“What Are They Observing?”

The Accomplishments and Missed Opportunities of Observer Missions in the Nigerian Civil War

*Douglas Anthony**

Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster PA

douglas.anthony@fandm.edu

Abstract

Three separate observer missions operated in Nigeria during the country's 1967–1970 war against Biafran secession, charged with investigating allegations that Nigeria was engaged in genocide against Biafrans. Operating alongside UN and OAU missions, the four-country international observer group was best positioned to respond authoritatively to those allegations, but problems with the composition of the group and its failure to extend the geographical scope of its operations beyond Nigerian-held territory rendered its findings of limited value. This paper argues that the observer missions offer useful windows on several aspects of the war and almost certainly delivered some benefits to Biafrans, but also effectively abdicated their responsibility to Biafrans and the international community by allowing procedural politics to come before commitment to the spirit of the Genocide Convention.

Keywords

Biafra – genocide – Igbo – international observers – military observers – OAU – Nigerian Civil War – United Nations

* The author wishes to thank Jeffrey Kempler, whose initial foray into the United Nations archive seeded the research central to this article; the Franklin & Marshall College Hackman Fellows program; and Franklin & Marshall College for support for faculty research.

1 Introduction

Three separate observer missions monitored Nigerian military operations during that country's 1967–1970 war against the secessionist Republic of Biafra, a conflict remembered by some as the Nigerian Civil War and others as the Nigeria-Biafra War. The war followed a series of political crises heavy with regional and ethnic overtones, including two military coups, that marked the end of Nigeria's First Republic. After a series of failed attempts at resolution, the country's Eastern Region declared its independence as the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967; Nigeria invaded five weeks later. The observer missions had no peacekeeping responsibilities or capacity, and were present only during the second half of the war. The most important of the three embodied an Anglo-Nigerian response to persistent accusations by Biafra and its allies that Nigeria, with British support, was engaged in an ethnically inspired genocide targeting Biafrans generally and specifically members of its largest ethnic group, the Igbo, charges Nigeria and the United Kingdom vigorously denied.¹ The best known mission, the four-country “international” or “country” military observer team (also referred to as the “International Inspection Team” or the Observer Team-Nigeria/OTN), operated alongside a small delegation of military officers from two Organization of African Unity (OAU) member states, and a small United Nations (UN) civilian team led by a special representative of the Secretary General.²

The observer missions to Nigeria do not fit familiar templates for discussing military observers. Military organizations have long used formal observers to gather information on other forces, mainly in wartime. Those officers from friendly or neutral powers, operating with varying degrees of access, worked primarily to benefit their own armed forces.³ More recently, in the post-World War II era, international military observers have become a mainstay of peacekeeping efforts, usually mediated by the United Nations or regional organizations. In the UN model, peacekeeping—including observer missions—usually occurs “at a stage where the two groups are somewhere between war and peace; they are in a state of truce, armistice, ceasefire.”⁴ These traditional peacekeep-

1 The older variant spelling “Ibo” appears in quoted matter.

2 The country observers left behind only a limited documentary record. This paper supplements their published reports with correspondence from UN staff, who experienced significantly less turnover during the 18 months the observers were active. Other key primary sources originate in the British Public Records Office (PRO).

3 See Alfred Vagt, *Military Attache* (Princeton University Press, 1967), 258 ff.

4 Louis A. Delvoie, “International Peacekeeping: The Canadian Experience,” *Pakistan Horizon* 45 No. 3 (1992), 39.

ers are not in place to solve political problems, but rather, by being present, to make less likely intentional or unintentional resumptions of hostilities. The United Nations' first forays into peacekeeping were such unarmed observer missions, as during the late 1940s in Palestine, Kashmir, and along Greece's northern border.⁵ Unarmed observers constituted more than half of UN peacekeeping operations at least as late as 1988.⁶ Those efforts stand in sharp distinction to armed peacekeeping efforts, such as the creation and deployment of the UN Emergency Force during the 1956 Suez Crisis, or even more strikingly, the United Nations Operations in the Congo where, by late 1961, UN troops were engaged proactively in combat operations.⁷

As detailed below, while a small UN delegation was present, the Nigeria-Biafra war was not a candidate for UN intervention, and there was no peacekeeping component. Moreover, international officers in the field had far narrower mandates than conventional military observers in wartime; rather, the *sine qua non* of their common mission was Britain's desire to discredit genocide allegations. These factors combine to position the Nigeria observer missions as historical outliers, remembered mainly, and often in passing, in the context of debates about whether genocide occurred during the war, where observers' conclusions bolster claims that no such crime occurred. As I argue below, those claims must be treated cautiously.

Charged specifically with determining if charges of genocide were justified, the country observers were the group best positioned to speak authoritatively on the matter. They famously reported, confidently, that they could find no evidence of genocide. But the methods deployed by all three teams, most notably their failure/inability to visit Biafran territory and interview Biafrans not under the control of Nigerian authorities, make it impossible for their findings to be dispositive on the genocide question. Further, in hindsight, all three observer missions reflected structural political biases that worked in favor of Nigeria. By allowing procedural and political considerations to undercut their responsibility to Biafrans and the global community, the observer project failed to uphold the spirit of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (CPPCG), this despite five of the six countries represented on the observer missions being signatory to the CPPCG and therefore

5 Larry M. Forster, "Training Standards for United Nations Military Observers: The Foundation of Excellence," *African Security Review* 6 No. 4 (1997), 25.

6 Marrack Goulding, "The Evolution of United Nations Peacekeeping," *International Affairs* 69 (3) (1993), 455.

7 Jane Boulden, *Peace Enforcement: The United Nations Experience in Congo, Somalia, and Bosnia* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), 35.

bound by its terms.⁸ While the operations of the observer missions offer useful windows on contemporaneous concerns regarding genocide, the treatment of prisoners and displaced people, the conduct of Nigerian forces, and on the roles of outside parties in the conflict, the existence and operation of the observer missions also demonstrate how formal political concern for the people of Biafra was, in the final assessment, secondary to other considerations.

Such a critique comes with a significant caveat. It is folly to criticize the observer missions without also acknowledging the benefits to Biafran civilians and combatants that almost certainly followed from even a flawed observer presence. Journalist John de St. Jorre wrote in 1972 that the country observer mission constituted “a unique and civilising contribution to the history of warfare.”⁹ And even as vociferous a skeptic of the country observers as the Earl of Lytton, who deeply distrusted Nigeria’s Federal Military Government (FMG), wrote to the British Foreign Secretary that “there was no massacre of Ibos while the team was present” in part “because the team served to deter excesses” by the Nigerian military.¹⁰ Whether Lytton’s remarks are strictly true we shall never know, but two brief examples provide compelling evidence of how pressure from observers pushed Nigerian forces to better conform to both the laws of war and Nigeria’s stated operational policies, both in ways that protected Biafrans. First, it is clear that visits from observers directly led to significant improvements in conditions of Biafrans imprisoned in several federal facilities.¹¹ And, more dramatically, while Nigeria’s “Operational Code of Conduct for the Nigerian Armed Forces” specified that “hospitals, hospital staff and patients should not be tampered with,” Nigerian air attacks on clearly marked hospitals and other civilian targets were well documented. The presence of observers helped to temper those attacks.¹²

8 Ethiopia, Canada, and Sweden were among the original signatories. Poland acceded to the treaty in 1950, Algeria in 1963.

9 John de St. Jorre, *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972), 283.

10 PRO FCO65/249 “Britain/Biafra Association, Part A,” “Commentary on the Report of the Observer Team to Nigeria (22 September–23 November 1968),” Noel (Earl of) Lytton to Lord Shepherd, FCO, January 16, 1969, 4.

11 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, 17 January 1969 “Fourth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities.”

12 Major General Yakubu Gowon, “Operational Code of Conduct for the Nigerian Armed Forces,” undated but issued in early July 1967. In A.H.M. Kirk Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966–1970*, Volume 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 455–457. For attacks on hospitals, see UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Observer Team to Nigeria, *Report on Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 24 November 1968–13 January 1969* (20 January, 1969).

