

WEST CAMEROON EMPATHY WITH BIAFRA DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970: A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

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Abstract

This study attempts a historical investigation of West Cameroon reaction to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. Informed by primary and secondary sources and based on qualitative historical analysis, the study reveals that despite President Ahmadou Ahidjo's proclamation of neutrality at the wake of the war and his ensued support for the Gowon regime, the situation at the grass-root level in West Cameroon was in divergence to official government dispositions. Surprisingly, factored by historical, geographical, cultural, ancestral and minority considerations, West Cameroonians including religious bodies at the grass-root level generally sympathised with the Biafran cause. The Igbo who for many years had been victimised, resented and accused by the indigenes to be at the origins of many atrocities in Southern/West Cameroon were suddenly embraced and accepted. The paper therefore submits that the contempt, resentment or Igbophobia which the Igbo in Southern/West Cameroon had been victims of were guided by pan Cameroon sentiments and not outright hatred for the Igbo ethnic group as a people. The attitude of the Southern/West Cameroon indigenes towards the Nigerians and Igbo in particular during the colonial and early post colonial years were thus driven by jingoistic underpinnings and not xenophobic considerations.

Keywords: Biafra, Empathy, Igbo, Igbophobia, jingoism, Nigerian Civil War, West Cameroon

Introduction

With the defeat of the Germans in the Kamerun Protectorate in February 1916 by the Allied forces, the territory including other German possessions in Africa was seized by the victorious Allied forces. It was in this light that Britain and France partitioned the erstwhile German kamerun protectorate in 1916 following a failed condominium (Elango 1985). Britain was handed one fifth of the territory while France got four fifth of the territory. Both portions were placed under the League of Nations as Mandate B territories and later trust territories under the United Nations (UN). The British sphere was not only smaller but comprised of two disjointed parts bordering the British colony of Nigeria and ran from the Atlantic Ocean in the South to Lake Chad in the North. Both spheres became known as British Northern Cameroons and British Southern Cameroons¹ and were administered as integrals of British Northern and British Southern Nigeria for administrative convenience among other reasons. The French on their part administered their portion as a distinct entity within French Equatorial Africa. (Rubin 1971: 71, Gardiner 1967: 523, Rothwell 1971: 73, Ngoh 2001:3, Chiabi 1989: 170- 199, Awasom 2004: 86-116, Kofele-Kale 1980; Fanso 1985: 23-43; Mbuagbaw *et. al.* 1987). French Cameroon gained independence on January 1, 1960 as the Republic of Cameroon. British Northern Cameroons on her part voted in the UN organised plebiscites of February 1961 to gain independence by integration the Nigerian Federation. While British Southern Cameroons attained independence on October 1, 1961 by reunifying with the Republic of Cameroon to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon; a two state Federation. The Republic of Cameroon was christened the state of East Cameroon whereas former British Southern Cameroons

¹I use British Southern Cameroons and West Cameroon in this study interchangeably to mean the same thing.

became known as the state of West Cameroon. The British move to administer Southern and Northern Cameroons as integrals of Nigeria rested on several reasons. The British wanted to pacify the Eastern Nigerian borders with Cameroon (Rubin 1971:71). Alfred Milner a British colonial Secretary of State for colonies on May 29, 1919 in a memorandum intimated that; "the territory we have gained, though not large in extent, has a certain value in giving us better boundaries and bringing completely within our borders native tribes which hitherto been partly within British territory and partly outside it" (Gardinier 1967:523). Further, the British colonial administration was only interested in a small part of former German Kamerun to have as a bargaining chip in the after war territorial negotiations (Osuntokun 1978: 257). In fact, Lord Lewis Harcourt, British Secretary of State for colonies had proposed to Lord Frederick Lugard, the Governor General of Nigeria that Britain concedes the entire former German Kamerun territory to France in order to get the whole of former German Togo and Dahomey (Akinjide 1979: 231). The fact that the British sphere comprised of narrow, elongated and geographically separated strips rendered transportation very poor, communication network daunting and the administration of both strips as one entity separate from Nigeria impracticable. More to this, there existed fundamental ethnic, political and cultural disparities between British Northern and British Southern Cameroons. British Northern Cameroons which was predominately Fulani was ethnically, politically and culturally homogeneous to the Northern Nigerian province which was also Fulani dominated. The British thus felt that it was natural that British Northern Cameroons be incorporated into Northern Nigeria and British Southern Cameroons which had ethnic groups similar in language, ancestral origins, customs and traditions to those of the Southern province be administered together (Ngho 1990:3, Nfi 2011).

