

## Genocidist Discourse and Intellectuals in Africa

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### Abstract:

The relationships between intellectuals and genocide have historically seemed paradoxical. Intellectuals are supposed to be more enlightened than manual laborers and with higher enlightenment comes the expectation that intellectuals would be inclined to offer moral leadership to society. Paradoxically, wherever genocide has taken place globally and in post-colonial Africa in particular, the footprints of intellectuals are almost always imprinted in the crime scenes as leaders of anti-social thought and action. The genocide against the Igbo in Biafra is a case in point. The intellectuals provided the leading ideas that rallied the masses and unleashed them against the target group without provocation or justification. Almost always it is the international ruling classes that fund genocidist intellectuals and use them to pursue ruling class interests disguised as national interests. It is almost always macho intellectuals who champion genocidal looting and plundering of target groups of children, women, and men especially when they are poor and defenceless. This paper offers a race or ethnicity-gender-class articulation or intersectionality explanation of why genocidist ideologues tend to be masculinist intellectuals who are indoctrinated to defend the ideology of white supremacist imperialist patriarchy. The paper concludes that the decolonization of social thought, research methodology, action and policy discourse would contribute towards the ending of genocidal violence through the adoption of the Africana philosophies of non-violence, Ubuntu and Mbari. Cruse (1967) observed contemptuously that the most radical wing of African American intellectuals during the Civil Rights Movement was the Students Nonviolence Coordinating Committee while those who were armed were pursuing reforms and not a revolution. Our primary case study is the genocide against the Igbo in Nigeria and in Biafra with specific reference to the failure of leadership by some African intellectuals.

### Keywords:

Igbo, Biafra, genocide, intellectuals, Africa, Nigeria.

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## *Introduction*

Nri philosophy implores intellectuals to transform themselves into “warriors for peace” during periods of crisis, with a proclivity for action over rhetoric. Many of our finest writers and thinkers were armed with this ancient wisdom and worked towards a peaceful resolution to the hostilities (Achebe, 2012: 109).

Our approach is in keeping with critical discourse analysis with a focus on documents and thoughts that are verifiable as representative of the tendencies that we analyzed. Given that such documents and social thoughts are in the public domain, other scholars can consult them and draw their own conclusions. We are aware that archives and documents are terrains of struggle for power about the interpretations of representations and so we do not seek to overgeneralize our findings beyond the empirical referents of thoughts and documents from which we draw our conclusions. Other analysts are welcome to disagree with us and draw different conclusions from the same facts that are available to us. We adopt the scholar-activist methodology of critical and centered committed objectivity to suggest that we are against genocide, and we oppose it in all its guises while remaining objective in our analysis by not concealing or distorting oppositions to our points of view or perspective (Agozino, 2003). Those who implicitly or explicitly support genocide are also arguably, committed but they cannot claim to be objective or else they would also join us in opposition to genocide since genocidists tend to distort reality in genocide denialism.

Theoretically, we are guided by the paradigmatic thoughts of critical Africa-centered scholar activists. What they all have in common is their opposition to violence against Africans by anyone or any group for any reasons or pretenses and their support for the right to self-determination in opposition to colonialism, neocolonialism, racialism, sexism, and imperialism. All of these authorities center their critical intellectual work on people of African descent, and all adopted activist orientations in their scholarship as a model that it is not enough to analyze the ills of the world because the point of such analyses is to change the world for the better. Our list of influential theoretical frameworks is not exhaustive and so many more authorities will be invoked in the analysis as we go on to flesh out the relevance of each theorist to the task of understanding the puzzle that Africans have pursued genocidal policies with gusto even after the restoration of political independence.

Fanon (1963) predicted that the phantom bourgeoisie and pseudo intellectuals who were groomed by the colonial authorities to take over power in Africa were not interested in genuine liberation of the people because the emergent elites lacked capital and were dependent on imperialist forces to prop them up in return for the mass repression of the restive people who desire genuine freedom. Kwame Nkrumah (1967) theorized the new order as neocolonialism and saw it as the last stage of imperialism with the prediction that Africa would someday unite to foreclose attempts by foreign powers and internal compradors to

recolonize the people ever again. All our theoretical models agree that the deepening of democracy across Africa will usher in genuine liberation and thereby frustrate the schemes of genocidal forces and their intellectual lackeys to keep Africans shackled. A few African scholars particularly stand out as giants in the critique of genocidal policies in Nigeria and they offer the defense of the endangered Igbo as a model for making genocide history in Africa. They are joined by international intellectuals who became what Christopher Okigbo called “warrior intellectuals” exemplified by Stanley Diamond, Dan Jacobs, Auberon Waugh, Kurt Vonnegut, Herbert Gold, Harvey Swados, Geoffrey Hill, and Douglass Killam and who rallied to do what they could to end the genocidal war in Biafra as recounted by Achebe (2012). This is in sharp contrast to Nigerian intellectuals who have continued to defend the genocidal war under the ideology of what Lenin (1963) dismissed as ‘national defencism’.