What are more important, however, are the missed opportunities surrounding the observer missions. At the time the three teams deployed there was a general consensus that effective observation would necessarily include visits to Biafran-held territory. Still, in the end, none of the observer missions actually visited Biafra, despite its government's stated willingness to host them. Partly to blame was Biafran distrust of the OAU, the UN, and the UK-inspired country team, and also problems with communication. The other major factors at play were Nigerian, British, and UN concerns about the political optics of official meetings between Biafran leaders and international representatives. In the weeks before beginning his observer duties, the UN designee worried that Biafra would treat an official visit by a UN representative "as tantamount to UN recognition" of Biafran statehood.¹³

In fact, visitation did not necessarily equal recognition, as fact-finding visits by Canadian and American officials demonstrate.¹⁴ Still, while the outside world heard about Biafra through its propaganda arm, the work of foreign journalists, and aid workers' accounts, visits to Biafra by foreign representatives were comparatively few. One such occasion was the four-day visit of British Labour party staffer Tom McNally, who arrived in Biafra November 9, 1968. After being delayed on Sao Tome by suspicious Biafran officials, McNally landed at Ihiala Uli (hereafter Uli) airstrip, under Nigerian fire, on a relief flight carrying several tons of stockfish for protein-starved Biafra.¹⁵

McNally reported being able to talk to ordinary Biafrans, and experiencing only "slight" restrictions on his movements. He met with Biafran leader Chukwuemeka Omedegwu Ojukwu, who expressed concern about the observer missions not operating in Biafra, arguing that a prerequisite to testing charges of genocide was observing both sides of the conflict.¹⁶ British documents record Ojukwu asking

13 UN Series 370 Box 36 File 3 ACC 96/120, Letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett, 7 September 1968.

14 Canadian parliamentarians were part of a delegation to visit Umuahia in November 1968 and two US congressional delegations visited in February 1969, led by Republican Senator Charles Goodell and Democratic Representative Charles Diggs. John T. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 290 and 320n.

15 PRO DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, "Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tom by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968", 2. The Uli airstrip was Biafra's lifeline, and as such was central to the arc of the war. Uli could manage more than thirty landings per night and received, on average, 120 tons of cargo per night, and had handled twice that amount. Most was relief materials that arrived from So Tome on planes operated by Caritas and several Protestant organizations known collectively as Joint Church Aid, but there were arms shipments as well.

16 PRO DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, "Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tom by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968", 9.

What are they observing? What kind of civilisation have observers to check that killing is properly done? The thing to do is to stop the killing—not to see if it is being done properly.¹⁷

McNally's interviews with Irish and West Indian missionaries mirrored much of what Nigeria-based observers detailed: air attacks on civilian targets, including a feeding center and a hospital marked with, in the words of an Israeli doctor, "the biggest red cross in Biafra."¹⁸ "There is no doubt in my mind," McNally wrote, "that the Federal forces have bombed civilian areas of no military significance." The attacks, he argued, were counterproductive since they reinforced prevailing sentiments about Federal intentions.¹⁹

Observer reports, by contrast, were based in virtual entirety on information gathered behind Nigerian lines. The observers' only direct contact with Biafran civilians and combatants came from those taken prisoner or trapped behind Nigerian advances, or who crossed over on their own. In most such cases those informants were in close contact with—even under the direct supervision of—the same Nigerian troops responsible for the wellbeing of the observers. As Lytton wrote to the Foreign Secretary in 1969, "... it would have been better to take at least some evidence from those who had fled and to have done so in their place of safety rather than where their interrogators were guests of the 'oppressors'."²⁰ Communication with civilians also raised questions about the reliability of accounts observers recorded. During one of his early trips to a camp for displaced Igbo in Benin, and to Enugu and Awgu, the lead UN observer reported full access to people, places, and "sources of information." But while he and an assistant were able to interview English-speaking displaced people and administrators without Nigerian intermediaries, they had to rely on Federal troops for translation with non-English speakers.²¹

17 PRO DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, "Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tomé by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968", 6.

18 PRO DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, "Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tomé by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968", 3.

19 PRO DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, "Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tomé by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968", 10.

20 PRO FCO65/249 "Britain/Biafra Association, Part A," "Commentary on the Report of the Observer Team to Nigeria (22 September–23 November 1968)," Noel (Earl) Lytton to Lord Shepherd, FCO, January 16, 1969, 3.

21 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, "First Interim Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on his visit to the Northern Front," 9 October 1968.

The accuracy and value of observations [...] is qualified by the unwieldy size of the group when traveling as a whole together with members of the press, and the mode of operation which necessitates military escort and involves the presence of high-ranking officers. During short visits in these circumstances, ordinary people might be reluctant to reveal matters of significance which they are afraid may tell against their own interest.²²

The fact that none of the missions directly observed events and conditions inside Biafra represents, at minimum, a missed opportunity for Nigeria to reassure Biafrans, their supporters, and the international community, that its intentions did not include their extermination. At worst, it represents a fatal flaw in the entire enterprise.

2 The Genocide Question

At the heart of the observer enterprise lay the question of whether Nigerian forces had committed and/or were committing genocide against Biafrans generally, and members of Biafra's Igbo-speaking majority in particular. Even today the genocide question remains contentious, and casts a polarizing shadow over scholarly, popular, and personal accounts of the war. The question's "very construction raises important questions on the issue of conflict and identity in Nigeria and has helped to redefine the relationship between the state and the varied groups that make up this multiethnic country."²³ Biafra argued that it was fighting for survival against a stronger opponent that enjoyed the support of both the former colonial power, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union, which had opportunistically agreed to provide armaments that Britain would not. On the other side, despite neither Nigeria nor the UK being signatory to the CPPGC, both wanted to undercut a discourse that brought them international scrutiny and generated sympathy for Biafra.²⁴

22 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, "Second Interim Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on Visits to the Southern and Western Fronts", 30 October 1968.

23 Roy Doron, "Marketing Genocide: Biafran Propaganda Strategies During the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970" in A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (eds.), *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 72.

24 The UK acceded to the Convention two weeks after the war ended in 1970, Nigeria in 2009.

The discourse of extermination predated the war, when authorities in Nigeria's Eastern Region argued that two waves of violence directed against eastern Nigerians living in other parts of the country, mainly the Northern Region, constituted a pogrom.²⁵ Biafra's claims to independence were accompanied by a surge in genocide allegations, attaching first to civilian deaths at the hands of Nigerian ground and air forces, and later to Nigeria's blockade of Biafra, which exacerbated a critical food situation. The war's early months witnessed large-scale civilian casualties on all three of Biafra's fronts. Biafrans argued that deaths at Nsukka, along the northern front, in July 1967, constituted a massacre, as did incidents on the western front at Benin (September 20) and Asaba (October 7), and on the southern front at Calabar (October 19).²⁶ That those events happened under three distinct division commanders fueled arguments that they shared a common genocidal intent.

Elevating Biafran fears were unfounded worries of British military intervention alongside Nigeria. In January 1968 Biafran Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Matthew Mbu reported to UN Secretary General U Thant that he had received intelligence that "one thousand British troops" were en route to Nigeria via Cameroon to assist in the invasion of Port Harcourt, in support of "naked British imperialism."²⁷ The allegation was false, but it reinforced Biafra's narrative of a genocidal struggle. Other concerns were grounded in fact, as when Mbu telegraphed Thant in February 1968, interpreting as evidence of genocidal efforts air attacks on civilians, killings of prisoners, and mistreatment of civilians by Nigerian ground forces. He demanded UN intervention under the terms of the UN Charter and the CPPCG.²⁸ Biafra's rapidly deteriorating food situation made matters worse. By June Nigeria's blockade compounded disruptions to agriculture and fueled famine in Biafra, reinvigorating charges that

25 See Douglas Anthony, *Poison and Medicine: Ethnicity Power and Violence in a Nigerian City* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002), 119 ff.

26 Harneit-Sievers, Jones O. Ahazuem, and Sydney Emezue (eds.) *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below* (Enugu: Jemezie Associates, 1997), 75. The Asaba massacre is perhaps the best documented. See S. Elizabeth Bird and Fraser M. Ottanelli, *The Asaba Massacre: Trauma, Memory, and the Nigerian Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

27 Mbu wrote "Your Excellency, it is clear from the foregoing that the British government, by participating directly with the Nigerian military clique in their genocidal war against Biafra has abandoned all pretence of neutrality and is guilty not only of interference in the conflict between Nigeria and Biafra, but of supporting genocide which is an offence under international law." UN Series 303 Box 5 File 2 ACC 86/006, Telegram, M.T. Mbu to U Thant, 16 January, 1968.

28 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 2 ACC 86/006, Telegram, M.T. Mbu (Commissioner for Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, Republic of Biafra) to U Thant, 25 February 1968.

Nigeria intended to exterminate Biafrans. Then, on August 15, with Biafra militarily encircled, Nigerian military ruler Yakubu Gowon announced a timetable for Nigeria's "final military offensive" into Biafra, triggering fears inside the British government and elsewhere that genocide would follow.²⁹ The table was thus set for the empanelment and deployment of the three observer missions.

