the absence of a consensus, the assembly was adjourned for a duration of one week on the 15th of August, in order to provide the delegations with sufficient time to examine a range of proposals. According to Cervenka's work in 1977...

On August 22, when the negotiations recommenced, the parties involved reached a tentative agreement on a compromise proposition presented by the Emperor. The proposition entailed the establishment of an air and land mercy corridor aimed at providing assistance to the civilian casualties of the conflict. The Federal Government made a request for the Biafrans to transfer control of one of their strategic airfields to the Red Cross. This was intended to facilitate the reception of freighter aircraft carrying food and medical supplies from a federal airport that had been demilitarised. Despite some initial signs of progress, it was ultimately demonstrated that these were premature, as General Gowon declared the commencement of a conclusive offensive on August 25th, 1968, without awaiting the conclusion of the Addis Ababa negotiations. According to Cervenka's work in 1977... On September 4th, 1968, the town of Aba, which was among the limited number of towns still under Biafran control, was captured by the federal forces. This event subsequently intensified the Biafrans' predicament in Addis Ababa. However, they declined to concede. The Addis Ababa peace talks were brought to a close on September 9th, 1968, following a protracted period of negotiations that spanned almost five weeks.

Subsequently, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government convened on September 4th, 1968 at the Club des Pins located in Algiers. The event was under the leadership of Houari Boumedienne. Boumedienne, who served as the President of Algeria. It is imperative to acknowledge that the political destiny of Biafra appeared to have been conclusively determined at this summit. Similar to previous gatherings, the representatives from Nigeria and Biafra maintained their unyielding stances during the meeting. The Nigerian Federal government maintained its commitment to the principle of national unity, while also acknowledging the importance of protecting the rights of minority groups within the country. Conversely, the Biafran delegation advocated for secession. According to their assertion, the coexistence of the Igbos within Nigeria had become untenable. The issue was ultimately resolved through a democratic process, whereby the decision was made in favour of a unified Nigeria. Nigeria received support from 33 African states, while two countries, namely Rwanda and Botswana, abstained from voting. On the other hand, Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast, and Gabon, which recognised Biafra, voted against Nigeria. According to Mwakikagile (2009:420), ... Despite the fact that numerous African leaders expressed empathy towards the benevolent intentions underlying the acknowledgement extended by the four members of the OAU, they ultimately rebuffed President Nyerere's proposition that unity attained through conquest holds no value. The arguments put forth by

President Nyerere were supported by President Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast. However, the majority of delegates at the Algiers summit were influenced by the apprehension of potential minority conflicts in their respective countries, despite the aforementioned support. This was a significant factor, particularly considering that many African nations face comparable tribal and ethnic issues. (AHG/Res, 51 (IV), 1967)

The assembly additionally passed a resolution that implored the Biafran leadership to collaborate with the federal government in reestablishing harmony and solidarity in Nigeria by putting an end to acts of aggression. The OAU issued a recommendation that the Federal Military government of Nigeria declare a general amnesty and engage in cooperation with Biafra. The objective was to guarantee the safeguarding of the physical well-being of all Nigerian citizens, until such time that mutual trust could be reestablished. The resolution additionally urged all United Nations and Organisation of African Unity member states to abstain from any actions that may undermine the peace, unity, and territorial integrity of Nigeria. According to Bello (2017:30), Mwakikagile's work (2009:420) has been referenced.

On April 17, 1969, the OAU Consultative Mission on Nigeria convened its final meeting in Monrovia, Liberia. Distinguished attendees included President Tubman of Liberia, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, President Ahidjo of Cameroon, and I.K.W. Harley of Ghana. Diallo Telli, the Secretary General of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), was in attendance. The three-day meeting of the mission on April 20, 1969 concluded without any significant advancement towards the attainment of reconciliation between Nigeria and Biafra. The conclusive outcome of the peace negotiations in Monrovia reiterated the endorsement of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) for a Nigeria that remains unified and indivisible. As per Akpan's (1976) account, the Consultative mission arrived at a resolution that mandates the two factions involved in the Civil War to embrace a unified Nigeria, which guarantees comprehensive security to all its inhabitants, in the best interest of the African continent. The statement posited that "in the framework of this accord, both parties acknowledge the prompt cessation of hostilities and the expeditious commencement of peace talks." Subsequently, the consultative mission extended an offer to provide its expertise in order to facilitate the aforementioned negotiations. The Biafran delegation expressed their reluctance to engage in discussions regarding the OAU's concept of territorial integrity without first engaging in a dialogue regarding the implications of such discussions.