### *The Weapon of Theory*

Amilcar Cabral (1979) convinced us that military weapons are not the only arms deployed in a war of national liberation. He suggested that the struggle involves theoretical weapons that are sharpened by critiquing even those ideas that are influential among the nationalists who must also delve into their own culture of struggles to help them to make sense of their concrete situations instead of fighting for ideas in the head of anyone. Thus, Cabral challenged the theory of Karl Marx on the motive force behind the dialectics of historical materialism. Marx correctly stated that it was class struggles, not ideas, that led to the transformation of human society from slavery to feudalism and to capitalism and concluded that class struggles would continue to transform history towards socialism and communism.

By recognizing the weaponization of theory, Cabral was reminding us that even according to Marx, revolutionary ideas or theories have their place in a struggle for the restoration of independence though ideology may not play the primary role and though ideology could also play an anti-social role as false consciousness. Moreover, although class struggles are important forms of struggle in all known society, there were classless societies in communalism and yet history existed in the distant past as a result of the development of the productive forces. Therefore, even after the emergence of communism in the distant future, history will continue to be made through the transformation of the forces of production long after classes have disappeared while racial, ethnic, religious or gender struggles, for instance may continue in articulation or intersectionally (Hall, 1980; Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, according to Cabral, the orthodoxy of class struggles could be modified by calling on the petit bourgeoisie to commit class suicide by sacrificing their class privileges and by throwing in their lots with The Wretched of the Earth the way Frantz Fanon did.

Cabral can be critiqued for calling this ‘class suicide’ since the petty bourgeoisie will remain petty bourgeois despite their class alliances just as white allies will not commit race suicide and male allies will not stop being male in the struggles against imperialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Similarly, I contend that Hausa and Yoruba intellectuals will not be



committing ethnic suicide when they join Wole Soyinka, Fela Kuti, Femi Fani-Kayode (2017), Governor Ayo Fayose (2017) and foreign intellectuals in condemning the genocide against the Igbo in Biafra.

### *The Case of Biafra and the Role of Intellectuals*

If we look at the roles played by intellectuals in the Nigeria-Biafra conflict, we could use the framework provided by Cabral and others to evaluate if they made any original contributions to critical theory the way Cabral did, if they engaged in class struggles on the side of the masses or simply rallied in support of bourgeois nationalism, and if they were able to recognize the intersectionality or articulation of the different struggles that were never separate in the conflict. Whereas many Nigerian Marxists bent over backwards to prove that only class struggles exist in Nigeria, Chinua Achebe pointed out that the ethnic hatred of the Igbo by almost all other Nigerian ethnic groups defies explanation by reference to class struggles alone. Achebe admits that there is a class explanation for the oppressive role of the exploiting elites, but he insisted that the struggle in Biafra was ethnic and gendered as well as being class specific. Cabral, Fanon and Achebe were not social scientists and yet they arrived at original critical thinking about the African post-colonial condition while the social scientists were busy parroting Eurocentric theorists whose ideas were not developed with Africa in mind.

Another intellectual who was also a creative writer like Achebe rather than a social scientist is Wole Soyinka who tried to recruit intellectuals to form a Third Force against the genocidal war by leading delegations to campaign against arms supplies to both sides of the conflict. For his troubles, he was arrested and detained throughout the duration of the genocidal war. No critical social scientists spoke up in defense of Wole Soyinka while he languished in solitary confinement without trial except Achebe and foreign intellectuals. The critical social scientists may have ignored the plight of Soyinka because he was not a Marxist, but Soyinka reminded them that there was a Marxist Trade Union leader who was also detained by the genocidist Nigerian government and tortured to death just because he was an Igbo man. Yet the Nigerian intellectuals kept silent in the face of the tyranny, leading Soyinka to dismiss them as dead intellectuals on the ground that the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny. Soyinka (1988) went on to mock the archeologists who went digging for ancient relics and bone fragments while ignoring the rivers of blood that flowed before their eyes and he dismissed the sociologists with their erudite irrelevances in the face of genocide.

Another intellectual who has consistently called on Nigerian intellectuals to interrogate their opportunistic complicity in the genocidal war in Biafra is the mathematician, Edwin Madunagu (1982). He reported that every time he raised the call for self-criticism about the events of the Biafra genocide, his left-wing fellow intellectuals told him to hush it lest the debate increased the fragmentation of the left in the country. One leftist Nigerian intellectual who expressed anger at Achebe for revisiting the genocide against Biafra is Biodun Jeyifo (2016) who called Achebe an Igbo supremacist and ideological apparatchik just for saying that

he was a roving peace ambassador for Biafra. Jeyifo repeatedly tried to deny the genocide against the Igbo by calling it an 'alleged attempted genocide' and falsely accused Achebe of not mentioning the class struggle only to contradict himself by admitting that Achebe analyzed the politics of the elites against the masses in Nigeria. Jeyifo has never called on the Nigerian government to atone for the genocide against his fellow Africans in Biafra. To set the records straight, let us reflect on the testimonial that Achebe left for us on the role of intellectuals in the conflict just before he died.

