

The Organisation of African Unity And Its Mediatory Role In The Nigerian Civil War: A Historical Assessment

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Abstract

This is a survey research. The study examined the role of the OAU in mediating peace during Nigeria's civil war of 1967 to 1970. Its basic objectives were to: document the various mediatory talks organised by the OAU during the conflict; identify the factors that spurred the OAU to mediate in the war and; analyse the factors that inhibited the success of OAU's mediatory efforts to broker peace between the belligerent parties. Data for this paper was obtained from both primary and secondary sources including relevant books, journal articles, newspaper publications, archival materials and OAU resolutions. The research method adopted was content analysis of historical documents. The paper found out that the OAU's mediatory intervention ended up as an exercise in futility. The organisation's Charter's prohibition of intervention in internal conflicts of member states; bias on the part of the mediators in favour of Nigeria, as well as mistrust and uncompromising stand of the belligerents, among others, accounted for this failure. The study concluded that despite its failure to bring an end to the war through the diplomatic method of mediation, the OAU deserves commendation for its concerted efforts at promoting peace not only in Nigeria, but across the African continent at large.

KEYWORDS: NIGERIA, OAU, CIVIL WAR, CONFLICT, BIAFRA

Introduction

Much ink and erudition have been expended on the origins, causes, course and impact of the Nigerian civil war of 6 July, 1967 to 12 January, 1970 (Adejo 2008). However, there exists a dearth of literature on the role of international organizations at preventing the escalation of the Nigerian conflict

into full blown war, reducing the carnage and mediating a peaceful resolution of the war. In view of the above, this paper was conceived to examine the role of the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) at mediating peace between the Federal Military Government of Nigeria and the seceding Eastern Region's newly pronounced Republic of Biafra between September, 1967 and December, 1969.

It is essential to note that though the General Yakubu Gowon's led Federal Government of Nigeria decided to treat the civil war strictly as an internal affair of the country, three major issues made it a great concern not only to Africa, but to the whole world. These were: the supply of arms, including aircraft and heavy artillery, by the governments of the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Egypt to the Federal Government of Nigeria on one hand and from France, Portugal and other undisclosed sources to Biafra on the other hand; the recognition of Biafra as an independent state by the governments of Tanzania on 13 April 1968; Gabon on 8 May 1968; Ivory Coast now Cote D'Ivoire on 14 May 1968; and Zambia on 20 May 1968 (Aremu, 2014:7; Audu, et al. 2013:115); and allegations of starvation of Biafra's population, which was cut off from the sea and encircled by federal troops and; which in turn attracted a world-wide campaign to help the civilian population of Biafra led by the international Red Cross, the churches and other international bodies (Cervenka, 1971:153). All these issues brought the war to international limelight, and led to various peace and mediatory efforts to end the war peacefully and as quickly as possible.

For the purpose of clarity, this paper is divided into seven sections namely: introduction; conceptual clarification; mediatory efforts before the OAU's intervention; motivating factors for OAU's mediation; OAU's mediation talks and its impacts on the Nigerian crisis; reasons for the failure of OAU's mediatory talks; and the conclusion.

Mediation: Concept and Role in Conflict Resolution

Mediation is one of the most common methods of conflict resolution at the interpersonal, intra-state and inter-state levels. Some other important ways of managing conflicts are avoidance, adjudication, arbitration and negotiation. Mediation has been defined variously. Mitchell (2002) cited in Mottiar and van Jaarsveld (2009) defines mediation as an activity undertaken by a neutral third party with the objective of achieving a compromise or a settlement of issues between conflicting parties. According to Bercovitch (1997:130) mediation is " a process of conflict management, related to but distinct from the parties' own negotiations, where those in conflict seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider (whether an individual, an organization, a group, or a state) to change their perceptions or behaviour, and do so without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law". In his own

view, Nathan (2009:2) refers to mediation as “a process of dialogue and negotiation in which a third party assists two or more disputant parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict without resort to force.” Herrberg, Gunduz and Davis (2009) add that mediation differs from other forms of third-party intervention, essentially because it is devoid of force and the outcome of the peacemaking process depends largely on the parties involved in the conflict. In short, mediation may be regarded as a means of resolving conflicts and disputes between belligerent parties involving the intervention of a neutral third party.

Judging from the above cited definitions, mediation is essentially a voluntary process in which parties to a conflict agree to seek the assistance of, or accept an offer of help from, an outsider who may be an individual, an organization, a group, or a state. Its major focus is to change the perceptions or behaviour, of belligerents without resorting to physical force or invoking the authority of law (Bercovitch, 1997, cited in Nyambura, 2015:6). Mediation may thus be regarded as an extension of the negotiation process whereby an acceptable third party intervenes to change the course or outcome of a particular conflict (Bercovitch, 1997, cited in Nyambura, 2015:6). This is perhaps why Nathan (2005:2) asserts that, “the mediator serves as both a buffer and a bridge between the antagonists, ameliorating the anger and suspicion that prevent them from addressing in a cooperative manner the substantive issues in dispute” (Nathan, 2005:2).