The sixth Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on September 6, 1969 marked the latest initiative by the OAU to resolve the Nigerian conflict. It is noteworthy that the four nations that had acknowledged Biafra's sovereignty, namely Gabon, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, and Zambia, refrained from voting, as did Sierra Leone. However, the conference passed a resolution that strongly encouraged

the parties involved to accept the ceasefire agreement and engage in negotiations aimed at achieving a unified Nigeria. The resolution made an appeal in a solemn and urgent manner to the two parties engaged in the civil war, urging them to prioritise the interests of Africa by maintaining the unity of Nigeria. It further called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and prompt commencement of negotiations aimed at preserving Nigeria's unity and restoring peace and reconciliation, which would guarantee the population's security, equal rights, prerogatives, and obligations. This resolution was documented as AHG/Res. 58 (VI) in 1969. According to AHG/Res.58/Rev. 1 (VI) in 1969, the OAU issued a recommendation urging all governments, international organisations, humanitarian institutions, as well as political, moral, or religious entities worldwide to refrain from undertaking any actions that may impede the OAU's endeavours to achieve a sustainable resolution to the Nigerian crisis.

As anticipated, Ojukwu expressed dissatisfaction with the OAU's decision on the non-negotiability of Nigeria's territorial integrity. Therefore, during his speech to the Biafran Consultative Assembly on November 1st, 1969, he restated his willingness to engage in discussions with federal representatives at any location and time, but excluded the OAU as a potential venue. As per his statement, Biafra had developed disillusionment towards the OAU, owing to its perceived deficiency in foresight, impartiality, bravery, and steadfastness (Ojukwu, 1969).

A few days later, a Biafran policy statement was issued by the Markpress Agency in Geneva, indicating a major concession. It reads:

“Since our attachment to sovereignty is functional and not sentimental, Biafra will be prepared to accept, at the suggestion of no matter who, any alternative arrangement that can guarantee the non occurrence of the massacres of the past twenty five years” (Ojukwu, 1969).

It was assumed from the declaration that Colonel Ojukwu was willing to give up on his hitherto unwavering desire for independence from the federal government of Nigeria. However, 24 hours later, William Bernstein, the CEO of the Markpress Agency, said that the comment had been entirely misunderstood (Cervenka, 1977:106). In contrast to the OAU, Ojukwu tried to get Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, and Yugoslavia to mediate the war, but his efforts were unsuccessful. None of these nations formally contacted the Federal Government of Nigeria, which constantly emphasised that the OAU was the only institution with the authority to resolve the crisis.

Biafra and the Federal Government decided to hold their last round of peace negotiations in December 1969. The Emperor Haile Selassie extended an invitation to both parties to visit Addis Abeba. There was significant debate about whether the Emperor took this action on his own or in his role as the head of the OAU consultative mission on Nigeria. Given that Biafra had cut all ties with the OAU, the Biafran

perspective was that it was a private initiative (Cervenka, 1977:107). Olu Sani, the Nigerian ambassador to Addis Abeba, sought explanation, and on December 17th, 1969, he said that he had learned from Ketema Yifru, the Ethiopian foreign minister, that the negotiations had been arranged by the Emperor under the auspices of the OAU. Due to this deadlock, the discussions were never held, and on December 18, 1969, the Pius Okigbo-led Biafran team, which had already arrived in Addis Abeba, left for home.

By the end of 1969, the morale of the Biafran Army was rapidly declining and desertions were rife (Cervenka 1977: 107). The famished soldiers threw away their arms and disappeared into the bush or into the crowds of distressed refugees. In what remained of Biafran territory, refugees clogged the roads and the refugee camps and villages were overcrowded. The frequent strafing of the retreat routes by the MIG's (Mikoyan Gurevich aircraft of Russian Origin) of the Nigerian Air force added to the panic, which was increasing from day to day.

On the morning of 10 January, 1970, the last meeting of the Biafran cabinet was held. Colonel Ojukwu announced that he would leave Biafra 'in search of peace,' and appointed his Chief of Staff, Colonel Phillip Effiong, to administer the government during his absence (Cervenka, 1977:207). The following day, on 12 January, Colonel Efiang offered General Gowon the unconditional surrender of Biafra. The ceremony took place at army headquarters, Dodan Barracks, Lagos, on Thursday, 15 January 1970. Colonel Phillip Efiang formally presented a document to General Gowon, before the members of the Supreme Military Council, the Administrators of the Central Eastern state, A.U, Asika, and top ranking military and government officials.

The document contained a declaration that the so-called 'Republic of Biafra' had ceased to exist and that;

1. The authority of the federal military government of Nigeria was accepted,
2. The existing administrative and political structure of Nigeria was accepted, and ,
3. Constitutional arrangements would in future be worked out by representatives of Nigeria (Obasanjo, 1980).