In *There Was a Country*, Achebe addressed the role of intellectuals in three sections of part two of the book. One section was on 'The Writers and Intellectuals' and in it Achebe paid tribute to the international intellectuals who came to the defense of Biafra when fellow African intellectuals were defending the genocidal state. Auberon Waugh visited Biafra and wrote 'a devastating book on Harold Wilson's duplicitous policy' of orchestrating the genocide against the Igbo. Waugh also named his child Biafra Waugh in solidarity with the starving children of Biafra. Among the writers and intellectuals were some US writers like Kurt Vonnegut, Herbert Gold, and Harvey Swados who paid solidarity visits to Achebe and other endangered Biafra writers. Vonnegut was reported to have been devastated by the visit and to have checked himself into a hotel where he cried for days while his family went on a skiing holiday. Vonnegut's essay, "Biafra: A People Betrayed" remains a damning testimony against the genocide (Achebe 2012: 105-106).

Other writers and intellectuals who visited Biafra and bore witness to the genocide included Geoffrey Hill, Douglas Killam, Stanley Diamond, and Conor Cruise O'Brien. Diamond had done extensive fieldwork in Anthropology in Nigeria before the war from the last days of the British colony and understood the ideological context of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict as the case of the attempt by Britain to continue implementing colonial policies through a neocolonial regime. While Prime Minister Harold Wilson presented the genocidal Nigerian government as progressive nationalism fighting against primitive tribalism in Biafra, Diamond saw it as the orchestrated attempt to abort a genuine African national independence at the very moment of its birth. While the Nigerian left tried to stereotype Biafra as kowtowing to racist Portugal and South Africa, Diamond correctly observed that the bulk of the weapons of Biafra were manufactured internally by Biafrans while the few imported came from China and Czechoslovakia, but the Czech sources dried up after Soviet tanks crushed the Prague uprising in 1968 and removed Alexander Dubcek from office (Achebe, 2012: 106-107; Nwankwo, 1972).

Conor Cruise O'Brien published a long review in *New York Review of Books* in May 1969 following a return visit to Biafra with Stanley Diamond. "Biafra revisited" was illustrated with a poem by Achebe in honor of his friend, Christopher Okigbo, who had just been killed resisting the genocide in Biafra. It also included a poem by Diamond, "Sunday in Biafra", which captured the African tragedy in Biafra in an indelible portrait. O'Brien reported that the fate of Africa was represented by two of the best African writers alive, Wole Soyinka who was in solitary



confinement in Northern Nigeria for opposing the war and Chinua Achebe who was dodging bombs and facing starvation while seeking a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The Nigerian poet, Ezenwa Ohaeto (1997) later summarized the thesis of O'Brien as an acknowledgement that the survival of Biafra would have proved to be a victory for African originality, resilience, and for a skillful contribution to genuine African independent development.

In contrast to the solidarity of foreign intellectuals with those suffering in Biafra, the vast majority of Nigerian intellectuals who were not of Igbo descent opportunistically sided with the genocidist regime to serve as what has been identified as 'Africa's Murderous Professors' by Michael Chege (1996). According to him, following the arguments of Paul Johnson in his *History of the Jews*, genocidist ideas circulate not just as a result of 'vulgar rumor but by the deliberate propaganda of intellectuals'. This is supported by Bauman (1989) who argued that the holocaust against Jews was not an aberration but a logical conclusion to the ideology of the Enlightenment as exemplified by the modernist thoughts of Max Weber. Weber laid an emphasis on the technical superiority of rational bureaucratic administration to all other systems of administration even if what was being administered by the iron cage was mass murder. Contrary to suggestions that German intellectuals and masses suffered from mental illness to allow them to commit such barbarism, Bauman concluded that rationality without compassion is consistent with genocidal policies. Chege argued that such a rational administration of genocide by the iron cages of bureaucracy was not something that happened in the past nor was it limited to European populations. He stated that it was happening also presently in Africa where genocidist policies are being implemented by African neocolonial regimes with the support of African intellectuals and imperialist countries that supplied the modernist weapons of mass destruction. Chege applied this theory to the Afrikaner Broederbond of apartheid South Africa and to the Akazu faction of the Hutu ruling class in Rwanda during the genocide and afterwards in Kenya where more than 400 of the intellectuals fled with their hate-mongering journal, *Kangura*, and where Kenyan intellectuals themselves were prominent in opposition to multi-party democratic elections. Despite mentioning the Nigerian Professoriate among the African intellectuals that use allegations of tribalism to discredit legitimate opposition to the genocidist state and despite making the analogy that the kikuyu were chided by intellectuals that they brought the 1992-1993 massacres on themselves by migrating to other regions and prospering at the expense of the locals and so they should 'quit whining that they were being treated like Ibos or Jews of Kenya', Chege failed to extend his theory directly to the foundational genocide of postcolonial Africa, the genocide against Biafrans.

Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe (2013) paid tribute to Achebe as a scholar who centered the genocide against Biafra as the paradigm for explaining the genocidist state that imperialism imposed on postcolonial Africa. According to him, Achebe provides Africans with the memory of the precolonial African civilization, the realization that colonialism did not completely wipe out African freedom, and the awareness that Africans continue the struggle for freedom by countering the 'conquest literature of the aftermath'. Starting with his novel, *Things Fall Apart*,

Achebe consistently reflected on the necessity to oppose the European conquest and occupation of Africa even when the balance of forces seems to suggest that resistance was suicidal, according to Ekwe-Ekwe, quoting CLR James via Walter Rodney (1972). Ekwe-Ekwe maps the colonial genocides in Africa from its inception in Abame among the Igbo before it spread to other parts of Africa. Given the leadership role of the Igbo in the struggle for the restoration of independence, the British set out to punish the Igbo by spreading the propaganda of Igbo will to dominate Nigeria. Then they turned the other eye when ethnic hostilities led to the massacre of the Igbo in other parts of Nigeria in 1945 and 1953 while the British were still in control. Similar propaganda led to the characterization of the 1966 coup as an Igbo coup and resulted in the mass killing of the Igbo with Nigerian soldiers leading the genocide especially after the counter coup. The punishment of the Igbo continued in the genocide against Biafra with Britain supplying the weapons and rationalizing the use of starvation as a legitimate weapon of war to kill 3.1 million people in Biafra. Ekwe-Ekwe also followed Achebe in stating that Awolowo, a British trained lawyer and deputy chair of the federal executive committee during the genocidal war, served as the chief genocidist theorist of the doctrine that starvation was a legitimate weapon of war. Awolowo, as Finance Minister, also imposed the immiserating policy of confiscating the life savings of the Igbo after the war in return for 20 pounds per male family head while authorizing the sale of the shares of foreign companies to Nigerian compradors at a time that the impoverished Igbo could not participate in the indigenization policy. Ekwe-Ekwe concluded that the survival of the Igbo and their remarkable thriving in the face of what he classified as phase 4 of the Igbo genocide 'is arguably the most extraordinary feature for celebration in an otherwise depressing and devastating age of pestilence in Africa of the past 47 years.'

Achebe recognized Ekwe-Ekwe among the Nigerian intellectuals who have expressed outrage over the Igbo genocide in Biafra while other elites in Nigeria continued to behave like Anwu or the wasp that habitually stung other insects and laid her eggs in their belly while they were incapacitated so that the lava would hatch and eat the host insects alive. Other compassionate intellectuals who campaigned against the genocide include Cyprian Ekwensi who left his illustrious writing career and elite appointment as a director in the Nigerian Ministry of Information to serve Biafra in the Directorate of External Publicity. Achebe recalled serving with Ekwensi and the poet, Gabriel Okara, as roving ambassadors for peace. Another intellectual who defied ethnic chauvinism and myopia to support Biafra was Wole Soyinka, already recognized at the time as the foremost dramatist of Africa. Soyinka had risked a journey to Biafra to appeal for a cease-fire to allow for negotiated settlement of the dispute by a delegation of anti-war intellectuals from both sides that he planned to set up. He was arrested by Nigerian troops on his return and charged with gun-running for Biafra and of being a Biafran agent or spy. But he was never tried as he went on to spend the years of the war in solitary confinement. Achebe told *Transition* magazine in 1968 that the Nigerian situation was untenable and that if he was a Nigerian, he would have been in prison with Soyinka for opposing the war against Biafra (Achebe, 2012: 110).



Another roving ambassador was Kenneth Onwuka Dike, the pioneer Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan who resigned that position to assume the same post in the University of Biafra. His renown as a historian and former professor in universities like Harvard attracted media attention to his speaking tours explaining the cause of Biafra. Vincent Chukwuemeka Ike was another intellectual who served the Biafran cause bureaucratically and went on to contribute literary major works after the war. Among the female intellectuals who supported Biafra was Flora Nwapa who wrote the first novel ever published by a woman in Nigeria. She served Biafra in different capacities and went on to lead some of the reconstruction efforts regarding the institutions destroyed by the war in the east central state of the Igbo. Achebe acknowledged that Igbo women deserve recognition for their ingenuity in providing food from thin air even under threats of air raids to keep their families alive, for organizing schools to teach the young ones and for volunteering to direct traffic during the heavy throngs of feet and a few cars ferrying refugees from town to town. Some of the women also enlisted in the army. Adichie also centered her *Half of a Yellow Sun* on the courageous role played by young Igbo women who continued to love the men in their lives despite the material deprivations brought by the war. Christie Achebe (2010) and Buchi Emecheta (1982) also narrated the struggle of women in *Destination Biafra* but with a focus on Debbie Ogedemgbe, a Yoruba woman who joined the Nigerian army to fight for her country only to wonder if her British lover and Nigerian military adviser was in it to help Nigeria or to help British interests.

Achebe dedicated a whole section of part 2 to a discussion of the life and works of the 'finest' Nigerian poet of his time and 'the most remarkable anywhere of our time', Christopher Okigbo, who volunteered to resist the genocidist war against Biafra and died of fighting. A prominent Kenyan intellectual, Ali Mazrui, had published a propagandist novel in which he 'tried' Okigbo and found him guilty of betraying poetry because of his commitment to his tribe, though Mazrui was always loyal to his own Arabic-African-European heritage. Achebe disagrees with Mazrui's characterization of the struggle of Biafra as a tribal war given that Biafra embraced a multiplicity of ethnic nationalities in the Southeast region. Achebe recalled watching Christopher Okigbo debate his elder brother, the eminent economist, Pius Okigbo, on the merits of secession. When the elder brother argued for one Nigeria, the younger Chris warned that he should be careful lest what happened to the military head of state, Ironsi, who was assassinated while trying to keep Nigeria united by 'appeasing extremists', should repeat itself. Christopher was passionately dedicated to Biafra following the pogroms in northern Nigeria and he admired the Biafran military officers and what they said in private conversations. He knew that Achebe may have tried to dissuade him from joining the army and so he pretended that he was going on a top-secret trip to Europe only to turn up two weeks later in the uniform of an army Major.