At the time the observers deployed, Nigerian and British needs for political cover converged with Biafrans' unmistakable need for reassurance. Biafran civilians in Federal territory shared "the belief spread among the Ibo people that the Federal forces were bent on exterminating them," which led some to remain in hiding in the bush for up to ten months before others in contact with Federal troops reassured them enough to emerge. According to the lead UN observer, "the initiative of one individual in establishing contact with the armed forces was often sufficient to reassure the rest of the villagers and bring them out of hiding," though that first step proved difficult.³⁰ Many Igbos remained in place or in hiding as Nigerian troops advanced. Among them, reluctance to make contact was unevenly distributed, with both traditional and modern elites apparently more reticent than others. Along the northern front in late 1968, neither "senior traditional leaders" nor "middle-class, educated Ibo" had come out of hiding or left their homes as Federal troops advanced.³¹ And airdropping 40,000 safe-conduct passes in a six-week period had little effect, pushing officials to consider using radio programs to reach the better educated, whom they believed to be thought leaders.³² Several months later the pattern persisted, as evidenced by the small numbers of "middle-class Igbos" in federally-controlled territory. A UN observer reported a conversation with one such couple, he a government lawyer, she a nurse, who had reluctantly crossed Federal lines after the fall of the town of Okigwi. Among other reasons, "they genuinely expected to be maltreated by the Federal troops and he thought he would probably be killed."³³ The international presence had a reas-

29 Karen E. Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra," in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*, 144. See also Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict* Vol. 2, 71.

30 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, First Interim Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on his visit to the Northern Front, 9 October 1968.

31 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, First Interim Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on his visit to the Northern Front, 9 October 1968.

32 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, United Nations Press Services, "Third Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities", 21 November, 1968.

33 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Letter, (Lagos) Erik Jensen to José Rolz-Bennett, 28 February, 1969.

suring effect, as when a UN observer met with representatives of 11 villages at Ishiagu in September 1968. The next day they returned to their homes, “accompanied by some 500 villagers, and more were still expected.”³⁴

3 The Diplomatic Context

More than a year earlier, in the war’s early weeks, Biafra was eager, even desperate, to generate international pressure to stop the coming Nigerian invasion.³⁵ The diplomatic forces arrayed against it were formidable. While the OAU, UN, and the British Commonwealth had different priorities and interests, each also had well-established ties to Nigeria, and the three observer missions reinscribed some of the tremendous advantages Nigeria enjoyed as a sovereign state. The same dynamics also make clear how widespread international recognition of Biafra was, from the earliest days of the conflict, an improbable goal.

Nowhere were Nigeria’s advantages more apparent than in the role the OAU played in shaping the diplomatic contours of the conflict. From the beginning, the general reluctance of African states to entertain secessionism played to Nigeria’s advantage. Prior to Biafran secession, Gowon had gathered African diplomats posted to Lagos and received assurances that their governments would not “give any form of recognition or support to dissident elements” opposed to his rule, assurances consistent with well-established OAU opposition to separatism.³⁶ Nonetheless, believing that unexpected (and short-lived) military successes in August 1967 bolstered its negotiating position, Biafra hoped outside pressure would push Nigeria to negotiate. Strem lau has documented Biafra’s early overtures to East African leaders, and the sympathetic responses by President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda.³⁷ The FMG countered by emphasizing that “secession was a purely

34 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, “First Interim Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on his visit to the Northern Front”, 9 October 1968.

35 Strem lau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 147.

36 Nigeria Ministry of External Affairs, “Remarks by His Excellency the Head of the Federal Military Government and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces to Heads of African Diplomatic Missions in Nigeria on the Nigerian Situation, March 1, 1967,” quoted in Strem lau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 63.

37 Nyerere’s preference for a peace negotiated by African brokers was based on his stated opposition to intervention by “the United Nations or the big powers,” and Kaunda, freshly disappointed with the ten-year Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland that had ended in

internal matter, and that if any initiative were to emerge within Africa it should come from the [OAU] and not from one or more self-appointed mediators."³⁸ The matter thus redirected from individual states to the OAU, Nigeria moved to limit the OAU's ability to act, instructing its representative at the OAU's September summit in Kinshasa "to prevent the civil war from being placed on the official agenda or in any other way from becoming an issue of formal consideration at the summit."³⁹ Biafra went unrepresented in Kinshasa, and its attempts to engineer OAU mediation failed.

The summit did, though, see the creation of an *ad hoc* Consultative Committee comprising several OAU heads of state. In November its members visited Nigeria but not Biafra, though they attempted to communicate by radio from Lagos with Biafran leader Ojukwu, who, distrustful of the OAU, did not respond. The committee's failure to facilitate dialog between Biafran and Nigeria "appeared to foreclose any future [OAU] role as intermediary between the two sides."⁴⁰

That failure also had implications for the UN, which, already reluctant to be perceived as undercutting the regional authority of the OAU, became even less likely to intercede.⁴¹ A July 1968 exchange is helpful in illuminating the UN's general disinclination to intervene in what it, like the OAU, saw as an internal Nigerian affair, or to engage publicly with arguments about genocide. At a Geneva press conference with the Secretary General, a Swiss reporter cited the CPPCG and called on the UN "to intervene in this genocide—I stress this genocide—in a more effective way." Anticipating counter-arguments that the UN could not unilaterally intrude into the affairs of a sovereign member state, the reporter pointed out that the UN had intervened in Congo's civil war, and reacted to internal matters in Rhodesia and South Africa—"in other words, they take up matters that were internal in character." Thant responded that it was up to member states to raise intervention in the General Assembly or the Security Council. Those bodies, he argued, would determine if genocide was happening. Otherwise, he said, UN intervention should be limited to humanitarian matters.⁴²

1963, "retained a deep suspicion of any federal arrangement inherited from the British." Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 82.

38 Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 86.

39 Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 89.

40 Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War* 147 and fn 18.

41 Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 95.

42 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, "Weekly News Summary" 12 July 1968.

In fact, over the course of the war, no member state raised the question of UN intervention in either the General Assembly or the Security Council. In the war's last days Thant told the press

The reason why not one single Member State out of 126 has brought this to the United Nations is very simple; because every Government and Member State knows fully well that, if it attempts to bring this question to the United Nations, the United Nations will simply refuse to discuss it. It is as simple as that.⁴³

The fact that the 41 OAU member states constituted nearly a third of General Assembly votes meant that OAU hostility to secessionism worked against the conflict making its way to onto the UN agenda.⁴⁴ Moreover, embedded in the subtext of the Secretary General's statement was the reality that open support for Nigeria by two permanent members of the Security Council—the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union—made UN intervention an unrealistic expectation, such that when, in November 1968, Ojukwu said he envisioned the UN supervising a cease fire, the possibility of the UN actually doing so was vanishingly small.⁴⁵

With direct diplomatic action by the OAU or the UN off the table, the Commonwealth Secretariat remained the body best positioned to intervene in the conflict. MacQueen describes the widely shared expectation during the period of decolonization that peaked in the 1960s that external “responsibility” for newly independent African states resided primarily with the former imperial powers: “Three decades later a UN intervention in a conflict of that sort would have been virtually automatic, but in its time the Biafran crisis was still seen in essence as something which fell within a British sphere of influence.”⁴⁶ With possibilities for a negotiated settlement lingering, Commonwealth Secretary-General Arnold Smith floated the possibility of Commonwealth involvement, in the form a force dedicated to either peacekeeping or military observation, with the goal of guaranteeing the safety of Biafrans. In the case of the former, Britain's participation would have been contingent on both Canadian financial

43 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, “Secretary General Holds Press Conference in Accra” 10 January, 1970.

44 Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 95.

45 PRO DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, “Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tomé by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968”, 9.

46 Norrie MacQueen, *Humanitarian Intervention and the United Nations* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 94.

support and the presence of Indian and Ghanaian troops.⁴⁷ But the peacekeeping option attracted only limited support, including in Nigeria, where the *New Nigerian* newspaper, created as a semi-official mouthpiece for the government of the old Northern Region, in a front-page editorial rejected the idea, arguing that doing so would subordinate Nigerian national interests to that of an "international power consortium."⁴⁸

As prospects for a negotiated settlement faded and concerns about the conduct of Nigerian forces persisted, Smith's proposal morphed into sending other observers—from foreign governments or the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)—to monitor Nigerian forces as they advanced into Biafra.⁴⁹ Matters came to a head in August 1968, after the failure of peace talks in Addis Ababa, when Nigeria dramatically declared its plans for a "final military offensive" against Biafra. Karen Smith, updating Stremmlau's conclusion that Nigeria's invitation to outside observers was a gesture of good faith to Britain, describes a meeting between Commonwealth Secretary George Thompson and Nigerian Information Commissioner Anthony Enahoro the day after the declaration. Critically, Thompson told Enahoro that continued British support for Nigeria's offensive was contingent on Nigeria inviting outside observers to accompany troops.