It is essential to note that mediation appears to be an appealing dispute resolution technique because it promotes better relationships among and between disputants through cooperative problem-solving and improved communication techniques; as well as prompt settlement of disputes. However, this is subject to the impartiality of the mediator and the level of trust built among the belligerent groups. Another enticing feature of mediation to disputants is that it is initiated upon request and it leaves the ultimate decision-making power with the disputants (Folberg and Taylor (1984) cited in Nyambura, 2015:6). Though the outcome of mediation is non-binding on the disputants, it can help the parties to re-examine their positions and thus embrace the peace process with the aim of steering the conflict to a peaceful resolution (Assefa, 2004:51).

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

Attempts at African unity started with the pan-African congresses held between 1919 and 1945. But with the independence of many African states between 1957 and 1961, the principle of African unity was given a new touch. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sekou Toure of Guinea were the initiators of the new

clamour for African unity. With the involvement of many African countries in the struggle, a number of organisations emerged to champion the course of unity in the continent. These included the Brazzaville, Casablanca and Monrovia blocs of states. The difference of ideology among these groups of states was eventually resolved through the astute diplomatic maneuvers of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria. This led to the Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's peace conferences of May 1963 which was attended by 32 African independent countries. On 25 May, 1963, all the Heads of State and Government in attendance signed the Charter that established the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

The major tasks set before the OAU, as contained in Article 2, Section 1 of the OAU Charter included the promotion of unity and solidarity of African states and joint defence of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of African states. In pursuing the purposes of the organization, the members committed themselves to a number of principles including: non-interference in the internal affairs of member states; respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states and; peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation and arbitration, among others.

A Protocol establishing the OAU Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration was signed later in 1964. The 21 member Commission had tenure of five years, though members were eligible for re-election (Ajayi, 2000:37; Aremu, 2007: 20). The Cairo OAU summit of 1993 further decided on the creation of an OAU Mechanism for Conflict, Prevention and Resolution. Its main objective was the anticipation and prevention of conflicts; in circumstances where conflicts have occurred, it was expected to undertake peace-making and peace-building functions in order to facilitate the resolution of such conflicts. For this purpose, both civilian and military missions of observation and monitoring of limited scope and duration may be mounted and deployed.

Judging from the above, it is instructive to observe that OAU's intervention in African conflicts has presented a number of characteristics. The first is that it could only intervene minimally in matters regarded as internal affairs by member states. This may be gleaned from the submission of its first president, Justice M.A. Odesanya of Nigeria who declared at its inaugural meeting at Addis Ababa in 1968 that internal disputes were not among cases which the commission was empowered to handle (Amadi, 1998:99). This may probably explain why the OAU played a very significant role in the peaceful settlement of interstate disputes in the continent, but with limited story of success in intrastate conflicts.

Secondly, the OAU relied heavily on the tactics of negotiation and mediation for settling African conflicts. These have come in form of direct negotiations between affected states, appointment of ad hoc

committees of Heads of States and Government, as well as through the offices of third parties, and in negotiations during the Assembly.

Thirdly, the O.A.U. had no tradition of employing professional mediators or arbitrators in the search for a settlement. Rather, it uses the influence of its elder statesmen, who can command the respect and confidence of the parties to a dispute. These statesmen are regarded as the embodiment of wisdom, and therefore exert considerable authority. They play a critical role in developing a consensus among O.A.U. members and in persuading the parties to a dispute to modify their positions.

The other noticeable feature was that the OAU was more successful in resolving interstate conflicts than intrastate conflicts or civil wars. For instance, while it successfully mediated peace in boarder disputes between Morocco and Algeria, Somalia and Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, Gambia and Senegal as well as Mali and Burkina Faso (Masabo, 2013); the same story cannot be told regarding its involvement in the Nigerian civil war where it supported the Federal Government of Nigeria against the seceding State of Biafra. Details of OAU's intervention in the Nigerian civil war are highlighted in another section of this paper.

Historical Root of the Nigerian Civil War

The Nigerian Civil War also known as the Nigerian-Biafran War, 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970 was a political variance caused by the attempted secession of the south-eastern province of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra. The conflict was largely the result of political, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria, particularly, the Eastern and Northern regions (Ukpabi, 1995: 100). The various agents that led to the afore-mentioned crisis vary, starting from the colonial impacts (Adejo, 2008:3). As with many other African nations, Nigeria was a synthetic structure initiated by former colonial powers which had neglected to consider religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences (Aremu, 2010:549-560). Nigeria, which gained independence from Britain in 1960, had at that time a population of about 60 million people consisting of nearly 300 differing ethnic and cultural groups.

The causes of the Nigerian Civil War were diverse although, in the view of a Journalist, Alex Mitchell in one of his memoirs blames involvement of the British, Dutch, French and Italian Oil companies whose battle for the rich Nigerian oil field started the Civil War and kept it going (Lloyd, 1970:12; Aremu, 2015)

Furthermore, on 15th January 1966, Major Kaduna Nzeogwu and other Junior Army Officers who were mostly Majors and Captains attempted a coup d'état. It was generally speculated that the coup had been initiated by the Igbos and for their primary benefits, because of the ethnic origin of those that were killed (Elaigwu, 2005). The Prime Minister and the Premier of the Northern region in persons of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Sir Ahmadu Bello respectively were killed. It is also of immense value to note that the wife of Sir Ahmadu Bello was also eliminated in this coup. Meanwhile, the President, Sir Nnamdi Azikwe, an Igbo, was on an extended vacation in the West Indies. He did not return until days after the coup.