Achebe also spent a section of the book characterizing the two major Nigerian actors in the war - Ojukwu and Gowon. Both of them qualify to be included among the intellectuals given that Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was trained in Oxford university as a historian before he joined the Nigerian army and rose to the rank of Colonel before the war. Gowon also

attended top military colleges in England before the war and rose to the rank of colonel before becoming head of state following the assassination of Ironsi. Then he went on to obtain a doctorate degree from Warwick University after he too was overthrown. The western media represented Ojukwu as an aristocrat because of his wealthy parents but showed preference to Gowon as the gentleman General. Both officers had been invited to Ghana by the military ruler of that country, General Joseph Arthur Ankrah, who had overthrown Kwame Nkrumah, to try and resolve the conflict on a conference table at Aburi. They signed the 'Aburi Accord' which ruled out the use of force to resolve the conflict and recommended confederation as a way to keep Nigeria united. On return from Ghana, Gowon went back on the agreement, split the regions into 12 states and launched a 'police action' to try and forcibly reintegrate the eastern region which quickly declared secession. Achebe shared a short poem about the very first shot in the war fired by an unknown 'anonymous' soldier. Demas Nwoko went on to paint pictures and make terracotta sculptures of Soja in the slaughter field of the war front (Okeke-Agulu, 2015).

To counter the invasion from the north, Biafran troops invaded the Midwest region and tried to liberate the Benin Kingdom. But Gowon quickly regrouped and pushed them back under the field command of Murtala Muhammad. Muhammad overthrew Gowon after the war before being assassinated in an abortive coup in 1976. The Nigerian forces gathered all grown up men and boys in Asaba and massacred them, wrongly believing that it was the hometown of Major Kaduna Nzeogwu who led the first bloody coup. Ojukwu was made to believe that the Midwestern incursion could have been sustained if not for the betrayal of some officers in the Biafran army. As proof of this conspiracy, a memo signed by four intellectuals in the Biafran army was tendered as evidence of sabotage. Brigadier Victor Banjo, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Sam Agbamuche, and Major Phillip Allele were tried and found guilty of sabotage for suggesting that Biafra should sue for a cease fire since they did not have the weapons to defend themselves. They were executed by firing squad while members of the public jeered at them. Achebe suggested that they should have been spared for their crime as it appeared in a poorly worded memo. The Nigerian troops were reported to have resorted to Nazi like total solution when they captured the city of Calabar and decided to eliminate all the Igbo residents and managed to kill about 2000 Igbo civilians. They also shot and killed 14 nurses and patients at a hospital in Oji River, a town where Queen Elizabeth had visited to see a leper colony during her visit to Nigeria in 1956. The French Press agency reported that; 'On entry to Aba, Nigerian troops massacred more than 2000 civilians'. One of the genocidist military intellectuals, Benjamin Adekunle told the international press that Biafran Aid was 'misguided humanitarian rubbish ... If children must die first, then that is too bad, just too bad' (Achebe, 2012: 138). He also boasted that they shot everything that moved and also shot at things that did not move (Ekwe-Ekwe, 2006).

Toyin Falola (2014) testified that when Adekunle returned from the war front on leave, the people of Ibadan celebrated him as a war hero and the herbalists made charms to send to the troops committing genocide in Biafra to embolden them at a time that the peasants of



Agbekoya were fighting against exploitation by the military government but without expressing any solidarity with the people suffering in Biafra. Without expressing outrage over the mass starvation of children in Biafra, Falola alleged that the Igbo were not happy with Awolowo because he proposed imposing a ban on the importation of stock fish after the war. Falola wondered why the Igbo regarded dried cod stock fish, *okporoko*, imported from Norway as a delicacy when Awolowo believed that it was 'nutrition-deficient'.

In contrast to the silence of the Nigerian intellectuals or their cheer-leading of the genocidal war, foreign intellectuals were expressing their disgust and opposition. Jean-Paul Sartre and Francois Mauriac spoke out against the war in France. John Lennon returned his OBE medal to the Queen in opposition to the British role in orchestrating the genocide. Martin Luther King Jr. cancelled his trip to Nigeria and Biafra on behalf of a coalition of African-American intellectuals due to lack of guarantees of safety especially given his message of nonviolence. Joan Baez and Jimi Hendrix performed a benefit concert for Biafra in Manhattan on August 28, 1968. A young Jewish student, Bruce Mayrock of Columbia University, immolated himself in protest over the silence of the UN while innocent Biafra children were being killed in the genocide. Public pressure forced the Nixon administration to admit that what was going on was genocide that called for a change in US policy. Dan Jacobs (1987) reproduced a cable:

"FOR SECRETARY GENERAL UN FROM WCC REFUGEE RELIEF BIAFRA. DEAR MR. THANT. ESTIMATED DEATH FROM STARVATION IN MONTH OF JULY 6000 PER DAY. AUGUST 10000 PER DAY. SEPTEMBER 12000 PER DAY. PRESENT SUTUATION HOLDING OR DECREASING SLIGHTLY WITH PRESENT LEVEL OF RELIEF FLIGHTS. HOWEVER UNLESS IMMEDIATE CEASE FIRE MONTH OF DECEMBER COULD SEE DEATH RATE UNITS OF 25000 PER DAY. CARBOHYDRATES LIKELY TO BE EXHAUSTED IN NEXT SEVEN WEEKS. BIAFRA WILL BE COMPLETELY WITHOUT FOOD. ACUTE MASS STARVATION UNAVOIDABLE. ANSWER DOES NOT LIE WITH RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS. ANSWER LIES WITH END OF WAR."