The presence of observers was intended to protect Britain—primarily for a domestic audience—against accusations that it was supporting "massacres" of Biafrans. The government of Prime Minister Harold Wilson supported British ascension to the CPPCG, but British opinion on the matter was divided and the Wilson government was particularly sensitive to criticism that its diplomatic and material support for Nigeria violated the Convention. Moreover, though as a non-signatory, the UK was not subject to the legal requirements of the CPPCG, it was nonetheless sensitive to accusations of violating the *social* norm against supporting genocide.⁵⁰ Affirmations from presumably impartial observers that genocide was not occurring, the Wilson government believed, would protect it against any such allegations.

While Nigeria had signaled in May at abortive peace talks in Kampala that it would consider hosting observers, there was resistance inside the FMG from those who argued that accepting observers would constitute an erosion of

47 Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra," in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*, 142.

48 Editorial, *New Nigerian*, June 14 1968, quoted in U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) RG58, Box 1605, telegram, Stokes (Kaduna) to Secretary of State, June 14, 1968.

49 Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra," 143.

50 Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra," 145. See also Stremmlau, 266–267.

Nigeria's sovereignty.⁵¹ And selecting observers was no simple matter. Nigeria objected to participation by the ICRC, which it argued was "too attentive to the Biafran authorities and their propaganda."⁵² With ICRC observers untenable, the idea arose to deploy observers from individual countries, and on September 6 1968, after the conversation between Enahoro and Arnold Smith, the FMG invited the UN Secretary General, the OAU, and the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland, and Sweden to send observers. According to Karen Smith, "Canada had been involved in discussions on the Commonwealth force; Sweden was considered a sympathetic country; Poland was—like the rest of the Soviet bloc—virulently anti-secessionist."⁵³ The observers were offered a two-month mandate to "visit all war affected areas and newly liberated areas, on the Federal-controlled side, to witness the conduct of Federal troops—re charges of genocide, etc." and to see that "there is no intentional or planned systematic and wanton destruction of civilian lives or their property in the war zone."⁵⁴ The parties invited accepted. The four-country international team arrived in Lagos on September 22; a small contingent from OAU member states Algeria and Ethiopia followed a few weeks later, and a UN team already on the ground expanded its mandate.

4 The Observer Missions

The four-country team was the largest of the three delegations, peaking at 11 members during its first two months. Its first iteration had four members from the UK, three from Poland, and two each from Canada and Sweden. A command-level military officer led each delegation, joined by lower-ranking officers and, in the Polish delegation, a diplomat.⁵⁵ The country observers

51 de St. Jorre, *Brothers' War*, 283.

52 Marie-Luce Desgrandchamps, "Dealing with 'Genocide': The ICRC and the UN During the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967–1970," in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*, 247. In March 1968 the ICRC contacted the UN Commission on Human Rights regarding abuses of civilians. Then, on the heels of allegations that troops targeted prominent Igbo civilians when Nigerian forces captured Ikot Ekpene in April 1968, the ICRC circulated reports that soldiers massacred several hundred wounded hospital patients when Nigeria captured Port Harcourt in May. See 242 and 245.

53 Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra," in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*, 153–154n.

54 Nigerian Ministry of External Affairs letter of invitation, quoted in UN Press Services, 17 January 1969 "Fourth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities." UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006.

55 The original observers were: Major General William A. Milroy and Lieutenant Colonel

brought small support staffs and had access to their respective diplomatic missions in Lagos. Over time, lower-ranking observers took on increasing levels of responsibility. In their 15 months, the country delegations experienced regular turnover, with most members remaining in country for several months. While the four delegation heads rotated the formal role of chairman on a weekly basis, *de facto* leadership fell to the British delegation heads, first General Henry Alexander, the former military chief of staff to Kwame Nkrumah, and later his successors Brigadier Bernard Fergusson and Colonel Douglas Cairns.⁵⁶

It is important to note that serious questions emerged about the objectivity of several members of the British delegations. Critics noted that Alexander, who served for six weeks, held his observer position despite an apparent conflict of interest, by virtue of his position as the managing director of an oil-handling company with strong ties to Shell, a major player in Nigeria's oil sector.⁵⁷ And Karen Smith has detailed other problems, the most serious of which centered on Major Ian Walsworth-Bell, who served during 1969 and was withdrawn by the Foreign Office, ostensibly because of excessive contact with Nigerian officers. He later claimed to have been instructed by the British government to gather intelligence about Russian arm shipments and to advise Nigerian forces on how to disable Biafra's main airstrip at Uli. Press accounts, tribunal testimony, and personal statements detail how Walsworth-Bell—ostensibly a disinterested observer—gave military advice to British diplomats in Lagos. And in at least one instance he reported communicating security concerns directly to Nigerian authorities.⁵⁸ Accounts differed as to on whose authority Walsworth-Bell performed military roles incompatible with his purported status as a "neutral" or "impartial" observer, but all concerned accepted that he had. Another case involved potentially inappropriate communication between the British High Commission in Lagos and members of the country team.⁵⁹

E.B.M. Pinnington from Canada; Colonel Alfons Olkiewicz, Lieutenant Michal Byezy, and civilian Tadeusz Kumanek from Poland; Major General Arthur Raab and Lieutenant Colonel Carl Areskoug from Sweden; and Major General Henry T. Alexander, Lieutenant Colonel Douglas Cairns, and Major W.D. Arbuthnott from the UK, briefly assisted by a staff sergeant.

56 Suzanne Cronje, *The World and Nigeria: The Diplomatic History of the Biafran War, 1967–1970* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), 83–84.

57 See Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 100. Alexander's business interests were ostensibly the reason for his return to Nigeria in December 1968, after his retirement from observer duties.

58 Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 107.

59 Smith, "The UK and 'Genocide' in Biafra," in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide*, 149, and Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 103–104.

What connected them was their potential to validate Biafran concerns that British observers were, in fact, supporting Nigerian military goals.

Such problems appeared to have done little to disrupt the activities of the observers. When in Lagos, the country team would meet each evening, often joined by UN and OAU observers. The Secretary General's representative on Humanitarian Activities, Nils-Goran Gussing, who was already in Nigeria, took on the additional responsibility of being the SG's civilian observer of military operations, though the UN often emphasized that Gussing, metaphorically speaking, wore two hats since he retained his charged to monitor civilians, assess relief needs, and make suggestions regarding the distribution of relief supplies.⁶⁰ In practice, however, Gussing's role observing military operations appears to have foreclosed opportunities for him to enter Biafra territory—the heart of “the war zone”—to make contact with Biafran civilians. For the duration of the conflict his humanitarian activities appear to have been limited to “straightening out misunderstandings in particular between the FMG and the ICRC.”⁶¹

The first months of the observer missions were the most critical, since the November 1968 proclamation by the country team that genocide was not occurring helped to mute those concerns. In their first four months as military observers, Gussing and his team made a combined 14 visits to the three fronts, sometimes alone, sometimes with OAU and/or country observers.⁶² Gussing had initially arrived in Lagos on August 17 to begin his work on humanitarian matters.⁶³ Unlike the country and OAU observers, Gussing and his team—two assistants and two secretaries—were civilians and operated without embassy support. One member was a legal officer; he and other members of the delegation were often consulted by other observers and the Nigerian government

60 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, Addendum to press briefing statement, “Background information only for Mr. Powell” 23 June 1970.

61 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969. See also Desgrandchamps, “Dealing with ‘Genocide’”.

62 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, 17 January 1969 “Fourth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities.”

63 An experienced diplomat with extensive field experience, he had been seconded from the Swedish government to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1958, then worked closely with the League of Red Cross Societies in Tunisia and overseen the reorganization and closing of refugee camps in Congo. He had also represented the Secretary General after Thailand and Cambodia suspended diplomatic relations, and following the Six-Day War he had worked on Security Council resolutions on the protection of civilians and treatment of prisoners before returning to a UNHCR posting in Greece later in 1967. UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, press release “Secretary-General Appoints Nils-Goran Gussing as Representative for Nigeria”, 1 August 1968.

