Displacement and Identity: Igbo Diaspora of Canada, 1965-1985

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Abstract

Between 1965 and 1985, a significant number of Igbo, one of the three major cultural groups in Nigeria, migrated to Canada. This group of immigrants consists of victims of socio-political displacements that arose from the Nigerian civil war, which was fought when this cultural group attempted secession from Nigeria under the auspices of the Republic of Biafra, between July 6, 1967-January 15, 1970. As many Igbo began to leave Nigeria in search of a safe haven, Canada became one of the destinations for a significant proportion of the privileged class. It was certainly the knowledge of their previous encounters that propelled their choice of Canada. On arrival, they established socio-political organizations that created a sense of separate identity from the wider Nigerian community in Canada. This study focuses on the migration and identity formation of the second stream of Igbo immigrants in Canada, It highlights how displacement and victimization during the Nigerian civil war has propelled Igbo migration to Canada, and how their memories shaped their identity and activities in Canada. By examining the Igbo experiences during this period, the study situateS the Igbo Diaspora in Canada within a wider context, and in so doing, bring academic attention to the socio-political dimension of Igbo Diaspora.

Keywords: Displacement, Identity, Diaspora, Migration

INTRODUCTION

"We are Igbo Canadians."[1]

On May 30, 1971, a number of Nigerian immigrants tin Canada gathered in Toronto to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the declaration of the defunct Republic of Biafra, a secessionist state in Nigeria, which was crushed in January of 1970, after a mere 30 months of existence.[2] The celebration was sponsored by a segment of the Nigerian community in Canada, who identified with the Igbo linguistic group that constituted the majority of the defunct Republic. This gathering marked a turning point in Igbo activities and position, relative to other Nigerian groups in Canada.[3] The statement, "We are Igbo Canadians," suggests a total departure from a collective Nigerian identity to a separate identity, based on cultural and political sentiments. There is no doubt that a sense of cultural empathy may have been present amongst Igbo immigrants to Canada prior to their aborted secession from Nigeria. However, it was only after the failed secession that expressions of primary loyalty to the Igbo became a factor that shaped members' activities and their sense of identity in Canada.

Issues surrounding identity have been crucial in understanding the activities of diaspora communities across the globe. As Paul Lovejoy puts it, "identity formations in Diaspora are conscious creations that arise from shared experiences". According to Lovejoy, by consciously establishing institutions, such as political or social organizations, Diaspora groups build a sense of community identity that emphasizes cultural distinctiveness.[4] Alan Richardson adds that the conditions that push people to migration have direct and indirect consequences both on their perceptions and undertakings in their host societies.[5] Apparently, the Igbo gathering at Toronto stimulated the subsequent establishment of several socio-political and religious organizations in Canada, as members sought to demonstrate their separate identity in the Diaspora, in response to developments in their homeland.

Locating the Igbo Diaspora in Canada in a broader historical context requires an understanding of the various streams of their immigration or, to borrow from Ola Uduku, "Diaspora eras."[6] Available evidence suggests that a number of Igbo came to Canada during the era of British colonial rule in Nigeria (1900-1960).[7] These early immigrants constitute the first stream and were mostly students who sought to benefit from

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[1] Chimezie Onwuchekwa, 70, "Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/14/2012.

[2] Igbo Cultural Association of Canada, "Program of Event: 4th Anniversary Celebration of Declaration of Biafra," Toronto, May 30, 1971.

[3] According to Onwuchekwa, "Personal Interview" cited, other prominent Nigerian Linguistic groups in Canada during the period covered by this study include the Yoruba, Efik, Ijaw and Esan.

[4] Paul E. Lovejoy, "Ethnicity and the African Diaspora," in *Trans-Atlantic Dimension of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora,* eds. Paul Lovejoy and Dame Trotman.(New York: Continuum, 2003), 2–3.

[5] Alan Richardson, "A Theory and Method for Psychological Study of Assimilation," *International Migration Review* Vol. 3, No. 30 (Fall 1967): 23-24.

[6] Ola Uduku, "The Socio-Economic Basis of Diaspora Community: Igbo Nu Ike," *Review of African Political Economy* Vol. 29, No. 92 (June 2002): 303–308.

[7] John Burns, "Airlift Urged," *The Globe and Mail*, January 14, 1970, 1.

educational opportunities in Canada. The second and most significant, group consisted of Igbo immigrants, who came two years before, during, and immediately after the Nigerian civil war (July 6, 1967-January 15, 1970). The civil war itself was the result of the Igbo push for secession leading to the declaration of the secessionist Republic of Biafra in May 1967. In that sense, this second wave of Igbo immigrants to Canada consists of the victims of socio-political dislocations that arose from the Nigerian civil war. They came to Canada in search of refuge and mostly resided in Toronto and Ottawa. The last stream comprises those Igbo immigrants who came in the mid-1980s. In comparison to the second stream, they were primarily driven by the decline of economic opportunities in Nigeria—i.e. they fit into the category of 'economic refugees.' So far, no particular study has focused on the pattern of Igbo migration and community formation in Canada per se. Besides, studies on global Igbo Diaspora that have appeared within the last decade tend to focus only on the third stream, giving primary attention to economic explanations. [1] In my opinion, emphasis on economic underpinnings and ethnic consciousness do not provide sufficient explanations for the history behind the structure of Igbo Diaspora communities. Socio-political and cultural considerations could provide more encompassing explanations for this phenomenon.

This paper focuses on the migration and identity formation of the second stream of Igbo immigrants in Canada, the immigrants who left Nigeria between 1965 and 1985. It highlights how displacement and victimization during the Nigerian civil war has propelled Igbo migration to Canada, and how their memories shaped their identity and activities in Canada. By examining the Igbo experiences during this period, the paper hopes to situate the Igbo Diaspora in Canada within a wider context, and in so doing, bring academic attention to the socio-political dimension of Igbo Diaspora.

I.   CONCEPTUALIZING THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

In their discourses on the African presence around the world, scholars have employed the term "African Diaspora" to describe the varied experiences of Africans abroad. The existing literature tends to exhibit two major shifts in scholarly approaches to the conceptual, topical, and spatial parameters of what counts as African Diaspora. African modes of dispersion and experiences around the world were initially framed in terms of the historic Jewish exodus, with particular emphasis on conditions of displacement and servitude. Scholars who adopted this comparative approach, such as Shepperson and Skinner, tend to take the forced migration engendered by the transatlantic slave trade as the point of reference for their conceptions of African Diasporic experiences. In this model, "African Diaspora" is harnessed to forced transportation across the Atlantic and status of marginality in the Americas. Paul Zeleza has recently dubbed this paradigm "the Afro-Atlantic model of African Diaspora." The second shift occurred when scholars began to venture beyond the transatlantic slave trade and the status of Africans in the Americas. Instead of the rather narrow focus on African-Americans and issues of forced migration, scholars opted for a broader conception of African Diaspora. For instance, this model not only encompasses both voluntary and involuntary modes of African migration, but also deals with the multiplicity of their presence in different parts of the globe—including the Atlantic world. [2]

