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The Biafran War in Britain:

An Odd Alliance of late 1960s Humanitarian Activists[1]

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In the summer months of 1968, media reports of human suffering in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) began to disconcert the "conscience of the world", as *Time* magazine stated.[2] After independence in 1960, Nigeria had widely been considered one of the most promising Third World states; the potential for development – boosted by the discovery of oil on the eve of independence – seemed boundless in Africa's most populous country. Yet only eight years later, readers around the world were shocked when they were confronted with pictures of starving children in secessionist Biafra. The Nigerian Civil War was the result of ethnicised political conflict. Nigeria was divided into three main regions, which were each dominated by one ethnic group: Hausa and Fulani in the Muslim north, Yoruba in the Southwest, Ibos in the Southeast. In January 1966, a group of mainly Ibo officers initiated a coup d'état and installed a military government. This was answered by a counter-putsch by northern Nigerian soldiers in July and massacres against Ibos in Northern Nigeria in September. These outbursts of violence provoked a flow of some two million Ibo refugees to Federal Nigeria's South-Eastern state. On May 30, 1967, the South-East's political leadership around the Oxford-educated General Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared their

[1] The original title of the conference paper was 'The Cross-Party Network against the Wilson Government's Support of the Federal Military Regime in the Nigerian Civil War'.
[2] 'Nigeria's Civil War, *Time*, 23.08.1968, pp. 20-28, here p. 20. Titles will be abbreviated in the footnotes. See the bibliography for full titles.

independence, and the Nigerian Civil War began with the advance of federal troops into Biafran territory on July 6, 1967. After two and a half years of fighting, Biafra surrendered on January 15, 1970.[3]

The conflict's humanitarian dimension played a crucial role. Already in late 1967, signs were discernible that Biafra would be threatened by a serious shortfall in food supply. After the capture of the Biafran port town of Port Harcourt on May 19, 1968, Federal Nigeria created a blockade which left the secessionist state without access to the sea. The population of Biafra was heading for a famine that could cost hundreds of thousands of human lives.[4] Especially in Western Europe and North America, media reports of the starvation in the secessionist enclave caused citizens to sympathise with the plight of the population. A host of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), principally the International Committee of the Red Cross and church organisations under the umbrella of Joint Church Aid, organised an airlift to bring food into Biafra – and often weapons alongside with it. Biafra committees mushroomed in the democratic societies of the West, began to raise funds for the relief operation to the famine-ridden secessionist state and to lobby Western governments in order to change their foreign policy agendas.[5]

On the level of international diplomacy, the war is evidently characterised by 'odd alliances': the secessionist Republic Biafra was recognized only by the Third World states

[3] Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, *Biafra War* (Lewiston, NY/Lampeter, 1990); Toyin Falola/Matthew M. Heaton, *History of Nigeria* (Cambridge, 2008); Axel Harneit-Sievers, 'Nigeria', in Rolf Hofmeier, Volker Matthies (eds.), *Vergessene Kriege* (Göttingen, 1992), 277-318; Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, 'January 1966', in idem (ed.), *Crisis and Conflict Volume I* (Aldershot, 1993 [1971]), 1-24 and idem 'War and Peace', in idem (ed.), *Crisis and Conflict Volume II* (Aldershot, 1993 [1971]), 1-144; Albert Wirz, *Krieg in Afrika* (Wiesbaden, 1982), 134-150.

[4] The number of victims is difficult to gauge. Harneit-Sievers, 'Nigeria', 284-285 thinks one million victims is realistic, whereas John W. Young, *Labour Governments* (Manchester/New York, 2003), p.193 considers around one hundred thousand to be likely.

[5] The best starting points for the international history of the conflict are still: Suzanne Cronjé, *The World and Nigeria* (London, 1972) and John J. Stremlau, *International Politics* (Princeton, 1977). On the relief operation see Thierry Hentsch, *Face au Blocus* (Geneva, 1973) and Ndubisi Obiaga, *Politics of Humanitarian Organizations Intervention* (Lanham, MD , 2004).

Gabon, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Zambia, but backed not only by France and Israel, but also by Antonio Salazar's *Estado Novo* dictatorship in Portugal and the South African and Rhodesian Apartheid regimes. The Federal Nigerian Military Regime on the other hand was supported by the Soviet Union, but also by Britain, whereas the United States never clearly opted for either of the warring parties. In any case, the boundaries of the Cold War were decisively blurred in this conflict.