Cable from Dr. Middlekoop to the UN Secretary-General who tried to suppress it even after it was leaked to New York Times of Sunday Oct. 20 1968 after which Thant denied receiving the cable and did nothing to send relief or to seek a cease fire. African intellectuals have also joined the culture of denial and conspiracy of silence (Cohen, 2001) despite knowing the enormity of the evil visited on fellow Africans in Biafra.

According to Achebe (2012: 143), 'It did not escape Biafra's founders that a great nation needed to be built on strong intellectual foundations.' For this task, Ojukwu set up a National Guidance Committee that produced a report that came to be known as Ahiara Declaration which was similar to the Arusha Declaration of Julius Nyerere in Tanzania. Under the chairmanship of Cambridge educated literary theorist, Dr. Emmanuel Obiechina, the intellectuals and Ozo (titled) community leaders in the committee recommended socialism as the ideology for Biafra. Achebe reported that there were people who preferred US style democracy, while others preferred radical Marxists, Leninists, Maoists, and communist admirers of Che Guevara and yet others preferred African thinkers like Nkrumah and Nyerere

while Achebe preferred traditional African values. Achebe saw his role as that of pushing for African common sense and a task to keep the more radical elements of the committee like the 'firebrand professor Ikenna Nzimiro' under control. During the committee work, Nzimiro was arrested by the police for insulting them and it took the intervention of Achebe and Obiechina with appeals to Ojukwu to get the radical released from detention and return to the committee. Nzimiro (1982) later wrote that there was a class struggle in Biafra between bourgeois and left-wing intellectuals over the ideological direction of the new republic. Ahiara Declaration appears to be a little token of success by the left-wing intellectuals in contrast to the left-wing intellectuals who blindly supported the genocidist Nigerian regime but made no impact on the ideological direction of the neocolonial regime of Gowon.

When Nwankwo and Ifejika (1969) published *The Making of a Nation: Biafra*, a reviewer at Columbia University wrote that it read like the perspective of the partisans in the struggle and wished that other writers from other parts of Nigeria will publish their own perspective for a more balanced understanding of the conflict. More than 40 years after the war, we are still waiting for the perspectives of the intellectuals especially from Northern Nigeria to help us understand what they were doing when the masses from Eastern Nigeria were being slaughtered in the pogrom and when young men volunteered without being conscripted to go and carry out the final solution to the Igbo question perhaps because of a shared hatred for the Igbo (Achebe, 1983, 2012).

Major accounts came from allegedly genocidist commanders like Olusegun Obasanjo who appeared to absolve Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogu of blame for the first bloody coup in the country by writing a glowing tribute to his friend. Whereas the first coup was spun as an Igbo coup, there is evidence that officers from all regions of the country participated in the coup and the goal of the coup was to free Obafemi Awolowo from prison where he was serving time for attempted treasonable plot to overthrow the government by force. The Igbo officers implicated in the coup were mostly from Western Igbo of the Midwest region which used to be part of the Western region in which Awolowo was admired for introducing free primary education and free healthcare. Obasanjo has also written about his command of the allegedly genocidist forces and bragged that he ordered the shooting down of a plane carrying relief for the starving children of Biafra, a war crime if ever there was a plane.

We are still waiting for the account of the Northern Nigerian intellectuals about the genocidal hatred and aggression against the Igbo who have sacrificed much to help to bring socio-economic development to Northern Nigeria more than any other group. Instead of recognizing the error of targeting the innocent Igbo for genocide and thereby retarding the development of Northern Nigeria, the elites from the North, such as Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (2017), the Emir of Kano and former governor of the Nigerian Central Bank, keep bragging that the killing of 3.1 million Igbo was a deserved punishment for their leadership of the first coup that killed Northern leaders and Western leaders but spared Southeast leaders. Even Sanusi admits that the Igbo have been 'punished enough for their foolishness' and that the whole



country paid the price for the repression of the industrious Igbo, but he offered no apology to the millions of Igbo people who were killed during the genocide. On the contrary, youth organizations in Northern Nigeria continued to issue quit notices to the Igbo artisans living in the region. The latest such threat came in mid-2017 during the campaign for a referendum on self-determination led by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). A notorious genocidist song in the Hausa language and sung by women also circulated on social media asserting that the Igbo deserved to be eliminated from Nigeria because they were supposedly a curse to the country.

Jibrin Ibrahim (2015) focused his opinion on the elites and concluded that the Igbo elites had failed to win the presidency because they did not know how to build coalitions. Although he agreed with Arthur Nwankwo that the Igbo are more cosmopolitan and tend to travel to other parts more than their neighbors, he noted the pogroms against them, the millions that were starved to death during the war, and the impoverization policies that followed the war, but still saw the solution as the changing of the narrative by the elites rather than the demand for reparations and referendum by Igbo youth, at least in recognition of one of the 'remarkable stories of our time', the story of Igbo survival in the face of the genocidal odds that face all Africans due to neocolonialism.