By and large, it is pertinent to first understand the meaning of the term "Diaspora" to see how it has been contextually applied to Africa. In its most literal sense, the term has generally been used to depict the movement and settlements of people in places outside of their last knowable homelands.[3] Here, the term simply signifies population "dispersion" and "settlements," without dwelling on what Clifford and Mohamed have respectively called the teleology of "origin and return" and "suffering and redemption."[4] G.A. Sheffer's conceptualization captures this broader albeit, still literal application of the term. In his definition, Diaspora is a "group of migrant origins residing and acting in host societies, but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin."[5] In fact, Sheffer considers "links with home countries" the most vital characteristic of the concept of Diaspora. In addition to this definition, Robin Cohen offers three typologies of

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[1] For a general discussion on the Igbo Diaspora, see Udoaku, "The Socio-Economic Basis,"303–308; and Amosi Odi, "The Igbo in Diaspora: The Binding Force of Information," *Liberties and Cultures* Vol.34, No.2 (Spring 1999): 158-167.

[2] For samples of this conception, see George Shepperson, "African Diaspora: Concept and Context," in *Global Dimension of the African Diaspora 2nd ed.,* ed. Joseph Harris. (Washington, DC: Howard University press, 1993), 41-49; David Skinner, "The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture," *The Journal of the International African Institute* Vol. 81 No. 3 (August 2011): 515–517. On the conception of this analogical approach, see Mohamed H. Mohamed, "Africanists and Africans of the Maghrib: Causalities of Analogy," J*ournal of North African Studies* Vol. 15, No.3 (September 2010): 347–374. On the "hegemonic" tones and spatial limitations of the "Afro-Atlantic model," see Paul T. Zeleza, "African Diasporas: Towards a Global History," *African Studies Review* Vol. 53, No. 1 (April 2010): 8–10.

[3] Donald Carter, Preface *to New African Diaspora,* by Khadid Koser ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), xv

[4] See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997), 249-50; Mohamed, "Africanists and Africans," 353.

[5] G. A. Sheffer, "A New Field of Study: Modern Diaspora in International Politics," in *Modern Diasporas in International Politics,* ed. G.A. Sheffer. (London: Groon Helm, 1986), 3.

Diaspora—victim, trade, and labor. To him, the reasons for and nature of population dispersions are important aspects of Diaspora.[1]

In an article, in Joseph Harris' *Global Dimension of the African Diaspora,* George Shepperson posited analogy to the Jewish dispersion as a frame of reference to highlight the debate over the African Diaspora. In tracing the origins of the dispersal, he argues for a departure from the racially centered conception espoused by black writers, such as E.W. Blyden and W.E.B. Du Bois during the first half of the twentieth century.[2] Yet, he still conceived the African Diaspora as a parallel to Jewish experiences of captivity and exile. He also relates the dispersion of Africans to the slave trade, especially across the Atlantic, maintaining that slave-trade studies are pivotal to the historical examination of the African Diaspora. This comparative approach tends to obscure the particularities of African experiences by approaching the experiences of Africans abroad from a homogenous perspective of all population dispersions.[3] In any case, it hardly accounts for the diversity of African historical experiences, let alone the differences in their patterns of migration. Not surprisingly, scholars of Diaspora have since contended that the application of this perspective to all African conditions of displacement is highly problematic. For example, Tony Martins asserts, "we should do away with the expression because we are not Jews. Let us speak of African dispersion or scattered Africans."[4] In as much as it concentrates on forced migration, this paradigm also fails to account for multitudes of African voluntary migrations. By focusing on an analogy between the African condition in the Americas and the Jewish experience, Shepperson also limits the concept of African Diaspora to a rather single historical and spatial dimension. One could characterize Shepperson's conception of African Diaspora as both "narrow" and "old", yet by comparing African and Jewish experiences; he manages to capture the textual origin of the concept "African Diaspora."

In comparison to Shepperson, Paul Gilroy shifts the focal point away from the rather narrow parallelism between the Jewish and Afro-American experience to a much broader "Afro-Atlantic model." For Gilroy, the African Diaspora is "the history of blacks in the west." He understands the African Diaspora from the angle of socio-political and economic relations that involved Africans within the Atlantic system, not just to the Americas but to Europe as well—i.e., the three constituents of what is currently conceived as the Atlantic world.[5] The primary thread in this relationship, according to Gilroy, is, still, none other than the transatlantic slave trade. By shifting the focus to the African experiences in Britain, Gilroy seeks to extend the scope of the Afro-Atlantic model beyond the Afro-American connection. From a spatial standpoint, however, Gilroy's argument is still limited to the Atlantic and, indeed, shares the emphasis on the involuntary dimension of African displacement projected by Shepperson. Like Gilroy, Paul Lovejoy upheld the predication of African Diaspora on the transatlantic slave trade, but almost simultaneously, he recommended a shift in focus from Europe and America to the experiences of enslaved Africans around the globe.[6] Despite their respective attempts to expand the spatial dimension of the African Diaspora, both Gilroy and Lovejoy share fidelity to a crucial aspect of the Afro-Atlantic model. They tend to wed African Diaspora to servitude and, hence, involuntary migration. This failure to incorporate the global perspective of African experiences and the voluntary migrations has aroused criticism.

Paul Zeleza is perhaps the most consistent critic of the above paradigm—what he called "the Afro-Atlantic model." In that sense, his work marks a watershed in the shift to the current conception of African Diaspora. In his article, "African Diaspora: Towards a Global History," he posits that African Diaspora transcends Gilroy's Afro-Atlantic conceptualization and should include people of African origin residing in various parts of the world. For Zeleza, spatiality is crucial to the definition of African Diaspora. He stresses the need to move away from the Afro-Atlantic frame of reference, arguing that it is only a regional case study of Africans' presence and experiences. In a previous article, "Rewriting the African Diaspora," Zeleza expressed a similar view and cautioned against the treatment of African experiences from a limited geographical scope.[7] In Zeleza's view, Gilroy's emphasis on "blackness" points to an exclusion of non-black Africans, which illustrates his argument that the African Diaspora is too diverse to be reduced to a discourse on black identity around the world. These insights raise questions about the geographical space referred to as "Africa" and the histories of

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[1]Robin Cohen, *Global Diaspora: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 6.

[2] see E. W Blyden, Christianity, *Islam and the Negro Race* (London: Mittingham & Co., 1887); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (New York: International Publishers, 1946)

[3] Shepperson, "African Diaspora,"46. For a critique of this approach, see Zaleza, "African Diaspora," 8–10; Mohamed, "Africanists and Africans," 353-54.

[4] Tony Martins, "Garvey and Scattered Africans," in, *Global Dimension of the African Diaspora (2nd ed.),* ed. Joseph Harris. (Washington DC: Howard University press, 1993), 441.