The British decision to administer British Southern Cameroons as an integral part of the Southern province of Nigeria which later became the Eastern Region meant that the evolution of the territory was hinged on the administrative, judicial, legislative and constitutional dynamics in Nigeria. This was pivotal in the future economic, social and political developments of the territory and the rapport which the British Southern Cameroons indigenes had with the Nigerians. Administering Southern Cameroons from Nigeria gave the impression that Nigeria was the colonial master of Southern Cameroons and not Britain (Konings 2005:278). This was manifested by the dismantling of the borders between Nigeria and Southern Cameroons (Chiabi 1986: 59-86) which led to huge influx of Nigerians (Igbo especially) into Southern Cameroons from 1922 who more or less considered Southern Cameroons as their backyard offering a wide range of job opportunities in the plantations, educational system, the colonial administration including other avenues for commercial enterprises (Awosom 1998: 168-183, Ardener *et al* 1960, Konings 1993, Konings 2005: 278-279, Nfi 2015, Blackwell 2020). Again, the administering of Southern Cameroons from Nigeria gave it a perimetric status explained by the acute underdevelopment of the territory as compared to other areas in Nigeria by 1961 (Konings 2005, 278, Aka, 2002). From 1922, Southern Cameroons (the focus of this study) was administered as an integral province of the British protectorate of Southern Nigeria. It later became part of the Eastern Region of Nigeria as a province following the constitutional reforms of Bernard Bourdillon in 1939 which split Southern Nigeria into Western and Eastern Regions. The Southern Cameroons province was placed under a Senior Resident in Buea who was responsible to the Lieutenant Governor of the Eastern Region based in Enugu, the regional capital (Eyongetah and Brain, 1974:95).

Following the integration of British Southern Cameroons into Southern Nigeria no sooner did the Cameroonians develop frustrations in the manner in which they were being administered from Nigeria. It should be made clear here that the opinion of the Cameroonians was not sought after by the British colonial officials in the decision of administering their homeland as an integral part of Nigeria. In essence, Southern Cameroons was devoid of any recognised status and this was a

decisive factor of the frustrations of the territory's political, economic and social desires (Adig 2017: 2016) regarding the fact that the territory had been placed in a peripheral position; otherwise understood as a colony within a colony (DeLancey et al 2010:5) with the decisions of developmental projects taken from Nigeria and their treatment by the Eastern Nigerians (Igbo particularly) as second class citizens in their homeland (Amazee 2000: 7-18). The British Southern Cameroonians were frustrated by the fact that the British neglected the territory and starved it of developmental projects resulting to extreme poor means of communication which hindered the economic and social evolution of the territory. Regarding budgetary allocation, Southern Cameroons remained in a disadvantageous position as compared to other regions of Nigeria as no method and amount of revenue allocation was drawn up for the territory. The 1951 UN Commission report stipulates that the territory relied on the 'special obligation of the Nigeria government' for financial allocations. In fact, it was only by 1955 that Southern Cameroons was attributed a budget of its own. (Adig 2017:2017). This meant that the Nigerian government was not obliged to allocate a budget to the territory based on specific rationals and as such allocated to the territory what she wanted and not what she ought to. The growing number of Nigerians (Igbo especially) migrants into the Southern Cameroons with their higher educational backgrounds and entrepreneurial spirits, settled and picked up jobs in the Southern Cameroons. They occupied high ranking positions like administrative clerks, post masters, police officers, prison warders, soldiers, customs officers, teachers and head teachers, supervisors, and education officers among others in the Southern Cameroons administrative civil service. (Ndi 2011: 5, Nfi 2015). In the agro-industrial enterprises in the Southern Cameroons, particularly the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) and Pamol, an important number of Igbo and Nigerians held esteemed supervisory, professional and managerial positions (Ardener et al/1960, Konings 1993, Konings 1998). By the 1950s the CDC workforce counted between 25-30 percent Nigerians especially Igbo and 80 percent of the labour force of the Pamol plantations was made up of Igbo (Konings 1993, Konings 1998). The Nigerian Igbo also dominated the Southern Cameroons economy and trading sectors. The Igbo were found in almost every circuit of the Southern Cameroons informal economy as bakers, photographers, carpenters, blacksmiths, tailors, seamstresses, shoe makers (repairers), mechanics, butchers to name a few. They acquired lands for very insignificant amounts and created food and cash cropping farms, operated restaurants, ran provisions stores, small scale trading enterprises (Kleis 1975: 44-46).