"on questions pertaining to the Geneva Conventions relating to Civilians and to Prisoners of War and the UN Convention on Genocide, etc."⁶⁴

While the country team had been created to reassure an international audience in the UK and elsewhere, the FMG put special stock in the UN mission. Where the country observers, per the terms of their invitation, reported formally only to the governments of Nigeria and their home countries, the UN team answered to the Secretary General, who in turn reported to all UN member states. Six months after its empanelment, Gussing reported to the Secretary General that

UN observer reports, because of the stature of the organization and the wide distribution they received, were far more important to the FMG than the reports of the country observers team and those of the OAU.⁶⁵

Any particular appreciation for the UN reports most likely reflected the value of UN concurrence with the findings of the country and OAU observers, since it was more difficult for critics to accuse the UN of bias than the others.

The third leg of the tripod, the OAU mission, was the least active of the three, and received the least international attention. The OAU resented the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat in launching the country observer mission, which it saw as "intrusion" into what OAU member states mostly agreed was an African matter.⁶⁶ Its small delegation was headed by Brigadier Generals Negga Teghegn of Ethiopia and Sliman Hoffman of Algeria, the *de-facto* leader. There was little doubt that the OAU delegation was predisposed to be sympathetic to Nigeria: Ethiopia faced secessionist pressures of its own, and stood accused in some quarters of genocide against the Eritrean Liberation Movement; and Hoffman was on the record saying that "Algeria will always stand for the unity of Nigeria."⁶⁷

The observers' original two-month mandate was consistent with Nigeria's optimistic "final military offensive" projection, and as late as the end of November 1968 it was unclear what choice the FMG would make regarding extending

64 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969. Cronje noted at the time that the country observers lacked the "means of judging in legal terms what constituted genocide, and it was within their terms of reference to pronounce on this issue." Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 84.

65 It appears that the comments were made by General Gowon and/or Commissioner for External Affairs Dr. Okoi Arikpo. UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

66 Stremlau, *International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 181.

67 Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 90.

the country team. That changed when the team's first major report stated categorically that it found no evidence of genocide, to the delight of both London and Lagos.⁶⁸ In the House of Commons, Stewart announced that "the story about genocide has been proved beyond doubt to be completely false."⁶⁹ And in Nigeria, Gowon expressed satisfaction "that the team had written its reports without any fear of contradiction." So it came as little surprise when the FMG renewed the observers' invitations.

After the country observers issued their "no genocide" finding—by any reasonable measure a success for the FMG—Nigeria weighed the relative merits of extending the observer presence or ending it. Gussing wrote,

There are undoubtedly conflicting views in Nigeria—those who feel that observers impede military activity or imply criticism of Nigeria merely by their continued presence, and on the other hand those who feel world opinion has been favourably affected by Observer reports and that discontinuation could easily be misconstrued by world press and opinion, especially during critical final stages of war.⁷⁰

Nigerian Permanent Secretary for Defence Alhaji Yusuf Gobir invited input from observers on the question of their renewal. Three possibilities were on the table: maintaining the status quo, with observers continuing to make regular visits to the fronts; having the observers scale back their activities to adopt a more reactive stance in which they would deploy only in response to particular allegations; or leaving a skeleton team in place with other members on standby "in readiness for recall either in the event of intensified fighting or at the end of hostilities."⁷¹ OAU representative Hoffman adopted the stance that the country observers' mandate had been satisfied and should not be renewed. He favored sending them home, subject to recall. In contrast, the UN and OAU teams, as representatives of organizations with broader mandates, should remain.⁷² Gussing agreed that the UN mission should continue for as long as the war lasted, then be reassessed.

In practice, the FMG decided that both the country and UN observers would remain in place and it was Hoffman and Teghegn who departed after filing their

68 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett 23 November 1968.

69 *UK House of Commons Official Report*, 18 November 1968, cited in Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 83.

70 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett 23 November 1968.

71 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett 23 November 1968.

72 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett 23 November 1968.

fourth report in December 1968, explaining to Gussing that "the objective of their mission had for the moment been accomplished." Each left behind aids whom Gussing argued were too junior to be taken seriously by Nigerian officials or other observers, writing that "the OAU is neglecting the observer operation," despite the important roles it was expected to play in resolving the crisis and in affecting the behavior of Federal troops and reassuring civilians.⁷³ Both Hoffman and Teghegn, themselves subject to "instant recall," participated in several subsequent operations.⁷⁴

The short-term extension agreements Nigeria initially proposed suited the United Nations. The thinking in New York was that the UN was politically better off agreeing to a series of successive requests than accepting an open-ended arrangement. As a higher-up explained to Gussing, "the situation at your end being as fluid and emotional as it is, it seems safer to have on hand recent and unequivocal requests from FMG for the mission's extension." Short-term agreements also simplified the eventual end of the mission by allowing either party to simply not renew an expiring agreement, "thus avoiding—to the largest extent possible—unnecessary speculation regarding the reasons for the mission's termination."⁷⁵

5 Fieldwork

All told, the observer missions spent 15 months in the field, until the war's end in January 1970, during which time Nigeria emphasized their role in restoring confidence among Biafran civilians in captured territory. From their arrival, Gowon promised that observers would be deployed in captured territory "to accelerate the return of confidence" to the local population.⁷⁶ After the November 1968 "no genocide" declaration, the attention of the observers was increasingly focused on that goal, though genocide concerns continued to color their interactions with Biafrans in Nigerian territory. Gussing wrote that even formally educated Biafrans, whom he apparently expected to think otherwise, "genuinely believed that they were threatened with extermination." His belief

73 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

74 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter Gussing (Lagos) to Rolz-Bennett (New York), 18 January 1969.

75 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Letter, Rolz-Bennett to Gussing, 14 January 69.

76 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Gowon briefing "Programme for Peaceful Re-Integration of Ibos" 23 September 1968.

that those fears reflected Biafran propaganda did little to reduce the practical import of addressing them.⁷⁷

UN and OAU colleagues frequently accompanied the country observers on visits to the three fronts. In a confidential report to Thant, Gussing wrote that the various observers worked well together. In his words, "the special position of the UN and OAU teams was fully understood by the country observers." Each of the three teams issued its own reports but otherwise "cooperated very closely as far as travel plans and other common problems were concerned."⁷⁸ On other occasions Gussing did not distinguish between the observer missions, referring instead to a single observer group.

Age and rank affected the relationships between the country observers and Nigerian commanders. As observers cycled through, there was a general trend toward less high-ranking officers. The first British and Canadian representatives, for example, were both major generals, each followed by a brigadier, and the third British representative was a colonel. Still, as Gussing noted, "[t]he fact that the country observers were very high ranking senior officers certainly caused some embarrassment to the Nigerian Field Commanders." The officer corps of newly independent Nigeria had been relatively young even before the coups of 1966 depleted its ranks. When observers arrived, one of Nigeria's three division commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Muhammad Shuwa, was only 29, the other two little older. And the 33-year-old head of state, Yakubu Gowon, who held the rank of general, had assumed that office in 1966 as a lieutenant colonel. British General Alexander, by contrast, was 57. Gussing noted that, among the observers, only OAU observer Hoffman from Algeria, who was in his mid-40s, appeared sensitive to the discomfort of Nigerian commanders. Unlike the other foreign officers, Hoffman wore mufti in the field, which eased interactions with both Nigeria's young officers and civilians.⁷⁹

In their various configurations the observers visited camps for displaced people, hospitals, orphanages, and food distribution and administrative centers, sometimes accompanied by members of the press. They also interviewed POWs and civilian prisoners, and made modest interventions on behalf of both. In one instance, they reported interviewing three Biafran officers, 42

77 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter Gussing to Rolz-Bennett, 12 October 1968.

78 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969; UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, United Nations Press Services, "Third Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities", 21 November, 1968.

