

BIAFRA: A STUDY IN NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION
AND TRIBALISM IN NIGERIA

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PREFACE

This specialized study of Biafra seeks to explain what Biafra is, why its people decided to separate themselves from Nigeria, and how they have reacted to what have been their task in seeking national self-determination. The proposal to disintegrate the Federation of Nigeria is not an accident of history but an inevitable consequence. This exercise of war is not a noble struggle but one of futility. In this study I explain how Biafra came into existence by briefly recounting the political history of Nigeria before the breakaway. It is necessary to understand how Nigeria was formed by Britain out of irreconcilable peoples, how these peoples came to find that, following British rule, the differences among them, far from shrinking, became accentuated, and how the structure left behind the British finally was unable to explain the explosive forces confined within it.

I hope that this will provide an interesting and enlightening insight into the Nigerian-Biafran conflict and that my conclusions will be helpful and meaningful.

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INTRODUCTION

The secession of the former Eastern Region as the Republic of Biafra, in May 1967, and the civil war which followed were the culmination of a series of political traumas that have changed some of the old assumptions. The military coups of January and July 1966 had added an element of violent change to the already complicated power struggles of the previous decade. The massacre, in September of 1966, of Ibos and other Easterners living in the Northern Region had been a second shock which led most of the Ibos towards rejection of a federal state that could no longer protect them. In May 1967, the Federal Military Government, under Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, had decreed that twelve new states should replace the existing four Regions.

This was the profoundest revolution of all, amounting to a third coup. It promised to break up the old power blocs-the Hausa-Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the West and the Ibos of the East, whose rivalry had dominated federal politics. The new Nigeria was to belong, like Colonel Gowon himself and most of the soldiers who had placed him in power; to the minorities. It was to be a Nigeria of the Kanuri, Tiv, Birom, Idoma, Edo, Itsekiri, Ijau, Ibibio, Efik, Ogoja, and scores of others. But for the Ibos, embattled in a homeland swollen with refugees, bereaved by the thousand, the revolution seemed to have come too late. The splitting of their Eastern Region into three seemed to the Ibos less like

a reform than a crude attempt to dismember their potential new country even before they had launched it. They seceded, and war was then inevitable.

Tribalism is naturally a pejorative word, in Nigeria no less than elsewhere. Nigeria has some four hundred linguistic groups. Most of them are small, but it is not the small ones that cause trouble. The real trouble is caused by the rivalry of the few large groups, especially the Hausa-Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the West and the Ibo of the East. Each of these groups has a common origin, a common history, a common language, and a common way of life. They are not only nations but big ones. There are perhaps 20 million Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria alone. There are another million of them in the neighboring republic of Niger and there are yet others in northern Ghana and northern Cameroon. The Yoruba of the West comprise officially 10 million; they also spill over into Dahomey and into the Northern States. The Ibo accounted for between 60 to 70 per cent of the population of the East, officially 12 million in 1963. They too spill over into the Mid-West State, and until the 1966 upheavals, there were almost 2 million in the North and many more in the West and in Lagos.

The rivalries of these nations are as the struggle between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine. While the Palestine argument is largely over land, the Nigerian one is over jobs, contracts, scholarships and the right of traders to establish

themselves outside their Region of origin. Behind the main battle between the three main nations--each formerly dominating a particular Region--was the subsidiary battle of the minority tribes in each Region. The Tiv, the Kanuri and the Nupe fought for their rights against the dominant Hausa-Fulani in the North; the Ibibio, the Ijaw and the Efik fought the battle against the Ibo of the East; and so did the non-Yoruba people of the West, until their own Mid-West Region was created in 1963.

There are two nationalisms in Nigeria. There is the modern kind that makes civil servants, soldiers, politicians, professional men and school children alike take pride in their country. As yet this does not penetrate very far in society, and it received a catastrophic setback during the upheavals of 1966-68. The other nationalism, the one felt deep down in the bones, is not concerned with Nigeria but Ibo, Yoruba or Hausa. It is by no means confined to the illiterate. Hence the painful paradox of university professors quarreled bitterly on the campus over tribal issues. The University of Lagos all but broke asunder in 1965 because a shift in the political balance of power had caused an Ibo Vice-Chancellor to be replaced by a Yoruba. Because of this, problems began to rise between 1966-1969.