No serious scholar has written about the eyewitness of the genocide against the Igbo in the north, leaving creative writers like Wole Soyinka and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2006) to reconstruct the carnage from primary accounts by combatants who fought in the war and from secondary archival sources. It is possible that there is a rich library on the genocide in the non-Europhone literature of the Hausa and Fulani who have a long history of revolutions led by intellectuals like Uthman dan Fodio with the aim of promoting more ethical lifestyles and preventing oppressive taxation of the Talakawa by the feudal elites, but such literature remains relatively unknown due to lack of translations (Kane, 2012). The eminent Marxist historian, Yusufu Bala Usman (2006), passed away without shedding a drop of ink to lament the tragedy of the genocide against millions of Talakawa (ordinary) Igbo by a neocolonial army of occupation. Instead, Bala Usman was accused by Mayer (2016) of sounding more like a quasi-fascist in his dying days perhaps because he started advancing the fanciful geological theory that the oil and gas in the Niger Delta were sedimentations from the ancient flora and fauna of the ancestors of the Northerners and so, they had the right to take the oil for themselves. Mahmud Mamdani paid tributes to Usman for advancing the original theory that Hausa identity was a recent formation given that hometown identity was the norm with identities like Kanawa for people from Kano before the Sokoto Jihad and then British rule came to construct a pan-Hausa identity. Given his work on fascism in Uganda under Idi Amin, Mamdani (2012) would have been expected to question the silence of Usman on the genocide against the Igbo that he must have been aware of especially after working with Igbo intellectuals to build a radical political party that was split when some Northern elites started accusing the Igbo leaders of trying to destroy their Northern party (Achebe, 1983; Nwankwo, 1985; Agozino, 2016). Instead, Mamdani gave a commencement address in South Africa

where he tried to justify the unprovoked hatred of the Igbo in the North with the false claim that the Hausa and Muslims were equally hated in Enugu. Whereas, the first mayor of Enugu elected by the people was a Hausa-Fulani who defeated the Igbo candidate of the ruling party of Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1952 and served until 1958. Igbo candidates have continued to win elections in the North to represent the predominantly Igbo Sabo Ngeri or migrant quarters in Kano, and also in Lagos with huge Igbo migrant populations.

A younger scholar from the North central region has emerged in the person of Moses Ochonu (2014) but his accounts of internal colonialism by the Hausa Fulani over the Middle Belt minority ethnic groups completely ignores the fact that the genocide against the Igbo was led and perpetrated by Christian Middle Belt officers and masses. The bulk of the killing of the Igbo fleeing the initial pogrom was carried out in Gbokom where their trains were stopped, and they were forced out to be killed by the soldiers and the masses. Pregnant women had their fetuses cut out and beheaded along with their mothers. When the war broke out, the same Middle Belt Christians volunteered in large numbers to join the genocidal army and carry out the final solution against their fellow Christian Igbo perhaps because the military dictator of the time was the Middle Belt Christian, Yakubu Gowon, who was supported by top allegedly genocidist Middle Belt officers like Theophilus Danjuma. Instead of condemning the Christian fundamentalism of his kith and kin in the genocide against the Igbo, Ochonu wants us to believe that his people used to conquer and rule over the Igbo before the white men came to colonize Nigeria.

Toyin Falola and Ogechukwu Ezekwem (2016) put together a huge edited collection about the published works on the Biafra conflict in 2016 but the book failed to acknowledge genocide in the index despite the fact that the Igbo authors who contributed to the book variously testified against the genocide in their chapters. The European authors who contributed to the book also condemned the genocide against the Igbo but almost all the Yoruba authors in the book tried to deny, evade, or belittle the pain of the genocide still felt by the Igbo. This echoes the intransigence of Obafemi Awolowo when he was asked by a journalist if he would like to take back his criminal ideological assertion that 'starvation is a legitimate weapon of war, and all is fair in warfare'. Thirteen years after the end of the genocidal war, Awolowo defended the statement and said that he had no regrets for implementing such a genocidal policy as Finance Minister. The private secretary of Awolowo, the poet Odia Ofeimun (2012), maintains this line of thinking by stating in his rambling review of Achebe's *There Was a Country*, that the Igbo had themselves to blame for the genocide against them. The obstinacy of Nigerian intellectuals makes us wonder why they failed to follow the example of intellectual giants as Fela Anikolapo-Kuti who hustled for some bread by making a propaganda song, 'Keep Nigeria One' in 1969. But he admitted after the war that he was wrong and that Biafra was a justified secession (Moore, 1982).