[5] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 195–19.

[6] Paul Lovejoy, "Identifying Enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora," in *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery,* ed. Paul Lovejoy. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 1–2.

[7] Zeleza, "African Diasporas:,"8–10. See also, Paul Zeleza, "Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic," *African Affairs* Vol. 104, No. 414 (2005): 55–68.

people referred to as "Africans."

In an article published in 2000 entitled "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," Colin Palmer carefully categorizes the different streams of African migrations to various parts of the world. He sought to illustrate the need for a shift from the comparative approach and emphasis on involuntary migration, in favor of a more inclusive understanding of a variegated African Diaspora. Palmer identified five major streams that occurred at different periods and for different reasons. In the process, he situated the modern African Diaspora in the last stream, the stream which involves the voluntary migration of Africans. Although Palmer's objective is to locate the various streams of African movement throughout the world, he also argued that the study of the modern African Diaspora ought to begin with the study of Africa itself, as well as those Africans who left the continent. [1] This proposition has become a widely accepted framework for explaining the contemporary experiences of Africans around the world.

The forgoing proposition tends to enhance Joseph Harris' much earlier attempt to capture the main parameters of both the "old" and contemporary approaches to the African Diaspora. To Harris, the term African Diaspora signifies

> … the global dispersion (voluntary and involuntary) of Africans throughout
> history, the emergence of the cultural identity abroad based on origins and social
> conditions, and the psychological and physical return to the homeland, Africa.
> The African Diaspora assumes the character of a dynamic and complex
> phenomenon stretching across time, geography, class and gender. [2]

The above paradigm is much more relevant to an understanding of the Igbo experiences in Canada. In the first instance, Igbo constituted a significant proportion of forced migration, considering their involuntary transplantation as slaves from West Africa to the Americas. [3] Thus, they fit into the "old" Afro-Atlantic model as projected by Shepperson and Gilroy. However, the present study is not focused on the experiences of identifiable descendants of this generation of Igbo in the Americas. Instead, the main focus of this study is on Igbo voluntary migration and experiences, which places them within the context of the contemporary Diasporas. The conceptualization of contemporary Diaspora thus becomes relevant to the present study, as it provides the framework for evaluating Igbo Diaspora community in Canada, with particular emphasis on identity formation and agencies of group cohesion. The study fully endorses Palmer's suggestion that "the study of modern African Diaspora should begin with the study of Africa." [4] To this end, it will start with a brief survey of the socio-political landscape of Nigeria to provide the necessary historical background for a better understanding of Igbo migration and experiences in Canada. The most important aspect of this literature review on African Diaspora is the rather paradoxical framework it offers for this study. Igbo migration to Canada during the period under consideration could be described as both voluntary and involuntary. Though they were not forcefully transplanted, as was the case with those Igbo slaves taken to the Americas in the course of the transatlantic slave trade, the social and political circumstances that led to their migration suggest an element of involuntary migration.

2. POST-CIVIL WAR DISPLACEMENT

Nigeria provides an illustrative example of an artificial colonial creation, where different nationalities were brought together for political expediency. Several authors have focused their criticisms of this colonial action, not just from the vantage point of the socio-cultural trajectories of the various groups, but also from the angle of the colonial rationale. For instance, Dan Jacobs asserts that "Nigeria was a nation in name only." He maintains that, like many other African boundaries, Nigeria's map was created to suit British administrative convenience and to facilitate economic exploitation. [5] The differences amongst the various nationalities, and the politics of their inter-group relations, became factors that shaped the political and social spheres in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Of the about 300 identified groups in Nigeria, three major linguistic constituencies constitute roughly two-thirds of its population: the Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. [6] It was the political and social dynamics of

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[1] Colin Palmer, "Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora," *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 85, No. ½ (2000): 27–32.

[2] Joseph Harris, Introduction *to Global Dimension of the African Diaspora (2nd ed.)*, by Joseph Harris (Washington, DC: Howard University press, 1993), 3.

[3] Ugo Nwokeji, "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Population Density: A Historical Demography of the Biafran Hinterland," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 34, No. 3 (2000): 634. For more studies on Igbo population in Atlantic slave trade, see Douglass B. Chambers, *Murder at Montpelier: Igbo Africans in Virginia* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005); John Thornton, "Africa and Africans: Igbo Exiles in the Diaspora," *Slavery and Abolition* Vol.18 (1997): 72–97.

[4] Palmer, "Defining and Studying," 29

[5] Dan Jacobs, *The Brutality of Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopt, 1987), 18

[6] Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 21. For a recent study on the identification of Nigeria's cultural/linguistic groups, see Ethnologue:

inter-group relations among these three groups that defined developments in Nigeria's twentieth-century history, via what Godwin Onuoha calls "tri-polar relations."[1] It was the long-stained relationship between the Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups that prepared the ground for what would become the most devastating development in Nigerian history—The Nigerian Civil war of 1967-1970.   The war commenced in the wake of the federalist attack on the Igbo dominated Eastern Nigeria secession on July 30, 1967. It was fought mainly in the Eastern region, the Igbo homeland. When the secessionist army could no longer contain the federalist's advance, it surrendered on January 15, 1970, thus marking the end of the secession. The restoration of the union also ushered in a new phase of Igbo relations with the other two major groups in Nigeria.

At the end of war, Igbo were confronted with the traumatic consequences of the tragic war. In addition to a widespread destruction of basic social infrastructures, hunger and starvation that stemmed from war-time food shortages created a drastic refugee situation in the immediate post-civil war era. It has been estimated that about two million refugees were displaced during this period.[2] The provision of relief materials, especially food, and the rehabilitation of this adversely affected war zone, became the immediate challenge of the federal government of Nigeria. There were concerns about the capacity of the federal government to handle the momentous task of relief and reconstruction of the areas affected by the war. However, in an attempt to guard its sovereignty, the Nigerian government claimed that it had the capacity to rehabilitate the war victims, and launched the ten-year rehabilitation and reconstruction program.[3] Foreign agencies and countries that supported or provided relief to the secessionists during the crisis were banned from participating in the process.[4] This position increased the degree of hardship that the war victims faced, as reports pointed to the government's inability to provide adequate relief. As Igbo refugees became increasingly frustrated with post-war conditions, a series of campaigns were organized in order to create international awareness of the situation in the Eastern region. In response, the United Nations Secretary General, U. Thant, in his observatory visit to the war-torn zone, acknowledged the urgency of external relief provision to Igbo war victims on humanitarian grounds.[5]