The coup d'état itself failed, as Ironsi rallied the military against the plotters. But Ironsi did not bring the failed plotters to trial as required by military law and as demanded by the most Northern and western officers. In this context, it was generally viewed that the coup was a means by the Igbos to strike firm on the governmental and military competence of the Northerners not leaving the perception that Aguiyi Ironsi's refusal to punish the coup plotters signifies his assent to their deed (Aremu, 2016: 124-134). A counter coup was staged in July 1966, where so many lives and properties of Easterners residing in the Northern region of the country were lost. Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, the then Head of State and Col. Adekunle Fajuyi who was the Governor of the Western Region were assassinated. This coup brought Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon to power. His emergence generated some controversies as Lt. Col. Ojukwu it was against the seniority ranking in the Army (Oyediran, 1970:16).

In addition to the afore-mentioned points, it is of great value to recognize the personality clash between Gowon and Ojukwu, which might seem personal to different scholars, but we can't but recognize it as one of the causes of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970 (Adejo, 2008:39-40).

Ghana's Mediatory Efforts in the Nigerian civil war before the involvement of the OAU: An Historical Analysis of the Aburi Accord, 4-5 January, 1967

The Aburi Summit was a last ditch effort to save a tottering republic from collapse. On 4 and 5 January, 1967, Nigeria's top military leaders converged on Aburi in the Republic of Ghana for an unusual conference. It was called the Aburi Summit, An agreement, popularly called the Aburi Accord, was signed by the leaders. It was an accord that was meant to tackle the issue of true federalism in the country.

Even before Nigeria's independence in 1960, the nationalist leaders held several conferences to agitate for the country's independence. But none of these many conferences had generated much interest like the Aburi conference that produced the popular Aburi Accord.

The Accord was precipitated by the crisis that trailed the counter coup of July 26 1966, and the massacre of southerners, mainly the Igbos in Northern Nigeria. The counter coup was a revenge coup to the military coup that occurred earlier in the year 1966 while Lt. Col. Ojukwu, Military Governor, Eastern Region, as he then was, refused to recognize Lt. Col. Gowon as the new Head of State and Supreme Commander of the Nigeria Army. He had insisted that in the absence of Ironsi, the most senior Army officer, in this case Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe should take charge of the country's affairs to maintain order and discipline in the Army, but Gowon held on to power in Lagos (Adejo, 2008:40; Balogun, 1973: 103).

The entire country was enveloped in tension. Fear and mistrust pervaded the land. Soldiers and civilians of Eastern origin residing in the North, who had run home after the massacre that trailed the July 26 counter coup, could not return to the North for fear of their lives. The nation was thrown into chaos. Meetings were held, conferences were convened to find a solution to the national problem. On August 9, 1966, the representatives of the four military governors met and agreed that troops should return to their regions of origin to allow tempers to cool. An Ad-Hoc constitutional conference began on September 12, same year to find solutions to the problem in the country, but that was a futile effort. The constitutional conference was adjourned indefinitely on October 3, 1966 (Akpan, 1976: 74).

The Supreme Military Council (SMC) could not meet because Ojukwu had refused to attend a meeting in any part of the country where there were soldiers of Northern extraction, while the other members of the SMC could not come to the East for a meeting. For months, there was a stand-off between the Governor of the Eastern Region and the new Military rulers in Lagos. It was this state of affairs that gave rise to the Aburi conference.

The Aburi summit was the last ditch to save a tottering republic from collapse. So, on January 4 and 5, 1967, as earlier stated, Nigeria's top military brass conveyed in Aburi, in the Republic of Ghana for an unusual conference. Unusual in the sense that, it was the first and only time after the country's independence in 1960, the nation's leaders will gather in a foreign land to brainstorm on the problems of the country.

Aremu (2014:5) did not only examine the role played by Ghana in her quest to foster peace between the Nigerian Government and the Biafran Government, he also critically criticizes with apt outline, the insinuations and repercussions of Ghana neutral-play in the context of the war. He also made mention of the poor inter-personal relationship between Gowon and Ojukwu as the most reason why Aburi Ghana, was chosen in the wisdom of J.A Ankrah to venue the Accord.

Aremu opines that as soon as the war broke out in July 1967, Ghana's change of attitude became apparent. The government of Ghana remained neutral in the war, probably as a sign of respect for the O.A.U's principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and for its inalienable right to independent existence. In the words of Aremu (2014:5)

...Ghana did not, at any time during or after the Nigerian civil war, grant open diplomatic recognition to Biafra. However, the purported press war launched by the Ghanaian print media against Nigeria, during the war; the constant reference to "Biafra" as a sovereign country by the Ghanaian government; the emotional-laden support given to Igbo elements living in Ghana and the expulsion of Nigerian immigrant community from Ghana in 1969, with the exception of the Igbo's who were classified "special refugees", all raised fears about Ghana's unfriendly relations with Nigeria.

The conference was facilitated by the then Ghanaian Head of State, Lt. Col. Joe Ankrah, and was attended by nine military leaders of the country namely: Gowon, Ojukwu, Commodore Joseph Akinwale Wey, Head of the Nigerian Navy; Colonel Robert Adeyinka Adebayo, military Governor of the Western Region; Lt. Col. Hassan Usman Katsina, Military governor of the Northern region; Lt. Col. David Akpode Ejoor, Governor of the Mid-west region; Major Mobolaji Johnson, Military Governor of Lagos; Alhaji Kam Salem, Inspector General of police and Timothy Omo-Bare. Others who attended the momentous Aburi conference were: N. Akpan, Secretary to the Military Governor-East; Alhaji Ali Akilu, Secretary to the Military Governor-North; D. Lawani under secretary to military governor's office Mid-West; P. Odumosu, Secretary to the military governor, West and S. Akenzua, Permanent under Secretary, Federal Cabinet Office (Obasanjo,1980).