The West African conflict also provoked the formation of odd alliances within western societies. This was evidently the case in Britain. Many contemporaries believed that the Biafran population faced a genocide which was mainly enabled by British arms sale to Lagos. Harold Wilson's Labour government was thus one of the main targets of protest. However, the quickly established Biafra committees – and also the larger protest networks in which they were enmeshed – are hard to position within the spectrum of British politics: conservative journalists like Waugh or Frederick Forsyth were at the forefront of these campaigns, which also drew in liberals such as Lady Violet Bonham Carter, Labour MPs such as James Griffiths and left-wing activists like Lord Fenner Brockway or Peter Sedgwick.[6]

Discussions about Biafra were particularly intense in Britain, the former colonial power in Nigeria. However, our understanding of the connection between conflicts in the Third World and protest in the West in the late 1960s is widely determined by narratives about '1968'.[7] According to this narrative, New Left students and intellectuals repudiated American imperialism and orchestrated protest on behalf of liberationist movements in Vietnam or Cuba.[8] This argument also holds true for the British case, although here '1968' is,

[6] William A. Ajibola, *Foreign Policy and Public Opinion* (Ibadan, 1978); Oladapo Olusola Fafowora, *Pressure Groups* (Ibadan, 1990).
[7] I put 1968 in inverted commas if I use it as shorthand for the dominant narrative about late 1960s protest movements.
[8] Most accounts of '1968' do not refer to the war. See e.g. Gerd-Rainer Horn, *Spirit of '68* (Oxford, 2007); Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, *68er Bewegung* (München, 2005); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest* (Cambridge, Mass./London 2003).

compared to France, Germany or Italy, considered an absence.[9] Yet the Biafran War does not fit this framework in any case. Biafra activism in Britain transcended frontiers of political allegiance determined by the right-left divide or Cold War politics. The West African conflict thus remains a blind spot in this entangled history.

In this paper, I will briefly present some of the characteristics of the networks of interaction in which British activism on behalf of Biafra was enmeshed and I will especially attempt to explain what the common ground of the motley crew of advocates of the Biafran case was. In order to situate this advocacy network within the entangled history of the Third World and protest in 1960s Britain, I will mainly focus on two distinct discourses about Biafra: that of the New Left and that of humanitarianism. New Left discourse about Biafra is mainly an analysis of an absence; the lack of interest in this case among New Leftists will be emphasised to show which shortcomings are produced by the prevalent focus on '1968' in historiographical accounts of the period. The humanitarian discourse about Biafra will be analysed to indicate which distinctive, new elements were present here that transcend our understanding of the period.

On December 2 in 1968, in a talk at the University of East Anglia (UEA), the satirist John Wells presented Biafra as a possible Vietnam for the British New Left, an issue that should be used for a moral campaign against the government. Like-minded students seemingly followed suit. Two days after Wells' talk, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Roy Jenkins, came to UEA to participate in a televised programme on the future of democracy. Local students seized the opportunity to express their protest. Amidst catcalls, abuses and cheering, cards were held up with the purported death count in Biafra. The 'establishment'

[9] Accordingly, the story of '1968' in Britain is that of a 'cultural revolution' with less of a political edge. See Arthur Marwick, *Sixties* (Oxford, 1998).

also reacted in a way that seems to fit well-known narratives about '1968': the TV host Robin Day did not accept the Biafran issue for discussion.[10]

However, these three days in Norwich turned out to be not much more than one of a few short-lived flares of '1968' protest against the war in Biafra: in general, efforts of the New Left to take on the issue were remarkably scarce.[11] The first article in the *New Left Review* to mention Biafra appeared in 1972, two and a half years after the war was over.[12] The British-Pakistani New Left figurehead Tariq Ali does not refer to the war with one word in his major publications on protest in 1960s Britain.[13] In an interview in the 1980s, Tariq Ali explained in retrospect that 'the left in Britain had no position on Biafra.'[14] The socialist activist Peter Sedgwick contended in an article in the Trotskyist *Socialist Worker* in 1969 that '[v]irtually nobody, in fact, can be found who will defend the Federals' war-aims.' Yet there was also 'a marked lack of enthusiasm on the Left for taking up the Biafrans' cause.'[15]

During its first year, the war failed to generate public interest. However, with the pictures of starving Biafran children in the summer months of 1968 the conflict took centre-stage in international media, at least for a brief moment. The first sign of this upsurge of images of starvation was the cover of the American magazine *Life* on June 12. On the same day, the British newspaper *The Sun* printed pictures of starving Biafran children. After this

[10] Michael Sanderson, *History* (Norwich/London, 2002), pp. 193-194. In his article 'Biafra and the Left', *Spectator*, 16.05.1969, p. 644, the leftist journalist Richard West echoed Wells: 'Biafra, one might have thought, was a natural left-wing cause. It is a small nation fighting for independence against an empire. It holds old-fashioned left-wing beliefs like freedom and justice.'