Nevertheless, the economic hardships produced by the immediate post-civil war conditions were not so much a challenge to the Igbo, compared to post-war reconciliation and reintegration into the fabric of Nigerian society. The real problem, as Ralph Uwachue puts it, was with the social re-integration of Igbo into the Nigerian society.[6] The socio-political atmosphere and activities in Nigeria during the immediate post-civil war period created a greater feeling of rejection and alienation among the Igbo.[7] This was seen from the government policies toward reconciliation and the general attitude of other cultural groups in Nigeria. Instead of initiating strategies of crisis resolution and peace building, considering the urgency of incorporating the Igbo people, the Nigerian government introduced policies that tended to repress the Igbo the more. According to Achebe, the most prominent and visible of these policies was the Banking Obligation Decree of 1970. This decree offered the paltry sum of 20 Pounds (or 40 Naira), in exchange for any amount of the former Nigerian currency, which was changed during the hostilities.[8] This policy frustrated individual Igbo who made private efforts to recuperate themselves at the end of the war. Ikpeze claims that "the government policies towards Igbo people during the immediate post-civil war era were meant to make them politically irrelevant and socially ostracized."[9] In a similar legislation, the "Abandoned Property Decree of 1972", the government established a commission to oversee the auction of Igbo properties in other parts of the country, the properties they abandoned on the eve of the Nigerian civil war which were contested or claimed by the host population. The exclusion of the Igbo became pronounced when a significant number of them returned to their previous places of employment and business in various regions of the country—especially the Northern region—only to discover that the properties they left before the outbreak of the war had either been appropriated by the indigenes of their previous host communities or seized by the government. Two explanations have been advanced for these policies. Achebe

Languages of the World, "Languages of Nigeria," www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=NG (Accessed February 24, 2012)

[1] Godwin Onuoha, "Emergent Forms of Self-Determination: Contemporary Igbo Nationalism and the Order of Violence in South-Eastern Nigeria." Paper presented at the Center for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRIHSE) Workshop, University of Oxford, March 7–18, 2009. 13

[2] Alfred O. Uzokwe, *Surviving in Biafra: The Story of the Nigerian-Civil war; Over Two Million Died.*(Lincoln: Iuniverse Inc.,2003.) 57-64.

[3] Olukunle Ojeleye, T*he Politics of Post-war Demobilization and Re-integration in Nigeria.*(Famham: Ashgate Publishers, 2010).86-87

[4] Oye Ogunbadejo, "Nigeria and the Great powers: The impact of the Civil War on Nigeria's Relations," A*frican Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 296 (January 1976). 21-22

[5] AP, "U. Thant Visits Nigeria for Look at Refugee Aid," *The Globe and Mail*, January 19, 1970, 1

[6] Ralph Uwachue, *Reflection on the Nigerian civil war: Facing the Future.*(Victoria: Trafford, 2004).113

[7] Ojeleye, The Politics of, 100

[8] Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble With Nigeria.*(London: Heinemann, 1983) 45–6

[9] Nnaemeka Ikpeze, "Post-Biafran Marginalisation of the Igbo in Nigeria." In Ifi Amadiume and Abdullah An-na'im (eds) *The Politics of Memory: Truth, healing and social justice*(London: Zel Books, 2000). 95

suggests that these policies were meant to punish the Igbo for wrecking the nation.[1] In contrast, Onuoha is of the opinion that these measures were introduced to discourage any further attempts at secession in any section of the country.[2]

Similarly, the federal government's promise to reinstate Igbo civil servants and members of the military in the positions they held before the war was not fulfilled. By declaring vacancies in the various public services in the immediate post-civil war era, the government deliberately frustrated the Igbo refugee civil servants, who left the positions they had held prior to the civil war. The military Head of State, Gen. Gowon had previously warned that the Igbo should not expect his "generosity to the point of a VIP treatment."[3] This demonstrates the flawed nature of the 3R policies—Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation, designed to integrate the Igbo in Nigeria after the war. Additionally, Igbo people suffered discrimination and deprivation in secure employment with government organizations and private firms during this period.[4] The principles of 'Federal Character' and 'quota system' were adopted by the Nigerian government in the late 1970s which allocated proportional representation in government apparatus to the various cultural groups. This nullified the advantage that Igbo had previously enjoyed in lieu of their education. Their educational attainment became irrelevant during this period as academic qualifications ceased to be criteria for job recruitment. The phrase "State of Origin" was introduced in Nigeria's social system to identify one's cultural background which was ultimately unfavorable to Igbo people.[5]

The failure of the government to facilitate peace and reconciliation between the cultural groups that were involved in the crisis, especially the Hausa and the Igbo resulted in the further persistence and escalation of inter-group rivalries and violence, which left the Igbo vulnerable. The immediate post-civil war era, with respect to inter-group relations and the incorporation of the Igbo in Nigeria, was marked by inter-group hostilities, which took a different dimension from the pre-civil war period. An extreme religious dimension was introduced. Between 1974 and 1979, a number of significant religious crises took place in the Northern region, especially in the cities of Kano and Bauchi, which pitted Muslims against Christians.[6] The Igbo in these cities were again targets and victims. This demonstrated the lingering effect of the social rejection the Igbo faced in the wake of the civil war.

In reaction to the treatment of the Igbo in the immediate post-civil war era, Igbo elites and politicians, in 1974, formed *Ohaneze Ndigbo* (Igbo Assembly). This was a socio-political organization that sought a collective approach to alleviate the situation. This organization brought a sense of belonging to the people, as it provided them with the opportunity to channel grievances and complaints of discrimination and victimization. It also championed the call for a national conference to discuss and resolve the conflicts that confronted the Igbo during the immediate, post-civil war era in order to achieve total reintegration.[7] By October 1976, two years after its formation, *Ohaneze Ndigbo* was disbanded, as the government viewed it as a veiled framework for Igbo political organization.[8] In so far as the Igbo were concerned, this action was perceived as part of an institutionalized strategy to strip them of their pre-war political and social positions. As Ikpeze, argues' 'this political action emasculated the Igbo and rendered them vulnerable.'[9]

The fore-going social and political developments provided the platform for the widespread feelings and claims of victimization and alienation among the Igbo in the immediate post-civil war era, As Ibeanu argues, the Igbo saw themselves as an internally displaced population.[10] This led to agitations by Igbo for international intervention in granting them refugee status. To borrow Richard Parry's characterization of the Africans condition in late 19th.c Cape, South Africa, the Igbo claimed they were "in a sense citizens, but not altogether citizens" of Nigeria.[11] According to the United Nations charter, the key clause that warranted a refugee status

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[1] Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria,45-46*

[2] Onuoha, "Emergent Form," 16

[3] Oyinbo, *Nigeria: Crisis and Beyond*, 124

[4] J. Ahazuem, "The Long Term Effects of the war", in J. Ahazuem (ed) *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War : Perspective from below.*(Enugu: Jemezue Associates, 1997) 88-89

[5] Ikpeze, "Post-Biafran,"98. For a detailed study on the principle of "State of Origin" and "Federal Character" in Nigeria, see B. Adekanye, "Federal Character provision of the 1979 Constitution and the Composition of the Nigerian Armed Forces," *Plural Societies.* Vol. 14 (1983).32-47

[6] Albert, *Inter-Ethnic Relations,-19*

[7] Ohaneze Ndigbo, "The Violation of Human and Civil Rights of Ndigbo in the Federation of Nigeria,1966-1999: A call for Reparation and appropriate Restitution." A Petition submitted to the Human Right Violation Investigation committee.Nigeria. October,1999 .5

[8] O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria.*(New Heaven: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980) 28

[9] Ikpeze, "Post-Biafran,"98

[10] Okechukwu Ibeanu, "Exiles in their own Homes: Conflicts and Internal Population Displacement in Nigeria." J*ournal of Refugee Studies.*Vol.. 12 No. 2 (1999). 161-179

[11] Richard Parry, "In a Sense Citizens, but not Altogether Citizens": Rhodes, Race, and the Ideology of Segregation at the Cape in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1983)

was "a well founded fear of persecution."[1] The implication was that the socio-political displacement of the Igbo during this period did not meet the requirement that would necessitate special asylum consideration. Yet, the Igbo strongly believed they were being maltreated and victimized.