The Igbo also ran and controlled the transport sector in the Southern Cameroons operating taxis and trucks and pivoted the retail and wholesale distribution of palm oil in major towns in the Southern Cameroons like Kumba, Tiko and Victoria (Limbe). In the Kumba Division area, Nigerian Igbo were the principal buyers of cocoa, which in time became Southern Cameroons major export crop (Kleis 1975:46, Kleis 1980). The Igbo were also delusively attributed with malpractices like bribery and corruption, discrimination, adulterating palm wine and medicines, narcotics, counterfeiting, profiteering, theft, sorcery, cannibalism, disrespect of local customs and authorities (Amazee 1990, Amazee 2000:16-19). In 1948, the Bakweri Native Authority issued out a series regulations which included prohibiting indigenes from selling or renting out houses and farmlands to Igbo. Landlords were requested to issue quit notices to Igbo by March 15, 1948. The indigenes were also restricted to trade with the Igbo and women were barred from communicating with an Igbo (NAB, File PC/h (1948)1, 'Conditions of Settlement', Letter from Bakweri Native Authority, Buea, to Senior Divisional Officer, Victoria, dated 21 February 1948). In the CDC and Pamol plantations, the Southern Cameroonians undertook several measures on removing and replacing Igbo and Ibibio who held prestigious positions like supervisors and managers (Konings 1993: 69, Konings 1998:80). The 1953 census revealed the impressive and frightening number of Nigerians and Igbo especially in the Southern Cameroons. As per the census, there were over 838000 Nigerians in Southern Cameroons, of whom 258000 were Igbo (Aka E, 2002:165).

The predominance of Nigerians in general and the Igbos in particular in the white-collar positions in the civil service administrations and economy of the Southern Cameroons was profoundly begrudged by the local populations. In fact, this gave rise to what has been termed Igbophobia (Amazee 1990, Amazee 2000). The Igbo became victims of verbal and physical attacks by disgruntled Southern Cameroons indigenes who even went as far as telling the Igbo to return home (Konings 2005: 280). In the wake of nationalist struggles after the Second World War, the British Southern Cameroons politicians successfully used and exploited the anti Igbo propaganda or scare to woo the Southern Cameroonians to vote for independence by reunifying with their brethrens of the Republic of Cameroon in the February 11, 1961 UN plebiscites despite haven been associated with Nigeria for close to 40 years (Amazee and Oben 1989: 63-89, Amazee 1990, Amazee 2000: 16-19). In fact, the nationalist struggles and ambitions in the Southern Cameroons between 1945 to 1961 were more anti-Nigeria, influenced by an Igbo apathy than anti-colonial innature (Konings 2005:278). The reunification of Southern Cameroons with the Republic of Cameroon on October 1, 1961 had profound consequences on the Igbo and other Nigerians settlers in general in the West Cameroon State of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. Their socio-political position was weakened regarding the fact that their legal status changed as they became foreigners who no longer enjoyed equal rights and opportunities as the West Cameroon citizens (Konings 2005:283). A series of political and economic measures were taken at state level towards indigenising the West Cameroon civil administrative machinery, economic public and private sectors in order to circumscribe Nigerian and particularly Igbo influence. The West Cameroon government resulted in replacing Igbos and other Nigerians and foreigners in favour of Cameroon citizens in the civil service and from other government employments, in the economic institutions and in the plantation establishments including even self employed jobs (Kleis 1975: 47-51, Kah 2015). And few years after the independence of Nigeria on October 1, 1960, the country was plunged into a bloody civil war of secession with the Igbo Easterners wanting to secede and create their own country: the Sovereign Biafra State.

The Nigerian (Biafra) Civil war

The Nigerian Civil war otherwise known as the Biafran Civil War broke out a result of the attempted secession of the Igbo or the Eastern region (though the region was not exclusively Igbo inhabited as it constituted other non Igbo ethnic groups like the Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw and Ekoi) (Kleis 1975:39). Notwithstanding, the Igbo heartland population constituted the biggest mass and base of support for Biafra (Kleis 1975:39). The first gunshots of the war were heard on July 6, 1967 and the last on January 13, 1970. Social complexities and geopolitical disparities within the new state were at the background of the war. An abstract view of the causes demonstrates differences in socio-economic developments, the Tiv riots of 1964, the federal elections of 1964, the structural imbalances of the Nigerian federation, the 1965 Western regional crisis, the military coups of January 15 and July 29 1966 which was exacerbated by the killings of Igbo residing in the North between May to September 1966 coupled with the asymmetric distribution of powers among the various ethnic geopolitical groups. The Igbo declaration of the independence of the Republic of Biafra named after the Bight of Biafra on May 30, 1967 by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Chukwuemeka Ojukwu who was the Governor of the Eastern Region was the immediate and imminent cause of the war (Falode: 2011, 120; Cervenka: 1972; Goetz: 2001, 2; Oyeweso: 1992; Lasse & A. Dirk: 2014, 172). The war was principally between the Igbo and the Federal Military Government (FMG) of General Yakubu Gowon. The FMG responded by attacking the militias of the declared Biafran Republic in the respect of maintaining the unity and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. By 1968, the civil war had led to a humanitarian disaster caused by widespread civilian hunger and starvation (Okolo 2010: 57). The outbreak of the civil war drew the attention of the international community at large and the Federal Republic of Cameroon and in particular.