[11] Yet it might be added that the UEA Student's Union organised a 'teach in' on the Nigerian Civil War in February of the following year for which it extended an invitation to the government to provide a speaker. This invitation was turned down, however. A. J. Collins, 'Note for Mr. Watts', 06.09.1969 (NA FCO 65/250).

[12] Arghiri Emmanuel, 'White-Settler Colonialism', *New Left Review* May-June 1972, pp. 35-57.

[13] Tariq Ali, *1968 and after* (London/Tiptree, 1978) and *Street Fighting Years* (London/New York, 2005 [1987]).

[14] Jon Wiener, *Come Together* (London, 2000 [1984]).

[15] Peter Sedgwick, 'The appalling silence', *Socialist Worker*, 10.07.1969, p. 2.

first wave, similar images appeared periodically until the end of the conflict. Prime examples are the pictures taken by Don McCullin, a British photographer on his way to international fame.[16] Together with similar images shown on TV, these images in the press established an iconography of famine as postcolonial crisis.

These images of victimisation posed a problem for the New Left's discursive predispositions. New Left Third-Worldism focused on anti-imperialism and global revolution. Yet in the Biafran War, none of the war parties proclaimed any sort of African socialism. Moreover, no imperialist power extending its domination over the region was easily identifiable among the motley crew of supporters on both sides of the front lines. Some leftist authors tried to interpret the civil war as a conflict over oil in which European and American neo-colonialist companies pull the strings.[17] Although this was certainly an important factor in the conflict, this representation is by far too one-dimensional and did not spur a lot of interest at the time.[18] The war was in general perceived not as a political, but primarily as a humanitarian issue. 'Biafra' could not be imagined as a site of anti-imperial revolution. It became a cipher for human suffering, typified by the icon of starving Biafran children, emaciated skeletons with bloated bellies. Dame Margery Perham, noted writer on African affairs and former Oxford tutor, explains in her 'Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War' in *International Affairs* in January 1970 that

> through the medium of television, for the first time the sufferings of a besieged people have been carried into the homes of the great majority of our population. The Biafran appeal to our emotions came from the repeated pictures, not only of dead or dying men and women, but, even more penetrating, of small children with

[16] *Life*, 12.06.1968, 1; *The Sun*, 12.06.1968, p. 3. For pictures by McCullin see for instance the pictorial supplement in the *Sunday Times*, 01.06.1968. On McCullin see as well Susan Sontag, *Regarding* (New York, 2003), p. 37 and Don McCullin, *Unreasonable Behaviour* (London , 2002 [1990]).
[17] See Bob Fitch /Mary Oppenheimer, 'Biafra', *Black Dwarf*, 22.09.1968, 7; Daphne Vernon, 'Oil Companies', *Tribune*, 02.08.1968, p. 12.
[18] On the role of British oil interests in the war see: Chibuike Uche, 'Oil', *Journal of African History* 49 (2008), pp. 111–35.

> swollen stomachs and stick-like limbs who sometimes appeared to look straight at the viewer with a last cry for help.[19]

Biafrans were not represented as African Ho Chi Minhs or Che Guevaras, revolutionary subjects fighting for liberation. Unable to survive on their own, these haggard figures seemed to call for Westerners to step in.[20]

The representation of the conflict through the lens of humanitarianism was prefigured by Biafran propaganda, which relied heavily on images of the starving population.[21] Yet a major role in establishing the iconography of 'Biafra' was played by humanitarian activists in the West, who tried to raise funds for the relief operation by, for instance, publishing appeals in the press.[22] In Britain, a major role was played by Oxfam. The humanitarian NGO tried to organise a relief operation to the secessionist enclave, and was also highly visible in the media, through appeals and articles written by its staff.[23] Oxfam also bought advertising space in newspapers that were more reluctant to print photographs of almost naked, starving children, like *The Guardian*, and thus secured a larger audience for these images.[24] These representations of the conflict established 'Biafra' as a space of humanitarian crisis. In a letter that Bruno Gans, head of Oxfam's first field team in Biafra, wrote to one of his colleagues in Britain, the real and the imagined Biafra mutually permeate each other. The German surgeon describes the condition of the patients in a hospital in the secessionist capital Umuahia in richness of detail. The worst cases have their 'skin stretched over ribs, enormous heads, pot