While the economic conditions that characterized the immediate post-civil war era in Nigeria were of immense challenge to Igbo people, it was the socio-political issue of displacement, as well as the difficulties associated with integration into Nigeria society, that translated into an upsurge of migration to different parts of the world. A significant number of Igbo fled to the neighboring West African countries of Gabon and the Ivory Coast. A privileged few sought refuge in Western Europe and North America. [2] Some of the Igbo who headed to North America, found their way to Canada.

3. MIGRATION TO CANADA

As many Igbo began to leave Nigeria in search of a safe haven, Canada became one of the destinations for a significant proportion of the privileged class. Out of all of the "big nations" that participated in the Nigeria crisis—either militarily or in a humanitarian capacity—Canada was singled out by this class of displaced Igbo. It was certainly the knowledge of their previous encounters that favored their choice of Canada. Echoing this sentiment, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the leader of the defunct Biafra Republic, declared that, "Canada is one country that has had past association with us . . . I know Biafra listens to what Canada says."[3] Also, evidence from interviews with Igbo immigrants in Canada suggests that the Igbo linguistic group see Canada as a peaceful and welcoming nation. Uche Ukachukwu, an interviewee declared that "Canada was sympathetic and supportive to the plight of Igbo people, as was seen by their massive support of post-civil war rehabilitation efforts in Igbo homeland"[4]Apart from the above-mentioned perceptions, there were a number of connections in Canada that provided the necessary social links for Igbo people. In the first instance, there were a number of established Igbo professionals in Canada, who were called to service during the short 30-month lifespan of the Republic of Biafra. A notable example was Dr. Okechukwu Ikejiani, a pathologist, who came to Canada in 1938. He was called and appointed both as "Ambassador Phempoteniary" for the Biafran Head of State and Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Commission.[5] There was also an existing Igbo community in Canada, which played a significant role in persuading their relatives to come to Canada.[6] This was in addition to the links provided by the Canadian missionaries and relief workers, who had operated in Igbo homeland. For instance, one of the Canadian relief workers, who made significant strides in the way of assisting Igbo youth immigration to Canada, declared, "Biafrans don't have anywhere to go.. They can all come here."[7]

As earlier stated, Igbo migration to Canada are categorized under three streams. The second stream, which is the focus of this study, includes those who came between 1965 and 1985. The record of the Igbo Canadian Community Association shows that about 473 Igbo came to Canada between 1965 and 1975.[8] This generation of Igbo immigrants included those who were directly affected by the war, or those who were displaced from the civil service in the Northern and Western regions.[9] Between 1975 and 1985, another set which included family members and a few professionals, also migrated to Canada. Only about 124 were identified under the second set by Igbo community records.[10]

Students constituted the highest percentage of Igbo immigrants to Canada during this second period of their migration. The educational opportunities presented by Canada offered an avenue for immigration. Considering the high transportation and logistics cost of coming to Canada, most of these students were from the privileged class. While some students were sponsored by their wealthy families, a good number of them came to Canada through communal initiatives and contributions.[11] A number of them benefitted from scholarships from church missions and relief agencies, a prime example of this category being Dr. Uche Ukachukwu, who was

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[1] United Nations Office of the High Commission for Refugee, *Background*. Paper on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee, September 1971, 4 .

[2] Toyin Falola and Okpeh O. Okpeh, *Population Movement, Conflict and Displacement in Nigeria,*(London: Macmillan Press, 2007.)340

[3] Ojukwu, *Biafra: Selected Speeches,* 217

[4] Uche Ukachukwu, 71;"Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/23/2012,

[5] Achebe Foundation, "Dr.Okechukwu Ikejiani,*" The Foundation Interview Series*, March 6, 2005 www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles-foundation/the-foundation.-nterview.series/dr.okechukwu-ikejiani- 2 html (Accessed April 12, 2012)

[6]Burns, "Airlift Urged," 1

[7] Marvine Howe, "Relief Group in Sao Tome Halted Flights after Last Trip Started Refugee stampede," *The Globe and Mail*, January 14, 1970, 4

[8] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "Membership Register, 1965–1975." These were the total numbers of Igbo who identified with the Association.

[9] Ikechukwu Egesi, 66;"Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/16/2012

[10] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "Membership Register, 1975–1985"

[11] Izuu Okongwu, 65;"Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/17/2012

granted a scholarship by the Presbyterian Church of Canada, to study Pathology at the University of Toronto.[1] This illustrates the benefits which Igbo enjoyed from the long established relations with Canadian missionary organizations. Another factor behind the student preference for Canada was its membership in the Commonwealth. Though the Canadian government did not initiate any educational sponsorship program for the Igbo or Nigerian youths per se during the immediate post-Nigerian civil war era, the contribution of its premier aid agency, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to the Commonwealth Scholarship Program, became a channel through which Igbo students gained access to Canadian educational assistantship. A number of Igbo graduates from the University of Nigeria utilized the scholarships offered by the Commonwealth Scholarship Program to come to Canada.[2] The lists of award holders reveal that out of the 187 Nigerian students who benefitted from the Commonwealth Scholarship Program in Canadian institutions from 1960 to 2000, 103 were Igbo.[3]

Table 1 Nigerian Beneficiaries from the Commonwealth Scholarship Program in Canadian Universities, 1960–2001[4]

	1960–1964	1965–1985	1986–2001
Igbo	6	64	32
Others	8	44	33
Total	14	108	65

From the above table, it can be deduced that the Igbo constituted more percentage of Nigerian students in Canadian Universities. This provides insights into the significant presence of the Igbo in Canada. It is not surprising that most of these students chose to stay in Canada after the conclusion of their studies. Some of these students applied for refugee status when their temporary study permits expired, considering the prevalent situation in Nigeria. In fact, some had their temporary permits extended while some others were given permanent resident status. [5] In 1970, for instance, Bernand Nkemdilim, then Sociology Professor at St. Mary's University, Halifax, an Igbo, refused to return to Nigeria at the expiration of her temporary permit.[6]