79 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

enlisted soldiers, and a journalist who had recently surrendered to Nigeria's Third Marine Commando division. In another, observers visited prisoners of war in Lagos and elsewhere, including three female POWs at the women's prison at Kiri-Kiri in Apapa. The number of male prisoners in the men's wing at Kirikiri and at Ikoyi prison was much greater, doubling to 623 in the months between the team's first and second visits in late 1968 and early 1969. The observers noted that superintendents untrained in the handling of military prisoners had comingled civilian and military populations, and inappropriately applied civilian rules to POWs.⁸⁰ A separate report noted extreme overcrowding, inadequate clothing and medical attention, and poor sleeping facilities.⁸¹ The team concluded that for Nigeria to comply with the Geneva Convention, the prisoners would have to be moved to a separate military-run installation where they could move around freely, with access to exercise facilities. The report also charged Nigeria with creating a screening organization with the power to release POWs who no longer needed confinement, and those misclassified as POWs. Authorities responded by improving conditions for POWs, but the team reported lingering concerns about Geneva Convention compliance.⁸² Then, less than four months later another UN observer, Erik Jensen, noted that the Kirikiri and Ikoyi POWs were generally physically fit, were receiving medical visits twice a week and monthly Red Cross visits, and had access to newspapers and mail service. The improvements, Jensen concluded, illustrated the impact of observer reports. "There is no doubt," he wrote, "that the FMG take note of appropriate criticism."⁸³ And by May the FMG had restored a disused prison in Lagos to house POWs under military supervision separate from civilian prisoners and detainees.⁸⁴

The visits to the civilian and POW camps offer windows on conditions there, as when Gussing and Canadian General William Milroy spoke with civilian detainees in Port Harcourt in January. The main object of their visit had been

80 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Observer Team to Nigeria, Report on Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 24 November 1968–13 January 1969 (20 January, 1969).

81 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, 17 January 1969 "Fourth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities."

82 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Observer Team to Nigeria, Report on Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 24 November 1968–13 January 1969 (20 January, 1969).

83 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Letter, Jensen to Rolz-Bennett, 10 April 1969.

84 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services "Fifth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities" 16 May, 1969.

the 650 Igbo civilians housed in a prison there. While adult male detainees were confined to the camp, soldiers allowed women detainees, under guard, to collect yams and other foodstuffs from nearby fields. A former teacher supervised the camp, and another teacher was the spokesperson for the detainees, though there was no school for the children. The observers noted that a shell had landed in the camp, wounding seven, some of whom later died.⁸⁵ Subsequent reports detailed familiar concerns regarding the treatment of POWs and displaced people, and about the comingling of teenage prisoners with adults, but acknowledged the “formidable task for the provision of suitable accommodation commensurate with security.”⁸⁶

Air Force operations present an example where the activities of observers yielded less ambiguous results. Unlike land operations, the immediate aftermath of which the observers could sometimes witness, air strikes usually occurred far behind Biafran lines. Biafran accounts and those by journalists and other witnesses detailed attacks on civilian targets, stories that fueled Biafran genocide accusations. Kirk-Greene noted that, in the absence of observers operating in Biafra, “reports from established journalists began to raise unpleasant thoughts that, for all the sincerity of those observers on the total absence of any genocidal plan among the military units, the Nigerian Air Force might be playing a part, however unwittingly, in eroding this truth through their wanton bombing of civilian targets.”⁸⁷

In late 1968, after the ICRC filed a protest with Nigeria concerning a lethal bomb and machine gun attack on a Red Cross hospital at Awo-Ommama, the country observers met with the Chief of the Nigerian Air Force. In that meeting the Air Force disputed ICRC arguments that the hospital buildings were “distant from any military objective” despite acknowledging that the hospital was six miles from a Biafran airstrip. In the Nigerian account, the presence of anti-aircraft weapons, troops, vehicles, supplies, and communications and air traffic equipment, meant “the area surrounding the airstrip is as much a target as the airstrip itself.” But the country observer report also reveals some hedging on the part of Nigerian authorities.

85 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Field Notes: Field Trip to Port Harcourt (3rd Division) Undertaken by General Milroy, Canada, and Mr. Gussing 20–21 January 1969. They found two POWs there, one of whom reported being abused by the camp commander. The other, a Biafran conscript, reported being sent into battle without eating for several days before his capture.

86 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 8 Country Team Reports, “Report on the Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 28 June to 30 September 1969”, (Lagos, 3 October 1969), 5–6.

87 Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict*, Vol. 2, 102.

[W]hile not admitting the allegation, the authorities did state that the hospital might have been hit accidentally owing to the speed of the aircraft together with the evasive action required to avoid anti-aircraft fire. From the information provided the Observers were unable to come to any precise conclusion regarding the allegation.⁸⁸

The second and third major country team reports, published in January and March 1969, were also inconclusive on the matter, with the latter stating that it was impossible to falsify allegations and repeating promises by the Air Force commander in a follow-up meeting that non-military targets were strictly off-limits.⁸⁹

By April the country observers were meeting with Air Force operational commanders, and were allowed to examine the data and methods the Air Force used to select targets and to reconnoiter them before and after attacks; they were also able to observe pilot briefings. These actions, the observers argued, appeared to have had a "restraining effect" on the Air Force.⁹⁰ Other sources concurred, as when the head of the Catholic mission at Bende speculated to British Labour staffer McNally that Nigeria had reduced attacks on civilian centers for the benefit of the country observers.⁹¹ And in April 1969 the UN noted improvements in discipline and accuracy, and reported no additional accusations of air attacks on civilian targets despite several reports of strikes on military ones.⁹²

The Awo-Ommama hospital attack was one of three incidents covered in their first report where the country observers responded to international concerns about the conduct of Federal troops, yet it was not that incident that the observers described as potentially reflecting excesses by Nigerian forces. The team also investigated separate incidents at Urua Iyanga and Okigwi. In the first

88 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, Observer Team to Nigeria, "Report on Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 24 November 1968–13 January 1969", (20 January, 1969).

89 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 8 Country Team Reports, "Report on the Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 14 January 1969–6 March 1969", (Lagos, 7 March 1969), 8.

90 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 8 Country Team Reports, "Report on the Activities of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom During the Period 7 March 1969–30 April 1969", (Lagos, 5 May 1969), 6.

91 UK DO 186 / Eastern Nigeria, "Report of the Visit to Biafra and San Tomé by T. McNally, 7–16 November, 1968", 10. Accounts by Rev. Fr. R. Mahar, Catholic Mission, Bende and Bishop of Owerri Joseph B. Whelan, appear in an appendix, 2–4.

92 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69–Feb 70, Letter, Jensen to Rolz-Bennett, 10 April 1969.

case, which occurred in October 1968 along the southern front, the team investigated reports of misconduct associated with the deaths of civilians, many internally displaced Biafrans, but found no evidence of massacre. Indeed, the first interim report found no evidence of the “wanton destruction of life outside the heat of battle [...] with the possible exception of the Okigwi incident.” The events at Okigwi warranting the possible exception, which occurred along the northern front on September 30, were distinctive in that their victims were Europeans rather than Biafrans.⁹³

The Okigwi incident was well-reported at the time, and the facts on the ground were not in dispute: fire from Federal soldiers in a Red Cross compound killed a British official of the World Council of Churches, his wife, and two European representatives of the ICRC. Three country observers investigated, accompanied by UN assistant D.W. Caulfield. They visited the site, then behind Nigerian lines, interviewing Nigerian commanders and Swedish and Yugoslavian survivors. Caulfield determined that Federal soldiers “deliberately and without provocation by the persons concerned shot and killed” four and wounded three, that several rounds were fired at close range, and that the Nigerian officer in command was present for the shooting “but was either unwilling or unable to prevent it.”

The most salient detail in the investigation was that Red Cross compound had been clearly marked. Though located in a tactically important position between Nigerian and Biafran lines, its markings should have protected it and its occupants. Moreover, Caulfield reported, the victims “were easily recognizable either by the ICRC insignia on their shirts, or by the simple red cross worn by the w.c.c. couple.” While contemporaneous accounts stated that the Nigerian officer responsible could not be identified, Caulfield reported that other Nigerian officers, including the acting battalion commander, arrived after the shooting and had acted to protect the survivors as the battle continued.⁹⁴ US diplomats concluded that the killings were “unprovoked and inexcusable” based in part on their determination that at least one officer, including a company commander, was withholding information.⁹⁵ Left unresolved were concerns about the role of the Nigerian field commander, or of the willingness of

93 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, 17 January 1969 “Fourth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities.”

94 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, “Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on an Incident at Okigwi,” 8 October 1968. Canadian Observer Milroy did not participate.