The agenda included: the re-organization of the Armed forces, constitutional Arrangement and the issue of displaced persons within Nigeria, with the overall aim of a political re-engineering for the country. For a start, it was also agreed by the participants that the Nigerian crisis would not be resolved through the use of arms (Obasanjo, 1980). All the participants made a strong argument for a return to true federalism that was in operation in the country before the first military coup of 15 January 1966. Specifically, Adebayo advocated a repeal of those Decrees that were passed after 15 January 1966:

...but I think we should revert to what the country was as at 14th January, 1966, that is regional autonomy (Ojukwu,1969:8).

At the end of the two days conference, the Aburi Accord was signed by the participants at that historic summit.

It was resolved amongst others that members agree that the legislative and executive authority of the federal military government should remain in the supreme military council, to which any decision affecting the whole country shall be referred for determination provided that where it is not possible for a meeting to be held, the matter requiring determination must be referred to military governors for their comment and concurrence.

Specifically, the council agreed that appointment to senior ranks in the police, diplomatic and consular services as well as appointment to super-scale posts in the federal civil service and the equivalent posts in the statutory corporation must be approved by the supreme military council. 'The regional members felt that all the decrees passed since January 15, 1966, and which detracted from previous powers and positions of regional governments, should be repealed if mutual confidence was to be restored.'

Besides, it was agreed that 'the Ad-Hoc committee should resume sitting as soon as practicable to begin from where they left off', and 'That all the law officers of the federation should meet in Benin on the 14 January and list out all the Decrees and provisions of Decrees concerned so that they may be repealed not later than 21st January if possible.'

On the issue of displaced persons, it was resolved that 'civil servants and corporate staff (including daily paid employees) who have not been absorbed should continue to be paid their full salaries until 31 March 1967 provided they had not got alternative employment'. While 'finance Permanent Secretaries were to resume their meeting within two weeks and submit recommendations, and that each Region was to send three representatives to the meeting' (Uwechue, 2004:20)

The major thrust of the Aburi Accord was that each region was to be responsible for its own affairs, while matters that affected the entire country were to be thrashed at the level of the SMC where in the words of Ojukwu:

Whoever is at the top is a constitutional chap-constitutional within the context of the military government. That is, he is a titular head, but he

would only act where, say when we have met and taken a decision
(Ojukwu, 1969:15)

On return from Aburi Conference, there were differences in the interpretation of the Accord on both the sides of the Federal government and Eastern Region government. Consequently, the Accord finally broke down without addressing the problems it set out to solve. Gowon's repudiation of the Accord was attributed to the Federal Bureaucracy at that time.

On 26 January, 1967, Gowon in a press conference reportedly stated that the Permanent Secretaries had advised him 'to stick to their previous recommendations' and advised 'on most of the issues contained in the Accord' (Forsyth, Frederick. 2001: 32).

Ojukwu reacted sharply. He gave a 31 March deadline for the implementation of the Accord or he will take measures to give effect to them within the Eastern Region. He lived up to his words when he declared the Eastern Region as an independent Republic of Biafra on 30 May, 1967. Gowon launched a police action against the Eastern region, to crush what he described as the rebellion of that region and the Nigerian civil war broke out.

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

Available records indicate that between September 1967 and December 1969, the OAU made frantic efforts to broker peace between the belligerent parties to the Nigerian civil war, despite the provision of non-intervention in the internal affairs of its member states. That notwithstanding, it is essential to note that the OAU decided to intervene in the Nigerian crisis for a number of reasons. Prominent among the motivating factors were to: maintain peace on the African continent; prevent the balkanization of the Nigerian nation-state; prevent the crisis from escalating into a full-blown war in consonance with its principle of peaceful settlement of disputes and; prevent extra-African intervention in the war, among others.

The OAU took various initiatives to resolve the contradictions involved in the Nigerian Civil War. The first of it was the **Kinshasa Peace Talks** which was held between 11 and 14 September, 1967. It was conveyed by President Joseph Mobutu of Congo, who used the initiative to boost the image of Congo as a peace-loving nation (Nagel and Rathbone, 1967: 437, cited in Bello, 2017:20). The peace talk was chaired by the former Ethiopian leader, Emperor Haile Selassie. Bello (2017:20) reports that the peace meeting was attended by representatives of seventeen independent African states. The meeting addressed three specific issues affecting Nigeria namely: halting the supply of arms and ammunition by major foreign powers including the United Kingdom, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and

Egypt, French, Portugal among other to Biafra and Nigeria; the official recognition accorded Biafra by some members of the organization such as Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon and Ivory Coast; (c) the potency or otherwise of insinuations of genocide against the people Biafra (**Cervenka, 1977:97-98**).

The summit came up when the Nigerian Civil War was already a cynosure within Africa; a period when the war had already become one of Africa's major problems. Incidentally, the frequent warning from General Gowon who held very firmly to the view that any intervention, even in the form of a discussion at the OAU level, would be in violation of Article III (2) of the OAU Charter, which prohibits any interference in the internal affairs of states; and Biafra's pressing for the 'Internationalization' of the conflict made the decision to discuss Nigeria at the level of the OAU a difficult one by the Heads of State and Government. Several days before the conference began; Colonel Ojukwu sent a high-level delegation to Kinshasa to acquaint the African Heads of State with the Biafran case while Gowon insisted that the war was merely a Nigerian internal affair (Oyeweso, 1992).