Another group of Igbo immigrants came to Canada under the "Independent" and "Family" classes. Given that Canadian citizens or permanent residents were permitted to sponsor family members, many Igbo who had this status used the opportunity to bring their close relatives to Canada. The clearest example of this was the case of Dr. Fidelis Ezemenari, a physicist, then with the Meteorological Branch of the Department of Highways in Toronto. He petitioned the Visa Department of Canadian Citizenship and Immigration office at Abidjan, Ivory Coast, which was responsible for West African countries, for delaying the processing of the applications of his wife, sister, and three children.[7] There is no sufficient data to determine the exact number of Igbo who came to Canada as landed immigrants during the period under review. This problem of data was exacerbated by the general categorization scheme of Canadian Immigration records, which classified individuals simply as "Africans" before 1973 and as "Nigerians" afterward. This silence on ethnicity is understandable since an identification of the Igbo as a preferred group would breach Canada's official position on the Nigerian crisis.

Table 2: "African" Landed Immigrants in Canada, 1966–1972 (Except South Africa and Egypt)

Year	1966	1967	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972
No.	678	940	969	883	992	1,220	6,947

Source: Statistics Canada. "Employment and Immigration Canada, 1966–1972"

Table 3: Nigerian Landed Immigrants in Canada, 1973–1985

Year	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985
No.	338	332	263	194	146	145	98	132	140	176	244	340	440

Source: Statistics Canada, "Employment and Immigration Canada, 1973–1985"

The preceding tables show that the migration of "Africans"—and Nigerians in particular—increased in

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[1] Uche Ukachukwu, interview cited

[2] University of Nigeria located at Nsukka, a town in Eastern Nigeria, Igbo homeland, was the first indigenous Nigerian University. It was established in October, 1960 by Michigan State University, East Lancing. This North American connection must have provided the platform for Igbo students to further their studies in Canada. See P.Olisanwuche Esedebe, *Reflection on history, Nation-building and the University of Nigeria.*An Inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka on Thursday, 11th September, 2003.

[3] Association of Commonwealth Universities, "Register of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows in Canada: Nigeria," in *Directory of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows, 1960–2001* (London, 2003), 136

[4]   Source: Directory of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows, 1960-2001.(London: Association of CommonwealthUniversities,2003)

[5] Canada House of Common's Debate, 31 Oct 1968. 2291 quoted in Howard, "The Canadian Government",105

[6] Clyde Sanger, "Trudeau to Study Aiding Students to Go to Nigeria for Rebuilding," T*he Globe and Mail*, January 14, 1970, 4

[7] Leone Kirwood, "Children, Sister Due in Toronto, Biafran Physicist Awaits Reunion with Family," T*he Globe and Mail*, January 15, 1970, 6

the early 1970s and declined by the mid-1970s. From this data, one can deduce that the Igbo formed the greater number of landed immigrants. After all, this period was the peak of their perceived social and political marginalization in Nigeria. Although the data is, at best, suggestive it lends credence to the claims of the various Igbo organizations concerning the size of their community in Canada. In addition, as Konadu-Agyemang points out, the removal of race-based policies in Canadian immigration law in 1970 which inhibited African migration to Canada was a factor that explains the increasing African presence in the country.[1] This is also applicable to Igbo professionals and entrepreneurs who came during this period under the 'Independent' class.

4. IDENTITY FORMATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

As the generation of Igbo immigrants who were displaced in Nigeria as a result of the civil war arrived in Canada, it was understandable that they began to identify with people from their cultural group, who shared similar experiences of dislocation in Nigeria. Fortunately, the already established Igbo in Canada provided them with basic necessities of adjustment on arrival. Consequently, the Canadian environment was not entirely strange to them. As Chimezie Onwuchekwa recalled, "When I arrived in 1966, I found a good number of Igbo people here who were mostly students and a few families."[2] These were also the people who helped him adjust to the new environment. The collective war experience and post-civil war displacement became the platform for Igbo group identity and relationships in Canada. The immediate priority of Igbo immigrants was far from adoption and integration into Canadian society. Rather, they continued to identify with the plight of their kinsmen in Nigeria and supported efforts made by various Igbo communities toward the reconstruction and development of Igbo homeland. To achieve this, they formed organizations that not only created a sense of communal identity, but also provided a viable forum for the expression of dissatisfaction with the inter-group relations in Nigeria, in relation to the Igbo and the projection of Igbo traditions in Canada.

The history of the Igbo Community Association in Canada dates back to 1963. In that year, a group of Igbo residents of Toronto came together and formed the Igbo Cultural Association of Canada with the aim of sustaining Igbo cultural heritage.[3] Igbo consciousness and socio-cultural sentiments were thus introduced on a broad scale by the activities of this Association. By 1970, the Association claimed to represent all the Igbo in Canada and boasted of having 150 members. With the end of the civil war in Nigeria, they became actively involved in the campaign for fair treatment of the Igbo. On January 14, 1970, the Association petitioned the government of Canada, appealing for intervention in the refugee situation in war-torn eastern Nigeria.[4] Most significantly, on May 30, 1971, the group organized a historic event in Toronto to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the declaration of the Republic of Biafra.[5] This occasion was attended by many Igbo from across the country. According to Luke Okafor, approximately 350 people were in attendance.[6] Apart from the conviviality of Igbo cultural celebration, the gathering was marked with expressions of allegiance to the defunct State of Biafra. As Chika Onyeoziere noted, "it was after this gathering that the Igbo in Canada began to identify themselves primarily as Igbo." Consequently, the Association changed its name to Igbo Canadian Community Association, to reflect its new outlook. According to Onyeoziere, It was the personality and leadership qualities of its first President, Dr. Fidelis Ezemenari, which transformed the activities of this association into a pivot of Igbo community life in Canada.[7] By the mid-1970s, it had successfully established itself as an institutional forum for the resurgent Biafra/Igbo consciousness in Canada. By focusing its activities on the plight of Igbo and events in Nigeria, the Association created a high sense of solidarity among its members.