The official response of the Cameroon Federal Government to the Nigerian Civil War

In spite of the fact that President Amadou Ahidjo and the Cameroon government had not yet digested the bitter pill of having lost former British Northern Cameroons to Nigeria in the 1961 United Nations plebiscites (Davies 1995: 204), in November 1967 the Cameroon government claimed an official position of neutrality in the wake of the Nigerian civil war and closed its borders with Nigeria and prohibited arms, foodstuffs, medicines and other supply shipments to Biafra (Amin 2020:9). Ensued developments by President Ahidjo attest that the Cameroon government clearly sided with the FMG of General Yakubu Gowon. Ahidjo was empathetic towards the Gowon administration, though his responses and measures were for strategic internal and security reasons. His position within the context of the Nigerian civil war against the Biafran cause was also in respect of the charter of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) which among other things stipulated the non-interference in the internal affairs of member states and the respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states. President Ahidjo readily made available his services in the holding of mediation between the FMG and the Biafran secessionist faction. He was member of a mediation committee of six presidents that was set up by the OAU on September 14, 1967 in attempts at mitigating the war (Davis: 1995, 203). Ahidjo also severely criticized countries that supported and recognised the Biafran state and preferred to stay true to the principles of the OAU charter, not supporting the Biafran state despite the fact that his stance put him at variance with some strategic Cameroon allies like France who had called on Ahidjo to recognise the Republic of Biafra (Alima 1977: 161). Ahidjo himself clearly intimated in a press conference in Bamenda on May 8, 1969 affirming his disapproval of having secessionist irredentism in his borders, insinuating that on no accounts would he support any secessionist state in Nigeria (Benjamin 1971: 162-63). Ahidjo went further and accused countries that supported Biafra of being responsible for the loss of lives and destruction of property caused by the war (Julius: 2020, 9). This was also due to the fact that President Ahidjo was from a region (Northern Cameroon) that shared geographical, cultural, historical, religious and linguistic attachments with General Yakubu Gowon's Northern Nigeria. Ahidjo was a Fulani like General Gowon himself (Davies, 1995: 204) Thus, his reactions and responses were therefore sympathetic to "his fellow brethren".

Ahidjo and the government of Cameroon provisionally permitted the Nigerian FMG to use portions of the Bakassi Peninsular such as Jabane to monitor or prevent the supplies of arms and ammunition by France via Gabon into Calabar for the Biafran separatist militia. He ordered the closure of the Cameroon border with Nigeria in the Southern West portion to prohibit the Biafran army from taking refuge and organising their attacks from Cameroon (Shaibu et al: 2015, 29; Amin: 2020, 9). Ahidjo went on to close the borders, beaches and ports of Cameroon with Nigeria and the movement of cars and trucks to the ports was prohibited to check clandestine movement of goods and persons. Even permits that had been issued to border trading operators were annulled. Only a handful of vessels were allowed to navigate, with a few amount of declared goods and it was strictly between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. (NAB Memo No MCI.WC/S. 1/190, 1967, Fombo and Okereke: 2022, 102-103). Government officials and security services were ordered to keep a very close watch on the Nigerians and more especially the Igbo in West Cameroon. Biafran refugees in West Cameroon were registered; their movement within Cameroon and their interactions with whosoever were under strict scrutiny. Security and government officials treated any form of cooperation between the Biafran refugees and West Cameroonians or Nigerians resident in Cameroon was treated by scepticism and government and security officials ensured that they were devoid of any activities in support of the Biafran cause (NAB Security report no S.11/55, 1967). Ahidjo and the Cameroon government further barred the supply of arms, medicine, foodstuff and other vital supply shipments from Cameroon to Nigeria. He authorised the Cameroon Red Cross Association to lend a hand of assistance to the Nigerian Red Cross. Ahidjo's total support to the Nigerian FMG prompted the declaration of the French

Ambassador to Cameroon who at one point intimated that 'Ahidjo had become more Nigerian than Cameroonian' (Torrent: 2012, 141). This gives a picture of the level of goodwill and support which President Ahidjo and the Cameroon government rendered to the FMG of Nigeria in securing and safeguarding her territorial integrity and unity. In addition, President Ahidjo in 1970 made available his services when he acted as the mediator in the negotiations between Nigeria and Gabon for the repatriation back to Nigeria of 3,500 Biafran children who had been in refuge in Gabon since 1968. The repatriation process of the refugee children was completed by February 8, 1971 (Goetz: 2001, 16-17).

However, an in depth diagnosis of the circumstances in Cameroon during this period, depict that the goodwill or sympathy which Ahidjo expressed to the troubles of Gowon led FMG were incidental. Ahidjo aimed at protecting Cameroon's national interest, internal security, and territorial unity and to secure his internal political ambitions in Cameroon which could have been jeopardised by the Nigerian situation. For example, the discovery of oil deposit in 1964 in the Ndian area of West Cameroon just three years before the outbreak of the Biafran war greatly influenced Ahidjo's position in regards to the Nigerian Civil War (Nfi: 2017, 43). Ahidjo had already conceived plans of controlling the oil deposit of the Ndian area. Thus, frightened by the events in Nigeria, the proximity of the Ndian area (West Cameroon) to the 'Biafran territory and more to that, events that had happened in the Katanga region of the Congo in the early 1960s were also speaking to the mind of Ahidjo. Ahidjo was determined to put up every means possible to avoid such a situation happening in Cameroon and as such it would have been paradoxical of him to support the Biafran cause. This explains why in 1972, just two years after the end of the Nigerian civil war, Ahidjo quickly abrogated the federal structures in order to eliminate the boundaries between West and East Cameroon. He went onto institute a strong centralised unitary state which gave him the powers to control oil in West Cameroon, a firm grip on the state and administrative machinery (Ibid, 43).