Meanwhile, contrary to Gowon's insistence that the OAU should abide by the stipulations of its principle of non-interference, the organization went ahead to discuss the conflict at Kinshasa (Cervenka, 1977:196-197; Bello, 2017:22). However, the final resolution adopted by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government was carefully drafted to avoid creating the impression that the OAU was interfering 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 instructive to note that the members of the Consultative Committee on Nigeria represented a careful balance of the different attitudes of neighboring states towards the Nigerian conflict. For instance, President Ahidjo of Cameroon was believed to have cooperated with Biafra in breaking the federal blockade in the field of telecommunications. Cervenka opined that many Igbo people traded and worked in Cameroon, especially in the western region of Cameroon which was once part of Eastern Nigeria. President Diori of Niger had to bear in mind the dependence of Niger on the Northern Nigeria Railways as a vital link between his country and the sea. Aside from the economic relations, the people of Niger have a natural affection and attachment to Northern Nigerians as fellow-Muslims, and because they claim the same ancestry. Two other members of the mission; Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and President

Tubman of Liberia were senior statesmen wielding great influence in African diplomacy. The choice of General Ankrah was motivated by the fact that he had been host of the Aburi meeting and because he knew both Gowon and Ojukwu personally (Cervenka, 1977:99).

On their arrival in Nigeria on 23 November 1967, Gowon firmly told its members: ‘You are here not to mediate’. In his welcoming address, General Gowon stated the terms on which he was prepared to listen to 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 communiqué issued by the mission at the end of its visit to Lagos expressed full agreement with General Gowon’s view by reaffirming that ‘any solution of the Nigerian crisis must be in the context of preserving the unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria’. This was however a bitter disappointment for the Biafrans, who initially advocated for OAU’s mediation, provided that Biafra’s sovereignty should not be negotiable and that Biafra would be invited to the peace talks as a sovereign state and not as a part of Nigeria. The Kinshasa Summit was indeed a major setback for the Biafran cause. As expected, Biafra openly rejected the approach and outcome of the Consultative Committee on Nigeria and labeled the OAU “a rubber stamp” for only acknowledging the interest of Gowon (Cervenka, 1977:99).

The initial rejection of the Consultative Committee on Nigeria by the Biafran government was the reason why the first peace talk was organized under the auspices of the Commonwealth secretariat rather than those of the OAU. It was tagged “**The Kampala peace talks**” (Cervenka, 1977:99). It was arranged by Arnold Smith, the Canadian diplomat and Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and George Thomas, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth (John de St Jorre, 1972:193; Cervenka, 1977: 199.) On 6 May 1968, preliminary talks between Chief Anthony Enahoro, Nigeria’s Federal Commissioner for Information, and Sir Louis Mbanefo representing Biafra, were held in London. It was agreed that peace

talks should begin in Kampala, Uganda on 23 May 1968 and that issues like; questions of foreign observers, the conditions for ending the hostilities, and the arrangements for a permanent settlement would be its agenda.

The peace talks in Kampala were opened by President Obote of Uganda and called for an early agreement on the cessation of hostilities as a basic preliminary for a broader understanding. While both proposals offered a great deal of scope for maneuvering, there remained a fundamental disagreement – namely; that while the federal government’s principal condition was renunciation of secession by Biafra before a ceasefire, the Biafrans wanted an immediate ceasefire with no such conditions attached. 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).

Meanwhile, the difficulty of reconciling the three objectives implicit in the Nigerian crisis – stopping the fighting, preserving the unity of Nigeria, and giving effective assurances of

safety to the Igbo people – appeared, both in the peace talks held before the war and during the war itself, to be absolutely insurmountable obstacle to any settlement.

Unfortunately, the Kampala peace talks broke down on 31 May, 1968. This was due to the irreconcilable differences between the delegates of the warring parties to the peace talk. Sir Louis Mbanefo accused the federal delegation of exploiting its military position, trying to dictate rather than negotiate the terms, using the talks as a propaganda exercise and pinning the blame for the breakdown on the Biafra delegation. He further accused the Nigerian delegation of employing obstructive tactics, of not wanting to talk peace, and of putting forward totally unacceptable proposals. On the contrary, Chief Enahoro described the Biafran demand for an unconditional cease-fire as unrealistic, and the demand for the withdrawal of federal troops to their pre-war positions as totally unacceptable. Mbanefo announced that the Biafran delegation “is going home” and Biafra’s delegation walked out of the peace talks on 31 May, 1968 (Cervenka, 1977: 203).

The appalling condition of the Igbo population in the war areas aroused world-wide concern and this largely explains why humanitarian considerations were behind the subsequent initiative of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia to revive the work of the OAU Consultative Mission on Nigeria. Consequently, he convened a meeting of its members in Niamey, the capital of Niger Republic, on 15 July 1968 (Streamlau, J. 1977). Ojukwu expressed his preparedness to go to Niamey, if invited. All six members of the mission were represented, five of them – Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia and Niger were represented by their Heads of State. Only president Mobutu of Congo sent a delegation led by a deputy foreign minister.