[19] Margery Perham, 'Reflections', *International Affairs* 46 (1970), pp. 231-246.
[20] On a similar reinvention of tiers-mondisme in French human rights discourse see Kristin Ross, *May '68* (Chicago/London, 2002), pp. 156-69.
[21] Cronjé, *The World*, pp. 210-4.
[22] See for instance the appeals in *The Times*, 15.06.1968, p. 17; 18.06.1968, p. 8; 25.06.1968, p. 3; 11.07.1968, p. 16; 19.07.1968, p. 5; 13.08.1968, p. 1.
[23] Maggie Black, *Cause* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 117-131.
[24] See for instance Oxfam Appeal, *Guardian*, 12.07.1968, p. 1.

bellies, wasted buttocks and sticks for arms and legs.' He contends that they 'virtually all look like Oxfam posters […].'[25]

The frictions between humanitarian and political understandings of the conflict become apparent in an exchange of letters between the Nigerian High Commissioner in London, Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, and Oxfam's General Secretary H. Leslie Kirkley. Ogundipe wrote to Kirkley in June 1968 that his 'government views with the gravest concern' Oxfam's 'Biafra Emergency Appeal', as the naming of the appeal 'will add credence to the fiction that a State of "Biafra" exists […].'[26] In his response, Kirkley explains that Oxfam 'never take[s] political sides, and our one and only concern is to help those in the greatest need.'[27] Two highly incongruent understandings of 'Biafra' are evident in these letters: for the representative of the Nigerian Federal government, 'Biafra' is a political concept, a secessionist state; Oxfam's general secretary understands 'Biafra' as a site of starvation and famine, it is a hot-spot on the humanitarian's mental map.

Due to its campaigning, Oxfam became increasingly associated with 'Biafra'; the NGO quickly found itself at the centre of a discussion about the relief operation. In early July 1968, the Wilson administration sent a team under Lord Hunt to Nigeria to improve the prospects of aid missions. The delegates included representatives from the Red Cross and Save the Children, but not from Oxfam.[28] The problem was that for many – especially in governmental circles in London and Lagos – Oxfam seemed to support Biafra. The organisation soon felt the need to differentiate itself from the 'Biafra lobby', portraying the organisation as the proponent of a depoliticised humanitarianism. In a rally at Trafalgar

[25] Bruno Gans, 'Letter to Carter', 23.11.1968 (OA COM 3/1/1: Confidential Papers on Nigeria/Biafra 1968-70), p. 1.
[26] B. O. Ogundipe, 'Letter to the Director Leslie Kirkley', 28.06.1968, (OA DIR/2/3/2/32), p. 1.
[27] H. Leslie Kirkley, 'Letter to His Excellency the High Commissioner', 05.07.1968 (OA DIR/2/3/2/32), p. 1.
[28] Black, *Cause*, p. 123.

Square, organised by the Save Biafra Committee on July 7, 1968, Oxfam sent a representative who asked the audience to allow him to stress that his organisation 'has no links with the Committee. Oxfam is a completely non-political body.' Even in front of the crowd of a Save Biafra rally, the Oxfam staff member was eager to counter charges that the NGO sided with the Biafrans and emphasised that Oxfam allocated half of its money to Nigeria. Yet, in any case, the championing of the Biafran cause was at least a subtext of his speech. As 'the Biafrans and Nigerians are all citizens of the British Commonwealth,' the British government had to step in as 'the senior partner in that Commonwealth'. Because this is the time

> for someone – anyone – who is big enough to show the will and determination to break through legalistic and diplomatic niceties. Human beings are much more important that [sic] artificially created boundaries or rules and regulations made by men. This job is too big for Oxfam. In the name of humanity, these statesmen, whoever they are, must act now. It is already too late.[29]

Political complexities can apparently be ignored. But politicians are called upon to intervene '[i]n the name of humanity'.