95 NARA RG59 Box 1882, POL 27–29 Biafra-Nigeria, telegram, US Ambassador (Lagos) to Secretary of State, October 5 1968.

observers to implicate Nigerian soldiers in attacks on Europeans while appearing to apply less scrutiny to incidents involving Biafrans. As Cronje noted after the war, "few other 'incidents' of this sort" that involved only Biafrans received such attention. "In this and other conflicts," she concluded, "European lives counted more in world opinion than African lives."⁹⁶

6 Contemporary Criticism

Criticism of the observer missions, where it occurred, was directed primarily at the country team, and took several forms. Its early reports, which rejected genocide claims, generated relief in Lagos and London, but also skepticism. The country observers' first provisional statement, dated October 2 1968, was based solely on visits to Biafra's northern front, just one of three operational areas. They wrote that there was "no evidence of any intent by the Federal troops to destroy the Ibo people or their property, and the use of the term genocide is in no way justified."⁹⁷ While Nigeria and Britain welcomed the declaration, Gussing commented that "a number of Ambassadors" in Lagos were critical of the statement, "which they consider to have been much too sweeping and categorical." But he himself was less critical, noting that the report differed little in substance from reports he himself had filed.⁹⁸

The country observers' first major report, issued a month later, based on visits to the three fronts, was more forceful, drawing on the CPPCG definition to proclaim that no genocide was occurring.⁹⁹ Among the skeptics was Lord Lytton, who objected to the absence of fieldwork in Biafra, writing to the Foreign Secretary that the observers "were content with second best evidence: They took evidence only from those who denied a proposition and none at all from those who affirmed it." He also took issue with the CPPCG itself, which identifies a number of acts that potentially constitute genocide, but also requires evidence that the accused intended to commit genocide. Lytton didn't contest

96 Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 86.

97 "First Report by International Observer Team," 2 October, 1968. Reproduced in Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict*, Vol. 2, 331.

98 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter Gussing to Rolz-Bennett, 12 October 1968, referencing UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, First Interim Report by the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities on his visit to the Northern Front, 9 October 1968.

99 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 8 (Country Team Observer Reports), Observer Team to Nigeria, *Report on Activities During the Period 24 September to 23 November 1968*, typescript. The report paraphrased the CPPCG definition as "the committing of acts with the intent to destroy—wholly or in part—a national, ethnic, racial or religious group as such." (20).

the team's broad conclusion that genocide, as defined by the CPPGC, was not occurring. He argued instead that "in light of the inappropriate definitions the value of the verdict is not very significant," that the Convention's emphasis on intent focused the observers' attention on orders and codes of conduct "rather than on infringements of both."¹⁰⁰

Critics also seized on what they saw as an inappropriately close relationship between the observers and the FMG that compromised the former's ability to make impartial assessments. Not only did members of all three observer missions travel to and from the fronts with Nigerian military units, but, per the terms of the original agreement, Nigeria also acted as host, providing lodging and board, as well as a headquarters for the observers at a Lagos hotel.¹⁰¹ The deck was stacked against Biafra in other ways as well. Journalist Suzanne Cronje noted that having an observer from the UK, Nigeria's primary military and diplomatic ally, "immediately detracted from any pretence to non-partisanship." Compounding the politics of representation was the absence of observers from any country openly sympathetic to Biafra. Britain, Cronje noted, had no intention of seeking Biafran reaction to the selection of observers. She argued that "the team should have included an equal number of Biafra's backers if its role, as [British Foreign Secretary] Michael Stewart claimed, was to reassure the [Igbo] people about the intentions of the Federal Government." A more balanced team, Cronje wrote, would have included representatives from Tanzania and the Ivory Coast, two of the handful of countries to officially recognize Biafra, alongside "international jurists and professionals experienced in the investigation of crime and the recording of evidence, not to speak of social workers, medical men and people capable of telling an Ibo from a non-Ibo."¹⁰² Nigeria was aware of such concerns, but did not envision expanding representation until after the war ended, and even then did not.¹⁰³

While the relationship between the observers and the FMG appears to have been generally amiable, it had its rough patches. Gussing reported that in some cases he and country observers had not been permitted to visit detained

100 PRO FC065/249 "Britain/Biafra Association, Part A," "Commentary on the Report of the Observer Team to Nigeria (22 September–23 November 1968)," Noel (Earl of) Lytton to Lord Shepherd, FCO, January 16, 1969, 1–2.

101 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9, letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett 23 November 1968.

102 Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 83–84. Other countries that recognized Biafra included Zambia, Haiti, and Gabon.

103 According to Gussing, FMG representatives communicated to him that it considered adding additional countries as part of an effort to "provide a security guarantee for the Ibos" after the war ended, but no such action followed. UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1 (Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69–Feb 70), report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

civilians, ostensibly because of security concerns.¹⁰⁴ And in another incident, Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, then commander of Nigeria's Third Marine Commando division, refused to receive country observers along the southern front on February 17 1969, only to welcome the UN observers a few days later.¹⁰⁵ British observer Fergusson, then the acting chair of the team, filed a protest with the Nigerian permanent secretary for defense.¹⁰⁶ According to the FMG, in refusing access to the front, Adekunle had followed orders reflecting FMG concerns for the safety of the observers in the face of a Biafran counterattack. While the Swedish observer considered withdrawing from the mission in protest, the matter was quickly clarified and appears to have been resolved in a meeting between top defense officials and the observers.¹⁰⁷

Most importantly, the critical question of observer access to Biafra persisted. Gussing had quickly recognized that not operating inside Biafra-held territory constituted a major flaw in the broader observer mission. At the same time, as an experienced diplomat, he also accepted why the country team did not protest the constraints. First and foremost was the fact that the FMG's invitation had extended only to areas that were both affected by the conflict and under Federal control. The observers' task was, in Gussing's words, "to see for themselves whether the accusations of Genocide and of wanton destruction of life and property from the side of the Federal troops were true." He accepted that limiting their movement would also constrain their ability to gather dispositive evidence, since "[t]hese signs if any would obviously be found in the reoccupied areas, and since the observers can hardly accompany the fighting troops when they advance, they have to follow in their wake."¹⁰⁸

A few months earlier, when still operating solely as the SG's special representative for humanitarian affairs, Gussing had written of his desire to visit Biafran territory, a goal endorsed by Secretary General U Thant. The exchange came after a Biafran official, Egbert Nwogu, expressed to a Swedish relief official his disappointment at what he saw as anti-Biafra bias on Gussing's part, evidenced by his failure to visit Biafra in his humanitarian capacity. At the time of the mes-

104 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, UN Press Services, 17 January 1969 "Fourth Interim Report by Representative of Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities."

105 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

106 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9 (Country Team Observer Reports), Letter, Bernard Fergusson to Alhaji Yusufu Gobir (Permanent Secretary, Defence), 21 February 1969.

107 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 9 (Country Team Observer Reports), Letters and text of observer protest, (Lagos) Erik Jensen to José Rolz-Bennett, 21 and 28 February 1969.

108 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

sage, Gussing had been appointed to his observer role but had not yet deployed. In that liminal moment, Gussing alluded to the political complications of a UN representative visiting Biafra as an observer of Nigerian forces.

[I]t is clearly essential that I have some indication beforehand that my mission would be welcome in Biafra. This is difficult to arrange here. And there is the additional danger that an official visit might be exploited as tantamount to UN recognition.¹⁰⁹

Gussing appears to have operated from the misapprehension that Biafran officials did not welcome military observers, when in fact they did. In March 1969 he wrote to Thant that Biafran officials “have never asked the observers to go there, nor have they to my knowledge made any attempt to invite other observers e.g. from the four African States which have recognised ‘Biafra’ or from France.” Gussing imagined that if a second set of observers from countries friendly to Biafra operated inside Biafra, “some sort of contact between the two observer groups might have been established thus making it possible to get a fuller picture of the situation on both sides of the fronts.”¹¹⁰

Critically, Gussing was wrong about Biafra not inviting observers. In de St. Jorre’s unattributed account the country team “refused a Biafran invitation because this would have been unacceptable to the Nigerians.”¹¹¹ That invitation had come in October 1968, during the early weeks of their mission. In a radio address transcribed by British authorities, Ojukwu had wondered “how a team of about ten men can observe, all at the same time, the activities of army of over 80,000 men operating from the air, sea and land in an area of 30,000 square miles,” or “how the report of observers whose itinerary has been carefully worked out and strictly controlled by their interested hosts can either be factual or convincing.” Ojukwu likened Nigeria to a criminal who sanitized a crime scene before witnesses arrived. The remedy for those shortcomings was for the observers to operate inside Biafra.