General Gowon concluded his speech by saying to the Biafran delegation: 'Gentlemen, let us join hands to rebuild this country, where no man will be oppressed' (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1970). The two soldiers, General Gowon in uniform and Colonel Efiang in civilian clothes, then posed for photographs, embracing each other several times (Cervenka, 1977:106).

Judging from the discussions above, it may be observed that the OAU made spirited efforts at ending the Nigerian civil war peacefully. Indeed,

its efforts were not just timely but were equally sporadic and concerted. However, its mediatory efforts in the Nigerian civil war failed to resolve the crisis. It is therefore expedient to probe into the factors that hindered the OAU mediation from resolving the crisis.

Why the OAU Mediation failed to stop the War

The OAU Charter's "conservative application of the concepts of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for the sanctity of borders" is perhaps the most significant obstacle that prevented the OAU mediation from ending the Nigerian civil war. Amadi (1998:134) calls this situation "the conservative application of the concepts of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for the sanctity of borders." Notably, the Consultative Committee established at the Heads of State and Government summit in Kinshasa was tasked with visiting the President of the Federal Government of Nigeria to "assure him of the Assembly's desire for the territorial integrity, unity, and peace of Nigeria" (Munya (1999:573-574). The Assembly reiterated its "adherence to the principle of sovereign and territorial integrity of member states, its condemnation of secession in any member state, and its recognition of the situation as an internal affair, the solution to which is the primary responsibility of Nigerians themselves" in the same resolution. (Amadi, 1998:134). Similar to this, the Assembly in its resolution on the Nigerian issue in Algiers urged the secessionist leaders to "cooperate" with the Federal authorities in order to restore the peace and unity of Nigeria "and to all OAU and UN member states to refrain from any action detrimental to peace, unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria." (Amadi, 1998:140). According to Akinbi (2012:296), the OAU mediation effort failed in large part because it disregarded the Biafran cause by neglecting to contact Ojukwu on its visit to Nigeria. It is impossible to disagree with his submission. The most significant obstacle to a peaceful settlement of the Nigerian problem may be seen as the bias towards one of the warring sides by a purportedly impartial arbiter. It was a very conservative approach to the situation. Tandon, reported in Munya (1999), may have been correct when he said that "the OAU is, by design and constitution, an essentially conservative organisation". The Consultative Committee, who functioned as the mediators, engaged in partial behaviour, as is correctly noted. Munya (1999:574) said that "the tension between the desire to resolve the conflict and to remain faithful to the OAU Charter explains the Assembly's confused state of mind and unmitigated diplomatic blunder". To some degree, this could be accurate. However, the bulk of African leaders really backed the Federal Government and opposed independence, partly because they were concerned about secessions occurring inside their own borders if the Biafra secession attempt were to be successful. Mali's Madibo Keita even issued a severe warning, stating that the independence would set a dangerous precedent for the political union of all nations (Amadi, 1998:136). Chad, Upper Volta, Sudan, and Egypt were additional supporters of Lagos, with the latter two providing active assistance.

Because of this, the O.A.U.'s only noteworthy contribution to the Nigerian civil war was its support for the "unity," "territorial integrity," and "colonial borders" of African governments (Cervenka, 1977:108).

Mistrust and the belligerents' unyielding position were two significant obstacles to a successful OAU mediation in the Nigerian issue. Remember that General Yakubu Gowon had urged that the OAU uphold its ideal of not meddling in the domestic affairs of member states? Even according to Bello (2017: 21), quoting Daily Times, 24 November 1967, Gowon did not accept any kind of OAU involvement. He reportedly hated it when the Nigerian conflict was even mentioned on the agenda of one of their sessions. Such an action, in his opinion, would violate its guiding principle. In his statement to the OAU Consultative Mission, which was led by General Ankrah of Ghana and paid him a visit in Lagos in November 1967 after the Kinshasa summit, he reaffirmed his position. 'The OAU has properly recognised our matter as solely internal problems, and in line with the OAU decision, your delegation is not here to intervene,' he said. (ibid)

The OAU decision in Kinshasa came as a startling shock to General Odumegwu Ojukwu, the chief commander of Biafra, on the other side of the barrier. He had thought that the outcomes would benefit Biafra. Because they believed they had the "legal" right to pursue their independence from Nigeria, Bello (2017:22) states that Biafrans were very hopeful that the OAU would arbitrate and make a judgement in their favour. (Bello, 2017:23; Peters, 1997:130) The OAU's following attempts to end the war were criticised and frustrated by Biafrans in response to their perception of OAU treachery, who also claimed that the OAU peace mission lacked impartiality and competence and was destined to fail (Cervenka, 1977:199; as quoted in Bello 2017:23).