Oxfam's call for humanity has a flavour quite distinct to that of the rhetoric of Ignatius Kugbara, the Biafran representative at the rally, who, according to the report for Oxfam written by J. W. Jackson, 'felt that everyone involved should support Biafra completely, without reservations.' It would be 'stupid' to think 'that Biafra did not exist as a sovereign state.'[30] These conflicting conceptualisations of 'Biafra' point to the friction between a political project of state-building and the spatial relations created by humanitarian action and advocacy. In the Oxfam view on the conflict, 'Biafra' emerged as a space of victimhood; it is rid of the political agency of a secessionist movement.[31] Although Oxfam tried to claim humanitarianism as a depoliticised understanding of the conflict their appeals did not leave

[29] Iain Somerville, 'Text of Speech at "Save Biafra" rally Trafalgar Square 7th July, 1968', (OA DIR/2/3/2/32), pp. 1, 3-4.
[30] J. W. Jackson 'Report of the Meeting in Trafalgar Square of the Save Biafra Committee. Sunday July 7th, 1968', (OA DIR/2/3/2/32).
[31] On the spatial relations of humanitarianism see François Debrix, 'Deterritorialised Territories', *Third World Quarterly* 19 (1998), pp. 827-846.

much space beyond the existing narrative of 'good Ibos' vs. 'bad Nigerians', it mostly only added the twist that the Ibos could not help themselves. Although the 'humanitarian lens' – in contrast to that of the New Left – enabled some sort of an apprehension of the conflict, this was still only a rather distorted understanding of a political conflict as a humanitarian crisis.

Also within the Labour party, criticism of Whitehall's Nigeria policy was formulated with recourse to the language of humanitarianism. At the Labour Party Conference on October 1 in 1968, Prime Minister Harold Wilson proclaimed:

> We are the party of human rights. The only party of human rights that will be speaking from this platform this month. Human rights: this has been the central theme of this Government's actions from the day we took office.[32]

This remark was primarily aimed at the Tories. After Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in April of the same year, Wilson wanted to represent the conservative rival as the party of racist suppression. However, politicians using this language risk being confronted with the 'boomerang effect' of human rights.[33] In the Labour newspaper's first outspokenly critical article on the British position on Biafra, penned by Joan Mellors, a pro-Biafran activist, *Tribune* reprinted this exclamation under the heading 'What about their Human Rights, Mr. Wilson?' accompanied by a photography of starving Biafran children. The article explained:

> It is precisely because we have always believed the Labour Party to be the party of human rights, that many of us have spent our lives within its ranks. And this is why we have felt so disillusioned and grieved that the belief in human rights never found expression within our Government's policy towards the Nigeria-Biafra conflict.[34]

A month later, the pro-Biafran *Spectator* published an article under the heading: 'Biafra and Human Rights', quoting yet another speech in which Wilson had expressed his '"determination for human rights, a detestation of discrimination based on race or colour."' In

[32] Qtd. in: Joan Mellors, 'What about their Human Rights, Mr. Wilson?', *Tribune*, 18.10.1968, p. 6.
[33] Keck/ Sikkink, *Activists*, p. 24.
[34] Mellors, 'What about?'…

this case, Wilson referred to the recently independent white minority regime of Rhodesia and to Gibraltar. Yet the Prime Minister explained Biafra as a threat of tribalism. The *Spectator* concurred thus that 'human rights mean nothing, it seems, when it comes to Biafra.' 'For in its policy towards Nigeria, the British Government is engaged as principal accomplice in the biggest suppression of human rights – and of human life – in the non-Communist world today.' Britain must stop providing Lagos with arms, otherwise the war would be drawn out endlessly: 'The time to call a halt is now […].[T]he British response to Lagos's latest demands must be a firm unconditional "NO".' But until that happens 'let us have no more hypocrisy from Mr Wilson about his devotion to human rights. Some of us believe in them.'[35] In their moral campaigns, pro-Biafran activists across the political spectrum drew on the language of humanitarianism and on evolving international norms – such as those of human rights – to lend force to their criticism of Her Majesty's Government's position in the Biafra conflict.

The language of humanitarianism served as a common discourse of a campaign that clearly transcended party political allegiances. The Biafran War was widely perceived as postcolonial African misery, a humanitarian catastrophe; this is exactly why it brought together an 'odd alliance' of people sympathetic to humanitarianism. The strong reactions to the humanitarian cause in Britain can partly be explained by national traditions of discourses about hunger, going back to the Irish famine and Dickensian representations of the workhouse poor. This 'humanitarian optic' is rooted in forms of journalistic reporting invented in the nineteenth century.[36] Similar public outcries were already heard for more then a century,