Again by this time (the late 1960s), the processes of national unity and national integration which were very dear to Ahidjo were already being threatened by some disgruntled and descending voices from some quarters in West Cameroon. These voices were questioning the manner in which the state was being governed. The West Cameroonians or Anglophones were already experiencing minority issues. More to that, the Cameroon Federal government had already been engaged in a war against the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) revolutionaries who were branded as marquizzards who were challenging the Ahidjo government and the independence which Cameroun had obtained from France back in January 1, 1961. To the UPC revolutionaries it was pseudo independence. Ahidjo and the Cameroon Federal government who was already engaged in the war against the UPC in East Cameroon and whose fighters often found refuge in West Cameroon could not dare to support Biafra in the fear of the eruption of a secessionist tendency in West Cameroon or UPC/West Cameroon alliance in a wish to counter the Ahidjo regime and the hope of establishing a new republic as hoped by the UPC revolutionaries. In another dimension, the geographical proximity of the Biafran territory to West Cameroon was a serious factor that could have had spill over effects in West Cameroon in sowing the seed of secession (Cronje: 1972, 292). From the foregoing analysis, it is therefore evident that Ahidjo did not sympathize (show goodwill) per se with the Nigerian FMG, but was forced by the circumstances in Cameroon that could have been jeopardised or escalated by the Nigerian case and thwart his political ambitions and national policies. However, while Ahidjo at the state level supported the FGM of Yakubu Gowon and adopted drastic measures to avert the Biafran cause, the attitude of the West Cameroonian indigenes at the grass root level was in contrast to the official state position. West Cameroonians generally showed support and empathy towards Biafra.

Bases for West Cameroon Empathy with Biafra

West Cameroon sympathy for Biafra was factored on a number of premises. The negative impact of the war on the Igbo who were forced to flee from their homes and homelands making them become refugees in West Cameroon incited the West Cameroonians to have commiseration for Biafra. Again, West Cameroon compassion for Biafra was guided by the shared cultural, geographical and historical ties which West Cameroonians had with the Eastern Nigerian region (Blackwell 1975: 253). As earlier mentioned, within the colonial context, former Southern Cameroons (West Cameroon) was administered from Nigeria from 1922 to 1961 as part of the Southern Region which later became the Eastern region of the Nigerian Federation. Though Southern Cameroons chose to gain independence by joining the Republic of Cameroon, the close to 40 years colonial connection they had had with the Nigerian Easterners (Igbo) had in one way promoted the establishment of long standing friendships and mutual relations between West Cameroonians and Igbo at individual levels (Konings 2005: 285). Moreover, noteworthy that the ethnic groups that inhabit West Cameroon had long been in contact and interacted with the Igbo including other ethnic groups of Eastern Nigeria sharing similar historical experiences and of common ethno-cultural ancestry. These ethnic groups interacted with each other within the context of inter-ethnic relations and trade operations for many years before the dawn of colonialism which created and imposed colonial international boundaries dividing the people and made them 'foreigners' to each other (Njoku 2012: 198-199, Funteh 2015:31-32). Thus, the long pre-colonial historical, geographical, cultural and ancestry ties which the West Cameroonians shared with the Igbo spurred up temperance for Biafra.

Minority issues also influenced West Cameroon empathy for Biafra. Just like the Igbo (Biafra) suffered discrimination and persecution under the Hausa/Fulani hegemony in the Nigerian Federation, West Cameroonians by this time had also started experiencing minority issues in the Cameroon Federation. They were already complaining and questioning the manner by which the country was being governed by Ahidjo and the Francophone dominated regime. (Fonlon, 1963, Fonlon 1964, Kofele-Kale 1981). Hence, sympathy for Biafra was stimulated within the West Cameroonians who saw themselves as a reflection of the Igbo in the Cameroon Federation