General Gowon told the Committee that ‘the rebel leaders and their foreign backers are playing politics with the whole question of human sufferings to their diplomatic and military advantage’. He declared that, in military terms, the rebellion was ‘virtually suppressed already’, and that a unilateral ceasefire by the federal government without any prior commitment from the rebel leaders to give up secession would offer the secessionists the opportunity to regroup and rearm, and prepare for the continuation of the conflict. He added that ‘a unilateral ceasefire on humanitarian ground would not in any way relieve the sufferings of the innocent victims of our tragic war’. Gowon however showed more understanding for the Igbo fears for their safety by agreeing to introduce outside observers to ensure that federal troops would not massacre the Igbos. He was also very firm on the terms of reference of the observers, who were not to be concerned with peace-keeping operations but should observe and bear testimony only.

While the OAU Consultative Mission pledged its continuous support for the federal government on the need to preserve Nigeria as one political entity; it equally adopted a resolution in which emphasis was put on the relief operations in the distressed areas of Biafra; rather than on the reconciliation of the two parties. Bello (2017:25, citing Cervenka, 1977) reports that in a communiqué issued by the OAU Consultative Committee on Nigeria, after the Niamey talks, both parties agreed to: arrangements for a permanent settlement; terms for the cessation of hostilities; and concrete proposals for supplies of food and medicine to the civilian victims of the war. 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).

The **Addis Ababa peace talks** were opened by Emperor Haile Selassie on 5 August 1968. The meeting was held behind closed doors (Cervenka, 1977: 108). Though no agreement for political settlement of the dispute was reached between Biafra and the Federal, Emperor Haile Selassie seized the opportunity to get the two sides to agree on some workable arrangements for getting the relief supplies to the war-ravaged areas. His efforts and humanitarian approach to the conflict were commended by Pope Paul, and supported by the International Red Cross. The Red Cross' special envoy, August Lindt, came to Addis Ababa and tried to get the two sides to agree on a 'mercy corridor' which would speed up relief supplies (Cervenka, 1977). Without any agreement being reached, the meeting was adjourned for a week on 15 August to allow the delegations to study various proposals. (Cervenka, 1977)

When the negotiations were resumed on 22 August, both sides agreed in principle to a compromise proposal put forward by the Emperor, for air and land mercy corridor to aid the civilian victims of the war. The Federal Government had requested that the Biafrans should place one of their strategic airfields under Red Cross control so that it could receive freighter air craft with food and medical supplies from a demilitarized federal airport. However, all glimmers of hope proved to be premature because on 25 August, 1968, General Gowon, without waiting for the outcome of the Addis Ababa talks, announced the launching of a final offensive. (Cervenka, 1977) As a result, Aba, one of the few remaining towns still held by the Biafrans, fell into federal hands on 4 September, 1968 and this in turn put more pressure on the Biafrans at Addis Ababa. But they refused to yield. Finally, on 9 September 1968, after nearly five weeks of negotiations, the Addis Ababa peace talks were adjourned.

Eventually, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government met on 4 September 1968 at the Club des pins in Algiers. It was presided over by Houari Boumediene. Boumediene, the President of Algeria. It is essential to note that the political fate of Biafra seemed to have been sealed at this summit. As was the case at previous meetings, Nigeria and Biafran delegates remained uncompromising in their respective submissions. The Federal government of Nigeria insisted on the principle of a united country, though it recognized the necessity of safeguarding the rights of the minorities within the country; while the Biafran delegation insisted on secession. They claimed that the Igbos could no longer live peaceably within Nigeria. The matter was finally decided in favour of a united Nigeria by ballot. Thirty-three (33) African states supported Nigeria; two abstained from voting (Rwanda and Botswana); while the four countries which recognized Biafra- Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon voted against Nigeria' (Mwakikagile, 2009:420). Although, many African leaders sympathized with the humane motives behind the recognition given by the four OAU members, they however rejected President Nyerere's thesis that unity achieved by conquest is worthless. Despite the support given to president Nyerere's arguments by President Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast, the fear of similar minority conflicts in their own countries was a decisive factor on the disposition of nearly all the delegates to the **Algiers summit**; (AHG/Res, 51 (IV), 1967) especially when most African states have similar tribal and ethnic problems.

The meeting also adopted a resolution which appealed to the Biafran leaders to cooperate with the federal authorities in restoring peace and unity in Nigeria through the cessation of hostilities. The OAU recommended that the Federal Military government of Nigeria should declare a general amnesty and cooperation with Biafra. The aim was to ensure the physical security of all the peoples of Nigeria, until mutual confidence could be restored. The resolution further called upon all member states of the UN and the OAU to 'refrain from any action detrimental to the peace, unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria' (Mwakikagile, 2009:420, cited in Bello, 2017:30)

The last meeting of the OAU Consultative Mission on Nigeria was held in **Monrovia, Liberia** on 17 April 1969, attended by President Tubman of Liberia, Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, President Ahidjo of Cameroon and I.K.W. Harley of Ghana. The OAU Secretary General, Diallo Telli, was present. The mission ended its three days meeting on 20 April 1969 without making any meaningful progress towards reconciliation between Nigeria and Biafra. The final resolution at the Monrovia's peace talk reaffirmed the support of the OAU for a united, indivisible Nigeria. The Consultative mission resolved that 'the two parties of the Civil War accept, in the supreme interest of Africa, a united Nigeria, which ensures all forms of security to all citizens' (Akpan, 1976). It further suggested that 'within the context of this agreement, the two parties accept an immediate cessation of fighting, and the opening

without delay of peace negotiations.’ The consultative mission thereafter offered its good offices to facilitate these negotiations. However, the Biafran delegation was not prepared to discuss on OAU concept of territorial integrity without some discussion on what this would entail.