[35] 'Biafra and Human Rights', in Ministry of Information of the Republic of Biafra, *Genocide*, 5-6 (published first in *Spectator*, 15.11.1968). See also the reply by the International Observer Team member Henry T. Alexander, 'Biafra and Human Rights', *United Nigeria*, 09.12.1968, No. 6, p. 6 (published first in *Spectator*, 22.11.1968).
[36] Habbo Knoch, 'Mediale Trauer', in Frank Bösch / Manuel Borutta (eds.), *Die Massen bewegen* (Frankfurt a. M./New York, 2006), pp. 193-213, 203; James Vernon, *Hunger* (Cambridge, MA/London, 2007).

when Britons sympathised with Greek nationalists under Ottoman oppression, or in view of Ottoman atrocities against Bulgarians or Armenians or King Leopold's colonial slavery in the Congo. Although the media technology had changed – Biafra was the first Third World crisis brought to European homes via TV – the use of images and languages that were intended to shock the public are indeed comparable.[37]

However, the history of the humanitarian response to the Nigerian Civil War needs to be situated more precisely within the transformation of international relations since the late 1960s. The Biafran War was one of the events which provoked a proliferation of notions of humanitarianism and human rights. These concepts played a major role in this trajectory – they were at the core of discourses used to challenge national sovereignty and were subsequently anchored more and more firmly in international law and norms. Whereas human rights declarations after the Second World War were mainly authored by nation-states, the popularisation of these ideas was now spearheaded by non-state actors. Activists formed transnational networks to orchestrate moral campaigns against human rights atrocities in all parts of the world, regardless of the political orientation of the governments targeted. Governments' usage of the language of rights made them vulnerable to the 'politics of shame' and was thus connected to the reformulation of national sovereignty in an 'age of rights'.[38]

Still, the weakening of national sovereignty in a postcolonial world is characterised by a North-South divide: the postcolonies[39] are under much higher pressure to conform to these rules. The humanitarian work of NGOs like Oxfam is thus often considered the postcolonial

[37] For a work that links today's discourses about humanitarian intervention to these cases see Gary J. Bass, *Freedom's Battle* (New York, 2008).
[38] James H. Lebovic/Erik Voeten 'Politics of Shame', in International Studies Quarterly 50 (2006), 861–888; Louis Henkin, *Age of Rights* (New York, 1990). On human rights in postwar Britain see Tom Buchanan, 'Human Rights Campaigns in Modern Britain', in Nick Crowson, et al. (eds.), *NGOs in Contemporary Britain* (Houndmills, 2009), 113-128.
[39] This is a term popularised by: Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley , 2001).

equivalent to the colonial 'civilizing mission'.[40] Accordingly, the advocacy of the pro-Biafran lobby did not have a decisive effect on British policy toward the war – the Wilson government was able to sustain its support of Lagos despite the harsh criticism. In any case, the diffusion of humanitarian ideas since the Biafran War points to a shift in discourses about the Third World, which was now increasingly seen as a sphere of potential intervention in the face of postcolonial crisis.[41] Even if Whitehall was not willing to intervene on behalf of the Biafran population, growing numbers of humanitarian activists were. Biafra was thus, at least in the long run, one of the formative events of a new and more aggressive form of humanitarianism that developed a decidedly political and ideological content, at least once this 'new humanitarianism', as it came to be called in the 1990s, entered a liaison with the idea of humanitarian intervention, which gained prominence in the decades after Biafra.[42] However, the Biafran example already indicates that it is far from clear whether these new notions did substantially change international relations or whether they merely opened a new field of action for (mainly western) non-state actors in a sphere of politics dominated by nation-states and, to a lesser degree, intergovernmental organisations. Yet this is a different or at least a more complex story, and historians still have a lot of work to do to answer the questions it raises.[43]

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[40] Rony Brauman, 'Indigènes et Indigents', in Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, Sandrine Lemaire (eds.), *Fracture Coloniale* (Paris, 2005), pp. 169-176; Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism* (New York, 2006).

[41] See also Arthur Bryant, 'Destroying Wind', *The Illustrated London News*, 03.08.1968, p. 16, who interprets the suffering in Biafra as a result of the British withdrawal from Empire.

[42] This is highly evident in the case of Médecins Sans Frontières and French humanitarianism in general. See Yves Lavoinne, 'Médecins en guerre: Du témoignage au "tapage médiatique"', *Le Temps des Médias* 4 (2005), 114-126. See Fiona Fox, 'New Humanitarianism: Does It Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?', in *Disasters* 25 (2001), pp. 275-289 on the 'new Humanitarianism' since the 1990s.

[43] This field is still widely dominated by international relations scholars and political scientists. See e.g. accounts of the new global civil society such as: Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society. An Answer to War* (Cambridge, 2004); John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge, 2003).

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