West Cameroon Empathy towards Biafra

The Nigerian civil war greatly impacted Igbo in Nigeria and even Diaspora Igbo in West Cameroon. During the war, the Igbos in Cameroon who were predominantly found in West Cameroon were also victims of persecutions and attacks from non Igbo Nigerians who were not in support of Biafra, the Nigerian Consul General in Buea, West Cameroon and from Cameroon federal government agents who closely monitored them (Nwoke 2025:130). For example, on July 16, 1967, the Igbo resident in Kumba filed a complaint to the Divisional Officer (D.O) for Kumba, reporting a secret meeting which the Nigerian Consul General had organised with non Igbo Nigerians in Kumba, planning on attacking the Igbos (Biafrans) with machetes. The D. O made clear his disapproval regarding the act of the Nigerian Consul General and the allegation of Igbo as targets of attacks was presented because they did not participate in the meeting nor were they invited to it by the Nigerian Consul (NAB, TC/1966/12, Biafra-Nigeria War Security Reports from 1966-1969, 1970, 187). The public security service (police) in Buea on 17th August 1967, asserted to have uncovered a secret meeting held in Mountain Hotel, Buea constituted by three British and five Biafrans. It was claimed that the meeting discussed ways of purchasing V.H.F radio equipment through the aide of Mr Donald George Harrison and Mr James Harry Perkins, who worked with the Federal Ministry P.T (Post and Telecommunication) based in Buea as consultant engineers. It was also reported that the organisers of the meeting examined ways of buying navy ships and artillery for the Biafran state from abroad through Cameroon (NAB TC/1966/12, Biafra-Nigeria War 1970, 41).

Again, the Consular General of the Nigerian Consulate in Buea Mr H.J.N Okpokam, during a visit to the Nigerian community in Muyuka on July 20, 1968 accused entirely Lt Col. Ojukwu (an Igbo), for the cause of the Nigerian Civil War (NAB TC/1966/2, Diplomatic Relationship between Cameroon and Nigeria, Security Reports between 1966 and 1972, 73.). The Consular General by citing Lt Col. Ojukwu as solely responsible for the civil war was indirectly stigmatising the Igbo. The Federal Inspector of Administration of West Cameroon, in letter dated November 8, 1968 noted that the Nigerian Consulate-General had reported that Biafra guerilla training centres had been allegedly erected in Bomeh and Oshie in Gwofon Sub-division (NAB TC/1966/14, Nigeria- Biafra Conflict, NAB Memo no. CBN.OI/SEC, 1968). Though some of the allegations that were made against the Igbo of supporting the Biafra state were initiated by the Nigerian Consul in West Cameroon, they were all taken in to proper consideration by Cameroon government and security officials. However, after thorough investigations by the Chief of Services, Federal Security Bamenda and approved by the Senior Divisional Officer of the Division, it was established that there were no rebel activities and training camps in Bomi, Oshie and Mbingo, as alleged by the Consul (NAB Report no. S. III ANOL. 1/1281, 1968. For a detail reading on the numerous Biafran persecutions in West Cameroon during the war most of whom from the Nigerian consul in Buea and the Nigerian embassy in Yaounde see Nwoke: 2025, Fombo and Okereke: 2022). Surprisingly, while the Igbo were being attacked from divergent angles by the Nigerian Consular General in Buea, the non Igbo Nigerians and from the Cameroon Federal Government officials, the West Cameroon indigenes at the grassroots had a different reaction towards Biafra or the Igbo. Igbo in West Cameroon went from being disliked to be sympathised, accepted and embraced as refugees by West Cameroonians (Davies 1995: 204, Blackwell 2020:248). In fact, at the wake of the Nigerian civil war, there was a large widespread outpouring of human emotions, public sympathy and the feelings of brotherhood among West Cameroonians for Biafra and the Igbo (Torrent 2012:141). Jacques Benjamin gathered testimonies which depicted that the sweeping majority of West Cameroonians supported the Igbo secession. West Cameroon support for Biafra was also expressed by the *Cameroon Express Newspaper* which reported on the overwhelming support of West Cameroonians for the forces of Ojukwu. It is also averted that there were discrete support for the Biafran cause by some prominent West Cameroon politicians. The British Consul in Buea, West Cameroon was also persuaded that some West Cameroonians 'might easily have got involved in the conflict' and the Ambassador of France to Cameroon in Yaoundé also intimated on the support that the Igbo cause had in West Cameroon (Torrent 2012: 141). The closing of the Cameroon-Nigeria borders and the restriction of the movement of goods and persons also arose support from West Cameroonians for Biafra. The decision to close the borders greatly impacted economic life not only in the war struck Biafra and other parts of Nigeria but also had negative consequences in West Cameroon (Fombo and Okereke: 2022, 103). The border blockade led to shortages of essential goods and even famine in places in West Cameroon like Ndiain Division, including Bamusso (NAB Memo No MCI.WC/S. 1/190, 1967) as there was the scarcity of items like salt, stock fish, tinned tomatoes and cigarettes in West Cameroon resulting from the restriction of the transportation of these items from East Cameroon into West Cameroon for the fear of them being smuggled into Biafra (Fombo and Okereke: 2022, 102). Despite the ban by the Cameroon Federal government on the transportation of items, goods and persons, some West Cameroonians who did not have any permits cooperated with some settled Igbo to smuggle substantial quantities of items and goods like food and medicine from Cameroon into Biafra thanks to the porous nature of the borders. Again, traders who were authorised in places like Bamusso, Lobe and within the environs districts diverted their merchandise across the border into Biafra (Ibid, 113). These smuggled goods in one way or the other aided in curbing the serious shortage and scarcity of food items which were in grave need in war riddled Biafra. The West Cameroonians who smuggled food items into Biafra also did it out of sympathy with Biafra and were resolute to obstruct the economic bulwark on Biafra as there was total discontent within the

populations of West Cameroon who manifested sympathy for Biafra in disapproval to the tide controlling measures on legitimate businesses in non military material which the Cameroon federal government adopted to put into effect the economic blockade on Biafra leading to an increase in the death toll from starvation and malnutrition, disregarding the humanitarian concerns in Biafra(Ibid, 103).