The human rights lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi never said a word against the genocide in Biafra (though he condemned the torture and killing of a radical Igbo trade unionist, Gogo Nzeribe,



by the military during the war). The leading Marxist, Eskor Toyo, continued to demonize the 'Ojukwus of Guinea' after the war (Toyo, 1967; 1972). The story of those Igbo intellectuals who served the Nigerian government during the war – Dr. Ukpabi Asika, the war-time governor; Samuel G. Ikoku, the Marxist economist; and General Ike Nwachukwu, for instance – remain to be told to explain how they survived the ethnic cleansing during the genocide. Chielozona Eze (2017) indicates that some Igbo intellectuals like himself still buy into the propaganda that the Igbo have themselves to blame for the genocide against them. He blamed Achebe for writing the account of his role as a peace ambassador. Eze blamed massacred Igbo youth who waved the Biafran flag in honor of their beloved killed during the genocide or who demonstrated peacefully to call for a referendum on self-determination in 2017. Eze was bemoaning the fact that Igbo intellectuals failed to take Ojukwu and the Biafra leadership to task for leading the people into an avoidable genocide. Leaders like Akanu Ibiam, K.O. Mbadiwe, Michael Okpara, Christopher Okigbo, and many others failed to offer the courageous critique that Chinua Achebe, Ikenna Nzimiro, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Phillip Effiong, Arthur Nwankwo and N.U. Akpan were able to muster during and after the war.

Even though the Biafran Army was commanded by ethnic minority officers like Colonel Phillip Effiong (2004) and Colonel Basse and that the Chief of Staff to the Government of Biafra was Mr Ntieyong U. Akpan (1972), some of the intellectuals from the Southeast minority ethnic groups have not concealed their hatred for their Igbo neighbors. They seized their properties as abandoned properties after the war. Ken Saro-Wiwa (1989) refused to write the name of Biafra with a capital B and mocked the Igbo in his poetry to distance his Ogoni people who are of Igbo descent from the targeted Igbo long before his army officer friends framed him for murder and hanged him with eight other Ogoni activists. Even Elechi Amadi (1969) who bore Igbo names, bragged that he was the one who led the federal troops to the hideout of the Igbo to flush them out and kill them. Isaac Adaka Boro (1982) who was elected as student union president at the University of Nigeria by predominantly Igbo students before the war declared a revolution against Igbo domination. One of the 'revolutionary actions' he took was to arrest a female trader who had gone to purchase *kaikai* moonshine gin for sale in Onitsha. He claimed that the alcohol belonged to his people and they interrogated the woman for two days before her escape. When the war broke out, he was released from prison and joined the genocidal Nigerian army to kill the Igbo but ended up being killed by the feds. More recently, younger intellectuals like Alhaji Asari Dokubo (2017) have admitted that their elders were duped into supporting the genocidist forces against the Igbo. They now identify with the revival of the assertion of the right to self-determination and the call for self-determination by the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra whom the genocidist Nigerian army continues to terrorize with extra judicial killings that Amnesty International (2016) condemned.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude by calling Nigerian and African intellectuals to add their voices to the condemnation of the genocide against the Igbo in Nigeria. Otherwise, they will remain indicted in the words of Wole Soyinka (1993) who asked what sort of intellectuals will remain silent in the face of tyranny? Martin Luther King Jr. invited us to see ourselves as the descendants of a great writer who left a World House to his descendants. It is up to the descendants to fight and burn down the house or join hands to fix it up and live together harmoniously or go their separate ways and build their own houses if they prefer. Desmond Tutu refers to this philosophy as Ubuntu or the bundle of humanity which says that I am because we are, not I think therefore I am. Chinua Achebe synthesized this philosophy of nonviolence with the symbolism of Mbari or the clay miniature house that Igbo communities build with miniature characters from all cultures represented under one roof as a symbol of tolerance.

It is time for all African intellectuals to demand for atonement for the Igbo genocide and the other genocides in Africa while we push for the United States of Africa that Azikiwe (1937; 1960) called for throughout his life and which is currently taking shape under the African Union Commission with its own parliament and passport already in place. The story of how the Igbo survived the genocide and rebounded with unprecedented energy as a force to be reckoned with in the development of Africa is already well known and should be lauded by more African intellectuals.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

## **Notes on Contributor**

Dr. Biko Agozino (Edinburgh University, 1995) is a Professor of Sociology and Africana Studies, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA. He is ranked as one of the top Influential Criminologists in the world now by [www.AcademicInfluence.com](http://www.AcademicInfluence.com) and he is the author of the following books – *Community Policing in Nigeria* (co-authored, FDP and VTP, 2021); *Routledge Handbook on Africana Criminologies* (co-edited, 2020); *Critical, Creative and Centered Scholar-Activism* (2016, FDP); *Counter-Colonial Criminology*, 2003; *Pan African Issues in Crime and Justice* (co-edited), 2004 republished by Routledge, 2017; and *Black Women and the Criminal Justice System*, 1997, republished by Routledge, 2018. Also, Director-Producer, 'IE: Inclusive Excellence', premiered on Blue Ridge Public Broadcasting Service ECHO Channel and selected for Open Vision Film Festival, 2021; 'Shouters and the Control Freak Empire', winner of the Best International Short Documentary Prize, Columbia Gorge Film Festival, USA, 2011. He won the 2020 Amistad Award from Central Connecticut State University; he was appointed Professor Extraordinarius by the University of South Africa, 2021-2024; and he won the Excellence in Outreach and International Initiatives from the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Virginia Tech, 2021. He is the founding Editor in Chief of *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, 2005 to the present. He has been a visiting fellow at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, and Flinders University, Australia.



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