It is worthy to note how this Diaspora community was able to identify itself with the plights of Igbo in Nigeria during the immediate post-civil war era. They made various collective contributions to the development of the devastated Igbo homeland. This included the efforts they made in the provision of basic health facilities and the reconstruction of some of the publicly-owned schools in various Igbo communities that were destroyed during the war,[8] In addition, this community made concerted efforts to support educational development in Igbo society. For instance, at a meeting held on August 12, 1974, members agreed to create scholarships for Igbo high school students in the Igbo homeland, as an initiative in the way of human development. They agreed to organize fundraising dinners, in addition to paying monthly levy, to finance the project.[9] This demonstrated their financial

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[1] Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang , "An Overview of African Immigration to U.S. and Canada," in Kwado Konadu-Agyemang and K. Baffour (eds.), *The New African Diaspora in North America: Trends, Community-Building and A daptation* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006), 4
[2] Onwuchekwa, "Personal Interview,"
[3] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "A Brief History of our Journey," 1980, 3.
[4] Burns, "Airlift Urged," 1.
[5] Igbo Cultural Association of Canada, "Program of Event," May 30 1971.
[6] Luke Okafor, 73; "Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/23/2012.
[7] Chika Onyeoziere, 60; "Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/15/2012.
[8] Theresa Obiakor, 59; "Personal Interview," Toronto, 04/24/2012.
[9] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "Minutes of Meeting Held on August 12, 1974."

support and concern for the development of their homeland. Similarly, they identified with the campaign for the re-integration and accommodation of Igbo people in Nigeria's society during the immediate post war era. On March 14, 1979, they organized a protest march in Ottawa, in reaction to the religious conflict between Christians and Muslims that occurred in the northern city of Kano, where the majority of the affected victims were Igbo. The protest was meant to garner public sympathy and call for the intervention of the Canadian government.[1]

The Association introduced a constitution in 1974 in line with its welfare services to Igbo in Canada. This gave it a formal community structure, complete with set rules and obligations.[2] They provided welfare services such as assistance in transportation cost of deceased member to Igbo homeland and giving financial assistance to members. These aspects of the Association's service to Igbo community replicated a phenomenon with which most Igbo were familiar, considering their experiences in the northern and western regions of Nigeria, where similar associations were established to provide welfare. By 1980, the Igbo Canadian Community Association had established three branches in Quebec, Manitoba, and Alberta.[3] This was brought on by the increasing number of Igbo residents in these areas, as well as the growing need to establish a sense of community and consciousness among members of the Igbo group.[4]

Another organization arose from the Igbo community in Canada between 1980 and 1984, whose influence and activities contributed immensely to group consciousness. A group of Igbo in Canada formed an organization in 1980 called "Igbo League," which criticized the leadership of the Igbo Canadian Community Association as not being representative of Igbo aspirations. This organization believed that the focus of Igbo community in Canada should be "efforts to the realization of the State of Biafra."[5] They publicly expressed sentiments on the ill-treatment of the Igbo group in Nigeria and called for international intervention. In Okey Nandi's opinion, "their meetings were usually surrounded around criticisms against the Nigerian Government's policies in relation to the Igbo." Although the views of this movement were unpopular among members of the Igbo community, it made significant contributions in terms of re-emphasizing the loyalty to Biafra and "Igboness," as part of the larger process of Igbo identity construction in Canada.

In addition, religious activities played significant roles in group cohesion and identity. Most Igbo immigrants to Canada belonged to the three main Christian denominations that carried out missionary works in Igbo society: the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Catholics.[6] Therefore, they identified with the local districts of these denominations in Canada, in order to attend Sunday worship services. Before long, Igbo members of these three churches began to express dissatisfaction over the strained relationships with their fellow Euro-Canadian worshipers. As Chimezie Onwuchekwa puts it, "We did not enjoy the feeling of acceptance."[7] There were also complaints about the absence of a communal lifestyle in these churches, characterized by mutual aid and relationships, which they were accustomed to in Igbo homeland churches. This created a sense of alienation and indifference among Igbo worshippers. Similarly, the style of worship was quite unfamiliar to these immigrants. Most of the interviewees believed that part of the reason why they were uncomfortable had to do with the manner in which the services were conducted. They maintained that some of the features of Igbo church services, such as clapping during service, were entirely non-existent in the Canadian denominational churches.[8] However, these points of contention were not as crucial as the desires by these worshipers to hold services in Igbo language in order to preserve their culture and maintain their identity. Consequently, by the mid-1970s, many Igbo broke away from the Canadian churches and formed various prayer centers, where Igbo members of these denominations organized full-fledged services in private homes of individuals who felt obliged to provide an outlet for these yearnings.[9] The worship patterns, and languages were structured within an Igbo cultural basis to suit their desires and needs. This break-away and establishment of their own style of worship is what Joseph Gbenda calls the "Africanization of Christianity."[10]

A breakthrough occurred in 1976, when the Igbo Catholic congregation introduced Igbo church services according to the parameters of what the Igbo had desired. It started when Rev. Fr. Joseph Ogbonnaya, an Igbo Catholic priest, came to Canada to further his theological studies. After long consultations with the Bishop of the Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, Most Rev. M. Pears Lacey, the priest and his congregation were

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[1] Obiakor, "Personal Interview,"

[2] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "Constitution," 1974.

[3] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "A Brief History," 4.

[4] Okafor, "Personal interview,"

[5] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "A Brief History," 4.

[6] Ukachukwu, "Personal interview,"

[7] Onwuchekwa, "Personal interview,"

[8] This sentiment was expressed by 7 out of the 12 interviewees, when they were asked to trace the origin of Igbo- combined churches in Canada.

[9] Okafor, "Personal interview,"

[10] Joseph Gbenda, *Africanization of Christianity* (Nsukka: Chuka Educational Publishers, 2001), 1–134.

given a space at Transfiguration of Our Lord Parish, Etobicoke, where they conducted services during the evening hours. Many Igbo immigrants identified with this church. By December 1981, regular membership at this congregation was at 97, and it was estimated to reach 200 to 250 on special occasions.[1] This became the origin of the Igbo move toward Catholicism in Canada. It is interesting to note that most Igbo, who were members of either Anglican or Presbyterian churches in Nigeria, became members of the Catholic Church in Canada. As Charity Ogoke remarks, "the staunch resistance of some social liberal issues, such as gender and sexuality, which were prevalent in other denominations, was a factor that drew most Igbo to the Catholic Church in Canada."[2] For instance, debates on gay union and ordination of female priests had prevailed in the Anglican Church in Canada since 1979.[3] This was explained as being related to Igbo tradition, which has strict restrictions on gender equality and issues of sexuality. Thus, it became a phenomenon for Igbo in other cities, such as Montreal and Calgary, to establish their own services in their host Canadian Catholic churches.