The last OAU initiative for the settlement of the Nigerian conflict was made at the 6th Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 6 September 1969. Incidentally, the four countries which had recognized Biafra (Gabon, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Zambia) abstained, as did Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, the conference adopted a resolution urging the belligerents to embrace the ceasefire agreement and negotiate for a united Nigeria. The resolution appealed ‘solemnly and urgently to the two parties involved in the civil war to agree to preserve, in the overriding interests of Africa, the unity of Nigeria and accept immediately the suspensions of hostilities and the opening without delay of negotiations intended to preserve the unity of Nigeria and restore reconciliation and peace that will ensure for the population every form of security and every guarantee of equal rights, prerogatives and obligations’ (AHG/Res. 58 (VI), 1969). The OAU further advised all governments, international organizations, humanitarian institutions as well as political, moral or religious bodies in the world to desist from any action that could frustrate its efforts toward finding lasting solution to the Nigerian crisis (AHG/Res.58/Rev. 1 (VI), 1969: 6).

As expected, Ojukwu was not pleased with the resolution of the OAU regarding the indivisibility of Nigeria. Hence, in an address to the Biafran Consultative Assembly on 1 November 1969, he reiterated his preparedness to meet federal representatives at any place and at any time, but excluded the OAU as a possible forum. According to him, Biafra had lost faith in the OAU, ‘due to its lack of foresight, objectivity, courage and conviction.’ (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).

The announcement was taken to mean that Colonel Ojukwu was prepared to abandon his hitherto unyielding demand for secession from federal Nigeria. Twenty four hours later, however, the head of the Markpress Agency, William Bernstein, declared that the statement had been completely misinterpreted (Cervenka, 1977:106). Ojukwu’s attempts to secure mediation in the conflict through the intervention of Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, and Yugoslavia, in preference to the OAU, yielded no positive results.

None of these countries made an official approach to the Federal Government of Nigeria, which stressed repeatedly that the OAU was the only body authorized to mediate in the conflict.

The last round of peace talks between Biafra and the Federal Government were agreed to take place in December 1969. Both parties were invited to Addis Ababa by the Emperor Haile Selassie. The question of whether the Emperor was making his initiative privately or in his capacity as chairman of the OAU consultative mission on Nigeria gave rise to some controversy. The Biafran interpretation was that it was a private initiative, as Biafra had refused to have anything more to do with the OAU (Cervenka, 1977:107). The Nigerian Ambassador to Addis Ababa, Olu Sani, asked for clarification, and on 17 December 1969, he made it known that he had received assurance from the Ethiopian foreign minister, Ketema Yifru, that the talks were organized by the Emperor within the framework of the OAU. As a result of this impasse, the talks never took place and the Biafran delegation, led by Pius Okigbo, which had already arrived in Addis Ababa, returned home on 18 December 1969.

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 Efiog 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

Perhaps the most important factor that hindered the OAU mediation from resolving the Nigerian civil war was what Amadi (1998:134) refers to as “the conservative application of the concepts of non-interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for the sanctity of borders”, as entrenched in the OAU Charter. It should be noted that the Consultative Committee set up at the Kinshasa summit of Heads of State and Government was charged with the responsibility of going to the Head 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). In the same resolution, the Assembly reaffirmed its “adherence to the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, its condemnation of secession in any member states”, and its recognition of the "situation as an internal affair, the solution of which is the primary responsibility of Nigerians themselves" (Amadi, 1998:134). Similarly, in its resolution on the Nigerian issue at Algiers, the Assembly appealed to 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). Akinbi (2012:296) submits that the OAU mediation attempt ended up as a failure largely because it treated the Biafran cause with disdain by not bothering to consult with Ojukwu during its visit to Nigeria. One cannot but agree with his submission. This bias in favour of one of the belligerent parties by a supposedly unbiased umpire may be regarded as the most potent factor that foreclosed a peaceful resolution of the Nigerian crisis. It was indeed a most conservative way of handling the crisis. Perhaps Tandon, cited in Munya (1999) was right when he stated that “the OAU is, by design and constitution, an essentially conservative organization”. As is rightly observed, the mediators (Consultative Committee) were partial in their activities. Munya (1999:574) asserted 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”. This may be true to some extent. But as a matter of fact, a majority of African leaders supported the Federal Government and condemned secession largely because most of them feared secessions within their own national borders, should the Biafra secession bid was allowed to succeed. Madibo Keita of Mali even warned that the secession was a very serious precedent for political unity of every country (Amadi, 1998:136). Other backers of Lagos were Chad, Upper Volta, Sudan and Egypt, the latter two giving active support. This was why the only key achievement made by the O.A.U. in the Nigerian civil war was that it upheld the ‘unity’, territorial integrity and colonial borders of African states (Cervenka, 1977:108).