West Cameroon sympathy for Biafra was also intimidated by the Nigerian Consul General in Buea in a report which he addressed to the Nigerian ambassador in Yaounde. In a five-page report from the Consul General to ambassador Alhaji Bello Malabu in Yaoundé, which was relayed to the Ministry of External Affairs in Lagos and further transmitted to the Cameroon Ministry of External Affairs, Nigeria appealed "...the authorities of the Federal Republic of Cameroon [to] take measures to prevent the rebel agents from taking undue advantage of the ready sympathy they are known to receive in West Cameroon" (NAB Memo no. CBN.OI/SEC, Fombo and Okereke: 2022, 103). The Consul, in his memos, frowned at the general population of Anglophone Cameroon and vehemently accused some top civil servants of cooperating with the Biafra agenda in Cameroon. His accusations were based on a remark which he imputed to Mr B.E. Chu, a Chief of Service in Mamfe Division made on 20 August 1968. Chuis alleged to have uttered that: the President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon is bound [ultimately] to support the cause of Biafra soon or late since Cameroon is in the French community of nations. Every Cameroonian civil servant, therefore, who fails to toe the line of General de Gaulle, in the Nigeria/Ojukwu crisis would, when time comes, be brought to book (Fombo and Okereke: 2022, 104). The consul general's comprehension was on the premise that West Cameroonians were not in support of the Cameroon Federal government's position of supporting the FMG of Nigeria and that due to the pressure that was being exerted upon the Cameroon Federal Government by De Gaulle, it will in the end turn around to support Biafra as desired by Paris (Ibid, 104). The consul general in his report further uttered that West Cameroonians were unhappy with their union with French-speaking Cameroon and perceived Biafra as a courageous groundbreaker and leaders in secession which would be a source of inspiration and backing in an eventual secessionist attempt from the Cameroon Federation. The Consul further insinuated that these had to be taken seriously and that it was not out of mere fancy, making reference alleging that it was as a result of a promise made to them by Sir Louis Mbanefo, a Biafra emissary in a speech delivered in July 1967 at the Buea Mountain hotel who promise Biafran return support to the West Cameroonians (Ibid, 104). Attesting to the empathy and brotherhood attitude which the West Cameroon indigenes had for to the Igbo during the war, Cecilia Nnaji an Igbo lady who arrived in Kumba (West Cameroon) in 1964 to assist her aunt with her new baby affirmed that "the Anglophone people saw themselves as Nigerians, so people got along well"(Blackwell 2020: 253). West Cameroon (ians) unofficially hosted and welcomed many Igbo refugees during the early days of the war, though official government policy was pro-Gowon referenced by Ahidjo's decision to close the Cameroon borders to Eastern Nigeria in a quest to check Biafran activities across into Cameroon. The empathy of the West Cameroonians to Biafra is further corroborated by District Officer, Victor Rose, who served in Nigeria from 1956 to 1961. He admitted like many others his astonishment at the amount of support which West Cameroonians had for the Igbo. He acknowledged that Biafran sympathy was isolated primarily in West Cameroon (Blackwell 2020: 255).

Biafra also gained considerable support from the religious bodies in West Cameroon. The West Cameroon churches had a lot consideration for the Biafran refugees who escaped to West Cameroon at the outbreak of the war and for the Biafran children back at home in Biafra that was hard hit by hunger and starvation. West Cameroonians through the churches donated considerable amount of relief materials like accommodation, food, clothing and medical care to the Biafran refugees in West Cameroon. With the aide of the churches, Biafran refugee children of school age were also enrolled