Besides the opportunity to worship in Igbo language and familiar patterns, the various Igbo-oriented churches provided a veritable avenue for social relation amongst the Igbo As Kwasi Kwakye-Nitako expresses, "immigrant churches serve multi-purpose functions for their members."[4] Church services thus bridged the gaps of relationships and communication which ordinary would had been be lacking considering weekly busy schedules at their places of work or study. Church services also became avenues for Igbo cultural identity and expression as most Igbo worshippers dressed to these services on gorgeous traditional attires.[5] It is notable to state that Igbo churches provided the high-needed opportunity and assistance in consummating relationships for the Igbo who were poised to marrying from the Igbo cultural group. Chukwuemeka Nwokolo recounts how he found his wife, an Igbo, with the assistance provided by the church.[6]

It is apparent that religious activities were crucial and viable factors that brought a sense of cohesion and identity to the Igbo Diaspora community in Canada. The mobilization activities and political campaigns that were aimed at instilling group consciousness were perhaps not as effective as the role played by religious institutions. As Jacob Olupona and Regina Gemignani put it, "religious communities have thus emerged as sites for a vital expression and agency."[7]

As the community continued to expand, and it became obvious that it had gained a foothold in Canada, some of its prominent members found it imperative to introduce Igbo chieftaincy institutions in order to preserve Igbo traditions within the Igbo community in Canada. As a result, in January 1978, the Igbo Traditional Council of Canada was formed.[8] It should be noted that "chieftaincy institution," in the monarchical sense, was non-existent in pre-colonial Igbo society. It was introduced in the colonial era for local administrative purposes. Crowder and Ikime note that the title "Chief" was a label coined by British colonial officials to designate individuals with authorities to serve under the colonial governments.[9] A. E. Afigbo, in describing how chieftaincy was invented in Igbo society demonstrates how insignia of authority, known as "warrants," were given to those individuals who became known as warrant chiefs in the colonial era.[10] The institution was subsequently transformed in post-colonial Igbo society, to serve as a guardian of tradition in an administrative community, and was exclusively bestowed as highly respected individuals.[11] It was the influence enjoyed by the new Chiefs in the Igbo homeland that inspired its reproduction in the Igbo Diaspora community in Canada. On July 24, 1981, the first *Eze Igbo* Canada (King of Igbo in Canada) was installed, alongside six other chiefs, who served as members of his cabinet in an occasion held in Toronto.[12] The Traditional Council, headed by this "king," thus, organized and presided over several cultural festivals within the community. It instituted the "Igbo Day" cultural celebrations, which was an annual cultural fiesta that showcased variety of Igbo cultural heritage,

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[1] Catholic Archdiocese of Toronto, "Igbo Mass at The Transfiguration of Our Lord, Etobicoke," 1981.

[2] Charity Ogoke, 65; "Personal Interview," Ottawa, 04/18/2012.

[3] Gwendolyn Richards, "Gay Union, a threat to Church: Leader Warns," *The Globe and Mail,* May 30, 2003, A4.

[4] Kwasi Kwakye-Nitako, "Still Praising God, in a New Land: African Immigrant Christianity in North America," in *The New African Diaspora in North America: Trends, Community-Building and Adaptation,* eds. Kwad Konadu-Agyemang and K. Baffour. (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006), 128.

[5] Ogoke, "Personal interview,".

[6] Chukwuemeka Nwokolo, 58; "Personal Interview," Ottawa, 04/18/2012.

[7] Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani, "Emerging Communities: The Religious Life of New African Immigrants in the United States," in *The New African Diaspora,* eds. Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzewu. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 336.

[8] Igbo Traditional Council of Canada, Toronto, "Records File 4," 1979–1984.

[9] Micheal Crowder and Obaro Ikime, Introduction to *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence,* by Micheal Crowther and Obaro Ikime (eds.) (New York: Africana Pub., 1970),.ix–xi.

[10] A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (New York: Humanities Press Inc., 1972), 1–338.

[11] Herneit Sievers, "Igbo Traditional Rulers: Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum* Vol. 33, No. 1 (1998): 73.

[12] Igbo Traditional Council of Canada, Toronto, "Record File 4,"

such as traditional music and Arts. A notable example of this cultural event was the one held on September, 21, 1983, where honorary chieftaincy titles were conferred on some members of the Igbo community.[1] These cultural events also presented avenue to showcase Igbo cultural symbols and attires which invariably succeeded in reproducing the pre-colonial Igbo tradition, as well as promoting the resurgence of the chieftaincy institution of post-colonial Igbo society. Subsequently, a number of Igbo traditional groups were formed. Worthy of note were *Umu mma Canada*—a women's dance group formed in 1983, and *Anyi ga-adi*—a youth cultural forum established in 1984, both of which were based in Toronto.[2] However, the spread of traditional activities in other parts of Canada points to the crucial role they played in cultural identification and group cohesion.

5 CONCLUSION

The two basic components identified by Joseph Harris' conception of modern African Diaspora—"the voluntary and involuntary dispersion of Africans throughout history," and "the emergence of cultural identity abroad"— have become widely accepted as frameworks for explaining the experiences of Africans outside the continent.[3] Scholars to date, appreciate African Diaspora from the dimension of either involuntary migration, in which the experiences of transplanted African slaves are the primary concern, or voluntary migration, which discusses contemporary experiences. However, during the period under consideration, Igbo migration to Canada shared elements of both perspectives on African Diaspora. In as much as this generation of Igbo could be seen as part of the contemporary voluntary migration of modern African Diaspora, the circumstances surrounding much of their constituent migration and activities in Diaspora put them in a somewhat forced migration category. As Cohen has demonstrated, the reasons for modern African Diaspora fall under three categories: victim, trade, or labor.[4] This study of the Igbo experience thus subscribes to Cohen's categorization of "victim Diaspora." On Harris' second component, "the emergence of cultural identity abroad," the Igbo community in Canada has shown that Diaspora identity cannot be properly understood without appropriate background knowledge of the socio-political developments that gave rise to migration. I have attempted to link the migration of the Igbo during the period of this study, 1965 to 1985, to the trend of socio-political displacement, which arose from inter-group rivalries and conflicts in Nigeria in the mid-1960s through the mid-1980s.

Firstly, the pattern of Igbo migration and community formation in Canada, between 1965 and 1985, challenges some of the conclusions of studies on the global Igbo Diaspora, which focuses on an exclusive economic frame of reference.[5] There is no doubt that economic considerations accounted for Igbo migration during the period of this study, but they do not tell the whole story. This becomes obvious when one considers that the period under review was characterized by massive wealth that came from an oil boom, which undoubtedly bolstered the Nigerian economy. The present study thus proposes a reinterpretation of Igbo immigration patterns and Diaspora-community activities, by focusing on this particular period and analyzing trends through the lens of socio-political developments.

Secondly, the Igbo example presented in this study demonstrates the problem of generalizing the various African experiences abroad. The cultural and group differences that characterized Nigeria's socio-political landscape were reproduced in inter-group relations in the Diaspora. Thus, it would be misleading to study Igbo in Canada as part of the wider Nigerian community. Their community organizations and activities confirmed them as a distinct cultural group with unique experiences. Emotional attachments to the shared experiences of displacement, as well as developments in their home country, were paramount in the activities of the generation of Igbo immigrants that came to Canada between 1965 and 1985. This is clearly demonstrated by their identification as "Igbo Canadians"—a classification they used to distance themselves from Nigeria and establish primary loyalty to the Igbo ethnic nationality.

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Igbo Canadian Community Association, Toronto, "A Brief History," 5–6.

[3] Harris, "Introduction," 3.

[4] Cohen, *Global Diaspora,* 6.

[5] See Udoka, "The Socio-Economic Basis"; and Odi, "The Igbo in Diaspora"

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