Another important factor that prevented a successful OAU mediation in the Nigerian crisis was mistrust and the uncompromising stand of the belligerents. It should be recalled that General Yakubu Gowon had insisted on the need for the OAU to respect its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. Bello (2017: 21), citing Daily Times, 24 November 1967 even reports that Gowon did not tolerate any form of intervention on the part of OAU. He was reported to have abhorred even a mere listing of the Nigerian war as part of agenda at any of its meetings. He regarded such an act as constituting a breach of its principle. He reiterated his stand in his speech before OAU's Consultative Mission, headed by General Ankrah of Ghana that visited him in Lagos in November, 1967, after the Kinshasa meeting. According to him 'the OAU has rightly seen our problem as purely domestic affairs and in accordance with the OAU resolution, your mission is not here to mediate' (ibid)

On the other side of the divide, the OAU resolution at Kinshasa appeared as a rude shock to Biafra's head commander, General Odumegwu Ojukwu. He had hoped that the decisions would be in Biafra's favour. Bello (2017:22) reports that Biafrans were highly optimistic that the OAU would mediate and take a decision that would favour them, because of their belief that "they had the 'legal' right to seek their independence from Nigeria" (Bello, 2017:23; Peters, 1997:130) Biafrans reacted to this feeling of betrayal by OAU by criticizing and frustrating its subsequent efforts at resolving the conflict and declared that the OAU peace mission lacked objectivity and competence and that it was doomed to fail (Cervenka, 1977:199; as cited in Bello 2017:23)

As such, the two parties to the conflict held mutually incompatible views. While the Nigerian Federal Government insisted that no peace could be worked out outside one Nigeria, Colonel Ojukwu took the stand that no agreement which precluded an independent sovereign Biafra was possible (Amadi, 1998:137). Unfortunately due to the lack of mutual trust, as a fallout of the partiality of the OAU mediation committee, the parties could not engage in serious and flexible negotiations or show any willingness to make concessions (Nyambura (2015:62) . This affirms the view of Licklider (2001), cited in Nyambura (2015:62) that "mutual trust is a crucial factor during any mediation process as it ensures confidence between the actors and increases their willingness to negotiate and compromise. This lack of willingness to make concessions dealt a great blow to the OAU mediation process and signifies a basic weakness of mediation. In other words, regardless of the mediators' competence, the success of mediation fundamentally depends on how well the warring parties receive and take ownership of the peace process. In this regard, mediation becomes a very limited tool in the sense that it does not force the warring parties into a binding outcome (Nyambura, 2015:31). This reinforces the fact that in all situations of conflict resolution, mediatory efforts cannot avail much if the warring parties are absolutely determined to fight on.

This further affirms Nathan's (2005: 3) view that "parties locked in deep-rooted conflict regard each other with extreme mistrust and animosity...and view the conflict in zero-sum terms. Through the presence and support of a trusted third party, mediation can provide a relatively calm and safe space for the adversaries to articulate and explore ways of meeting their respective concerns".

Division within the OAU members on the recognition of Biafra as an independent republic also acted as a stumbling block to the effectiveness of OAU mediatory efforts. The break in the OAU ranks following the recognition of Biafra by some African states came to a head in Algiers with the host, President Boumedienne accusing the recognising countries of fronting for the imperialists. He went further to make a comparison between the Katangese secession and the Biafran secession observing that the states and organisations that supported Katanga were now aiding the Biafran secessionists (Amadi, 1998:138). Boumedienne had maintained that the only means of putting an end to the Nigerian crisis was the restoration of unity which was being prevented by such recognitions (Amadi, 1998:139). It would be recalled that Tanzania was the first African country to recognize the secessionist region of Eastern Nigeria as independent Republic (*The Observer*, London, 28 April 1968). Three other African countries: Cote D'Ivoire, Zambia, and Gabon also recognized Biafra. Though this move was vehemently criticized by Nigeria and some African leaders including President Boumedienne of Algeria, the OAU could not force the recognizing states to rescind their decision. This no doubt acted as a major hindrance to peaceful mediation of the Nigerian civil war.

Another problem was the O.A.U's. Charter's lack of provision for any mechanism to compel members to seek peaceful settlement of disputes (Okongwu, 1973: 589-591). It has no standing army to enforce compliance to its resolutions. This implies that member states may unilaterally ignore the Organisation's directives, with impunity. Even in the extreme, the OAU may be precluded from intervening or at best, intervene minimally in crisis presumed to be internal affairs of particular countries. Munya (1999:590), citing Thompson. & Bissell (1972) adds that the above challenge was complicated by OAU's "lack of effectiveness in enforcing its will and its general aloofness in the face of internal conflicts" that have emboldened some member states to "take independent positions on conflicts without receiving any sanctions from the OAU".

CONCLUSION

This paper has elaborated extensively on the role of the OAU as a mediator in the Nigerian civil war of 1967 to 1970. It notes that the mediation efforts failed to broker peace between the belligerent parties.

This was due largely to the partiality of the OAU mediators in favour of the Federal Government of Nigeria which forestalled any form of compromise by the State of Biafra. Hence, rather than broker peace, the OAU mediators no doubt complicated the outcome of the peace process in the Nigerian civil war. (Licklider, 2001, cited in Nyambura, 2015:67). This largely explains why the war continued “until the federal government brought the Biafrans almost literally to their knees”. Cervenka, 1977: 108). Such biased stance should be avoided in future conflict resolution attempts by the OAU, now the African Union (AU). This will not only enhance the credibility of the organisation as a reliable mediator, but will also reduce the gravity and intensity of wars across the African continent.

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