The two sides in the dispute as a result had opposing viewpoints. Colonel Ojukwu said that no accord could prohibit an independent, sovereign Biafra while the Nigerian Federal Government argued that no peace could be achieved outside of one Nigeria (Amadi, 1998:137). Unfortunately, as a result of the prejudice of the OAU mediation committee and the absence of mutual trust, the parties were unable to have real, flexible conversations or demonstrate any readiness to make compromises (Nyambura, 2015:62). This supports Licklider's (2001) assertion that "mutual trust is a critical aspect throughout any mediation process as it promotes confidence between the players and boosts their readiness to negotiate and compromise. Nyambura (2015:62) cites this statement. This lack of flexibility dealt a severe blow to the OAU mediation process and highlights one of mediation's fundamental flaws. In other words, regardless matter how skilled the mediators are, the success of mediation ultimately hinges on how effectively the opposing sides accept and control the peace process. As a result, mediation is reduced to a very restricted instrument since it cannot compel the disputing parties to reach a legally enforceable agreement (Nyambura,

2015:31). This serves as more evidence that, in all cases of conflict resolution, mediation attempts fall flat in the face of a party that is adamantly committed to continuing the dispute.

The argument made by Nathan (2005: 3) that "parties locked in deep conflict regard each other with extreme mistrust and animosity" is further supported by this, and see the situation from a zero-sum perspective. Mediation may provide the parties to a dispute a reasonably peaceful and secure environment where they can express their disagreements and look for solutions with the help of a trustworthy third party.

A barrier to the success of OAU mediation attempts was the disagreement among OAU members on whether or not to recognise Biafra as an independent country. The OAU's division over the recognition of Biafra by certain African nations reached a breaking point in Algiers, when the host country's President Boumediene accused the recognised nations of serving as fronts for imperialists. He went on to draw comparisons between the secessions of Katanga and Biafra, noting that the governments and organisations that had previously backed Katanga were now supporting the separatists in Biafra (Amadi, 1998:138). Boumediene had argued that the restoration of unity, which these recognitions were preventing, was the only way to settle the Nigerian situation (Amadi, 1998:139). Recall that Tanzania was the first African nation to recognise Eastern Nigeria's separatist zone as an independent Republic (The Observer, London, 28 April 1968). Cote D'Ivoire, Zambia, and Gabon are three further African nations that have recognised Biafra. Despite harsh criticism from Nigeria and other African leaders, such as President Boumediene of Algeria, the OAU was unable to get the recognising countries to reverse their decision. Without a doubt, this made it far more difficult to mediate the Nigerian civil war peacefully.

Another issue was that there was no mechanism in the O.A.U. Charter to require members to seek out peaceful resolution of conflicts (Okongwu, 1973: 589–591). It lacks a permanent army to compel adherence to its decisions. This suggests that the OAU may be prevented from acting or at most, intervene little in crises deemed to be the domestic affairs of individual nations, and that member states may unilaterally disregard the Organization's mandates with impunity. In addition, Munya (1999:590), citing Thompson & Bissell (1972), notes that the OAU's "lack of effectiveness in enforcing its will and its general aloofness in the face of internal conflicts" have given some member states the confidence to "take independent positions on conflicts without receiving any sanctions from the OAU."

CONCLUSION

The present study has provided a comprehensive analysis of the involvement of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as a mediator during the Nigerian Civil War spanning from 1967 to 1970. The text highlights that the attempts at mediation were unsuccessful in facilitating a resolution of the conflict between the opposing factions.

The lack of compromise by the State of Biafra was largely attributed to the perceived bias of the OAU mediators towards the Federal Government of Nigeria. Therefore, it can be argued that instead of facilitating the establishment of peace, the mediators from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) likely contributed to the complexity of the resolution of the Nigerian civil war. According to Nyambura (2015:67), Licklider (2001) was referenced. This statement elucidates the reason behind the prolonged duration of the war, which persisted until the federal government exerted significant pressure on the Biafrans, ultimately leading them to a state of near-complete surrender. According to Cervenka (1977: 108),... It is imperative that the OAU, presently known as the African Union (AU), refrain from adopting a biased stance in future endeavours aimed at resolving conflicts. The implementation of this strategy has the potential to bolster the organization's reputation as a trustworthy intermediary while simultaneously mitigating the severity and frequency of conflicts throughout Africa.

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