in schools (Memo no.PCO.371/8712, Fombo and Okereke: 2022, 113). More still, the Presbyterian and Catholic churches in West Cameroon responded favourably to the humanitarian calls that were made by the Protestant and Catholic churches in Switzerland between September and October 1968 begging on them to set up orphanages for the evacuation of starving Biafran children. A meeting in that regard was held on October 15, 1968 at 9 a.m at the Presbyterian station in Buea, West Cameroon and the Cameroon Churches established the Cameroon Relief Organisation (CAMRO) and identified Tiko and Mamfe as places where the Biafran starving children could be evacuated to (Omenka 2018:40). Tiko and Mamfe were probably chosen because of the close proximity and their easy accessibility from Nigeria into West Cameroon. Tiko is easily reachable from Calabar through the high sea and Mamfe connected by road from Ikom in Nigeria. Unfortunately, they did not receive the approval of the Cameroon federal government and the Biafran children were not evacuated to West Cameroon as wished (Omenka 2018:40). Still on the compassion that West Cameroonians had for Biafra, the Vice President of the Cameroon Federal Republic John Ngu Foncha's, (the leading politician from West Cameroon at the time) while representing President Ahidjo at an international conference in Gabon in 1970, offered five hundred thousand francs from his pockets to Biafran refugee children in Libreville. His humanitarian generosity despite Ahidjo's refusal to give in to the demands of President Charles De Gaulle of France to support the Biafran cause was a great demonstration of the sympathy which the West Cameroonians had for Biafra. Unfortunately, Foncha's kind humanitarian gesture cost him his job and position as Vice President as Ahidjo understood his act of generosity to the Biafran children to be an outright betrayal of him and the official position of the Cameroon Federal government. Ahidjo was scared that the Biafran secessionist tendencies could overflow into West Cameroon. Bent on deterring any possible Biafran-West Cameroon alliance or the sowing of the seeds of secession in West Cameroon, Ahidjo dismissed Foncha as Federal Vice President and replaced him with Solomon Tandeng Muna (Nfi: 2017, 44).

Conclusion

The defeat of the Germans in Cameroon led to the partition of German Kamerun between Britain and France. The British for administrative convenience further divided her portion into British Northern and British Southern Cameroons and administered them as integrals of British Northern and Southern Nigeria. British Southern Cameroons evolved within British Southern and later Eastern region of Nigeria. The British decision to administer British Southern Cameroons from Nigeria, encouraged a heavy influx of Nigerians especially Igbo into Southern Cameroons in search of Greener pastures which the Southern Cameroon offered in plantation labour, the colonial civil administration, the educational sector and in the private and public economic sectors. In time, the Nigerians and Igbo in particular came to dominate and control the Southern Cameroons public and informal economy and plantation labour, ran and controlled the Southern Cameroons educational service and also occupied prestigious positions in the Southern Cameroons civil service. The Southern Cameroonians frustrated by the dominant nature of the Igbo and Nigerians in general developed resentment for them. The Southern Cameroonians accused the Igbo of numerous atrocities and of treating them as second class citizens in their homeland. The resentment for the Igbo which came to be known as Igbo phobia was successfully exploited and used by the Southern Cameroons politicians to woo the Southern Cameroon electorate to vote for independence by reunification with the Republic of Cameroon in the UN organised plebiscites of February 1961.

Few years after the independence of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the country was caught up in a bloody civilian war following the declaration of the Biafran state on May 30, 1967 by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. The attempted secession of Biafra from the Nigerian federation was opposed by the FGM of Yakubu Gowon who responded with resistance preventing

the secession of Biafra or Igbo from the federation. President Amadou Ahidjo and the Cameroon federal government claimed neutrality in the face of the war during its early days but went on in taking measures which demonstrated his fervent support for the Gowon regime. The Igbo in Nigeria suffered attacks and persecutions from the FMG. Even Diaspora Igbo (Biafrans) in West Cameroon became victims of persecution and stigmatisation by the Nigerian Consular General in Buea, non Igbo Nigerians and from Cameroon federal agents that kept close eyes on them. Amazingly, factored by the historical, geographical, cultural, ancestral and minority foundations, West Cameroonians including religious bodies at the grass-root level generally sympathised with the Biafran cause. Following the empathy and support which the West Cameroonians demonstrated for Biafra and the Igbo, it can therefore be submitted that the contempt, resentment or Igbophobia which the Igbo in Southern/West Cameroon had been victims in the hands of the indigenes were guided by pan Cameroon sentiments and not outright hatred for the Igbo ethnic group as a people. As succinctly put by Konings (2005), the attitude of the Southern/West Cameroon indigenes towards the Nigerians and Igbo in particular during the colonial and early post colonial years were driven by jingoistic underpinnings and not xenophobic considerations. This is evidenced by the fact that, after the war ended, Cameroon and particularly West Cameroon continued to be a preferred destination for many Igbo migrants in search of conducive economic horizons. The Igbo migrants moved to major West Cameroon towns like; Tiko, Victoria, Mbonge, Kumba, Ekondo-Titi, Bamenda, Ekona and beyond. The huge Igbo migration into West Cameroon after the war is explained by the devastation and destruction which the war had cost on Eastern Nigeria, the poor treatment which the Igbo populations faced and the look-warm attitude which the Gowon regime had on rebuilding damaged infrastructures in the war wrecked Igbo land (Kanu 2019: 38, Nwoke and Emejulu 2021:145). The populations were left in very precarious conditions that occasioned their movements to destinations in West Cameroon in search of greener pastures

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