I hardly need to emphasise that if your intention is to observe the genocide being committed against our people, the obvious place to visit is Biafra. This will not only ensure that the observers are near enough to the Nigerian forward lines, where most of the acts of genocide are committed

109 UN Series 370 Box 36 File 3 ACC 96/120, Letter, Gussing to Rolz-Bennett, 7 September 1968.

110 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, Report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

111 de St. Jorre, *Brothers’ War*, 284.

as they advance into our territory, but will also offer them the opportunity of seeing where the Nigerian bombs and rockets fall. Besides, the observers, free to visit at all times any place in Biafra, will be in a position to interview Biafran victims and non-Biafran witnesses of the Nigerian genocide.¹¹²

Cronje noted that Shepherd had suggested that Okukwu "get in touch with the Nigerian Government or the Observer Team in Lagos if he wanted any extension of their activities to Biafra."¹¹³ Believing that Biafra had not extended invitations to Nigeria-based observers appears to have simplified for Gussing a potentially complex issue, since an invitation to observers to enter Biafran territory or travel there on their own initiative, "would certainly pose many difficulties of legal and formal nature not only for the UN, but also for the countries involved which have not recognised 'Biafra.'"¹¹⁴

7 The End of the War

The observer missions maintained a generally steady trajectory for the duration of the conflict. With the genocide question effectively contained, besides updates on Air Force activities mentioned above, later reports from UN and country observers focused mainly on conditions in refugee camps, rehabilitation efforts by Nigerian troops, prisoners of war, and civilian infrastructure. Nonetheless, as the conflict neared its end, international concerns about genocide resurged. A few days before Biafra's surrender, in a January 11 benediction, Pope Paul worried about "a kind of genocide" and "possible reprisals and massacres against defenseless people in Biafra," a day later urging international intervention to avoid "a yet more cruel epilogue of horror"; the French Foreign Minister called for international protection of Igbo civilians against massacres by federal troops; and demonstrators called for international peace-keepers.¹¹⁵

Biafra's surrender on January 15, 1970 meant that all of its former territory fell under Federal control and was thereby accessible to observers. At that point,

112 PRO DO 186 / 1 Eastern Nigeria / Biafra / ME / 2892 / B / 3 radio transcripts, "Ojukwu's Invitation to Foreign Observer Team to Visit Biafra," Biafran radio in English, 4 October 1968.

113 Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 85.

114 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1, Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70, report, Gussing to Thant, 1 March 1969.

115 Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War*, 181.

eight country observers, accompanied by the UN representative and an aid—all men—quickly toured operational areas. Those initial visits unfolded amid transportation shortages, and the *Washington Post* reported that the country observers “admitted, under questioning” that they “had spent less than a day observing conditions in newly captured areas before hurrying back to Lagos.”¹¹⁶

Their description of the conduct of Nigerian troops to be “as good as that of any army during and after a war,” while in keeping with the tenor of official Nigerian rhetoric, seems strained in hindsight. For example, in their final report the country observers resorted to euphemism to describe sexual coercion, accepting that “where girls seen with Federal troops were questioned, the term ‘enforced marriage’ proved to be more appropriate.”¹¹⁷ Emezue’s description, based on detailed interviews in subsequent years, is clearer. It was during the aftermath of the war that sexual violence by Nigerian soldiers against women in the war area peaked.

Nigerian soldiers freely took away young women who became their “wives” instantly. A woman approached by a soldiers scarcely had a choice. Husbands and parents of abducted women hardly protested openly. They accepted that the situation as a consequence of Biafra’s loss of the war. Those who did otherwise paid dearly for it.¹¹⁸

Emezue also makes clear that where some unions between Nigerian soldiers and former Biafran women were not only consensual, but the result of women’s initiative, they were often adaptive responses to severe conditions, reflecting soldiers’ ability to steal and redistribute Igbo property, something that had gone on during the war but expanded in its immediate aftermath.¹¹⁹

The UN also sent mixed messages about the conduct of the military after surrender. During his brief visit to Lagos that same week UN Secretary General Thant decided against visiting those same areas after accepting assurances that there was “no hint, not even the slightest remotest evidence of any violence or mistreatment of the civilian population.”¹²⁰ But several days

116 Jim Hoagland, *Washington Post*, “Biafran Death, Poverty Alarm U.N. Observer”, 20 January, 1970.

117 UN Series 98 Box 3 File 8, Observer Team to Nigeria, “Report and Findings of the Representatives of Canada, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom for the Period 1 October 1969 to 31 January 1970,” 12 February 1970, p. 3.

118 Sydney Emezue, “Women and the War” in Axel Harneit-Sievers, *et al*, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War* (Enugu: Jemezie Associates, 1997), 154.

119 Emezue, “Women and the War,” 149–150, 153.

120 Hoagland, “Biafran Death, Poverty Alarm U.N. Observer”.

later Said Udin Khan, who had replaced Gussing as Thant's representative in April 1969, filed a report that included allegations of looting and rape by Nigerian troops. Khan also noted decisive reactions, including summary executions, by their officers, which suggests that at least some of the allegations had merit.¹²¹

In any case, with the genocide question that had warranted their deployment rendered moot, Nigeria's appetite for observers waned. The FMG's Communications Commissioner, Aminu Kano, told reporters that he did not believe Khan's reports and called for international observers to leave. "The observers have outlived their useful purpose. They should pack up and go. Only Nigerians own Nigeria, and not anyone else outside Nigeria."¹²² The country observers remained through the end of January, officially disbanding on January 30, the same day that the United Kingdom formally acceded to the CPPCG. Khan remained in place as the Secretary General's representative until the end of May, continuing to report mainly on rehabilitation efforts, but also on misconduct, including sexual misconduct, by Nigerian troops.¹²³

8 Conclusion

The broader military observer presence in the Nigeria-Biafra war emerged from Nigeria and Britain's shared need to allay international concerns about genocide, and to provide the British government with domestic political cover to assist Nigeria. Led by the four-country international team, the observer missions met those needs perfectly. In his memoir, David Hunt, the British High Commissioner to Nigeria for much of the war, described the combined observer missions as "the most sensible action on the propaganda side that the Federal Government ever took."¹²⁴ In the process, because of problems with the composition of the country team and the limited scope of its operations, what was

121 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1 (Nigeria UN Observer Correspondence March 69-Feb 70), "Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities, Acting as International Observer, and his Assistant to Recently Liberated Areas", 26 January, 1970.

122 UN Series 98 Box 4 File 1 (Nigeria UN Observer correspondence March 69-Feb 70), William Borders, *New York Times*, "U.N. Observer Terms Aid to Biafrans Insufficient," 27 January 1970.

123 UN Series 303 Box 5 File 9 Acc 86/006, United Nations Press Services, "Statement of Secretary-General Regarding Mission to Nigeria on Humanitarian Activities," Press release 23 June 1970.

124 Sir David Hunt, *Memoirs Military and Diplomatic* (London: Triglyph Ltd, 2006), 263.

probably the best realistic opportunity to thoroughly and credibly address legitimate and deeply felt concerns about genocide passed unredeemed.

Problems with the national composition of the observer team—primarily the absence of representation from governments sympathetic to Biafra—were noted at the time.¹²⁵ To that critique, hindsight demands recognition of the unsurprising but nonetheless significant fact that there is no evidence of women in observer roles. Whether having female observers present would have altered the findings is secondary to the fact that the opportunity did not arise.¹²⁶ A third critical problem was the inability of military observers to operate inside Biafran-held territory. And even inside Nigeria, observers' interactions with Biafrans (or former Biafrans) normally unfolded under the gaze of Nigerian troops. Information gathered under such conditions must be evaluated cautiously. It is conceivable that even if observers had been willing to visit, Biafra might have calculated it had more to lose than to gain by receiving them. Such a hypothetical calculation could have turned on Biafran officials determining that observers, having already declared that the conduct of Nigerian air and ground forces did not reflect genocidal intent, would have been reluctant to reverse themselves. Within that same hypothetical, it is also possible, even likely, that contact between observers and Biafrans would have been corrupted by the presence of Biafran soldiers, as it was by Nigerian troops on the other side. The fact that no such contact was possible represents a perhaps inevitable but nonetheless critical flaw in the observer missions. As a result, as scholarly and popular debate about whether genocide occurred during the war advances, we must treat the findings of the observer missions with care. We must recognize the value of the observers' presence on the Nigerian side and the accounts they generated, as well as the limits of both.

¹²⁵ Hunt offers a competing view: while neither country recognized Biafra or provided it with direct aid, Hunt argued after the fact that the Canadian and Swedish governments were sympathetic to Biafra and that public opinion in both countries was pro-Biafran, going so far as to assert on his own authority that "the Swedish ambassador made sure his country's observer was aware of the fact that there was a strong expectation in Sweden that genocide would be found." Hunt, *Memoirs*, 263.

¹²⁶ While the topic is little discussed, Uchendu describes women in occupied territory as largely "unprotected" against mistreatment and assault by Federal troops. Egodi Uchendu, *Women and Conflict in the Nigerian Civil War* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2007), 101. See also Emezue, "Women and the War," 151.