Today, Nigeria thrives with a growth of economical power. The growth rate is 12% per capita income. There is 30% of the land under cultivation. Trade has increased to:

exports--\$1.8 billion of crude petroleum and an official exchange rate of 1 Naira to the U.S. \$1.52; and imports--\$1.6 billion. With these statistics, Nigeria is trying to solve her problems as well as have external forces to share in the development.

CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT: DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Gabriel Almond, in Politics of Developing Areas, defines a political system as:

the interactions to be found in all independent societies which perform the functions of integration and adaption (both internally and vis-a-vis other societies) by means of the employment, or threat of employment, of more or less legitimate, order-maintaining or transforming system in the society.¹

There are many political systems, such as the Congo's, that are excluded by this definition where the question of legitimacy is the crucial political issue. Political systems threatened by revolution or civil war or colonial political systems where the functions of adaptation and integration are performed, even though the possession and use of physical force by colonizing power is regarded as illegitimate by the subjects, are other examples. Almond's definition, however, can be applied to political parties in Nigeria.

The definition is more comprehensive than Burke's definition of a party as "a body of men united for promoting

¹Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, Politics of the Developing Areas (Princeton University Press, 1960), p. 7.

by their joint endeavours the national interests, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed." The Burkean concept of the party assumes a national arena in which the national interest is known but in which groups differ as to the means of achieving the ends. In accord with this concept, citizens may form parties because of agreement on certain means. As a party, they can propose programs to the electorate; and their failure to satisfy national needs may result in the loss of office. While in office, however, their duty is to carry out the national mandate faithfully.

Groups which at the moment are not in office because their proposals are only acceptable to the minority of the population have to set themselves up as the people's watchdogs, pointing out where those in office have failed to do their duty, where the means proposed have been inefficacious, and how the opposition's program will more efficiently further the national interest.

This role of the party best suits the parliamentary system of government with its opposition parties, cabinet, and parliamentary responsibility. With an educated community, with efficient means of communicating national needs and judging governmental performance, and with the consensual basis for accepting the rules of the game assured, such a system will succeed, as it has in Britian.

The parliamentary system of government is essentially dependent for its success on the existence of parties

whose representatives agree on a common policy, work together in a united front in Parliament. It is the party system which renders politics intelligible to the electorate.²

With the ends of society agreed upon, the test of the party's performance can only depend on the excellence or efficiency of its program and the execution of this program. Hence discipline and a united front in parliament become important values in parliamentary government.

When, however, this concept of the party is transferred to a society still in flux, where the national interest is still in the process of definition, there are bound to be conflicts about the nature of political goals and about the political means with which to achieve those goals. Political contest become a contest to define the goals to be sought by society. In the absence of moderation on the part of the political parties, conflicts may become total, one party's victory annihilating the other parties. Parliamentary government becomes very difficult to operate when disciplined parties are devoted not to working out those means which are most conducive to an accepted national end, but to discovering the extent that the constitutional means can be used to further particular ends. The electorate cannot give a mandate acceptable to all parties because it is split into many communities.³

²Report of the Special Commission on the Constitution of Ceylon, CMD (1928) 3131, p. 41.

³James Coleman, Nigeria Background to Nationalism, University of California Press, 1963, p. 421.

The goals of the political parties are not understood by all in terms of a common language of advantage and/or disadvantage; meanings are ascribed them from imputation of their sectional origins, and Parliament, rather than being the institution where the national logic or idea is abstracted from the numerous and partial organized demands, becomes the arena of power where the temporal majority superimpose their will upon the general will.

The political history of the introduction of the Nigerian peoples into legislative politics supports this interpretation. To this history we now turn.

In 1914 the colony of Lagos, the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the protectorate of Northern Nigeria were amalgamated, thus creating a unified Nigeria under Lord Frederick Lugard, who remained the British governor until 1919. In 1923, a legislative council which had been set up in 1861 with jurisdiction over Lagos was expanded and reorganized. The new council provided for four elected African members, although property franchise was still only granted to the inhabitants of Lagos and Calabar. Parties sprang up almost spontaneously, a pattern which was to repeat itself as constitutional devolution of power led to greater political activity.

From 1923 to 1947 Lagos was the point around which the political actors revolved. The quinquennial elections for the legislative council, the triennial elections for the

Lagos Town Council (to which body the elective principle was extended in 1920), and the perennial issue of the status and headship of the House of Docemo were the central issues of Lagos politics from 1923 to 1938.

The crucial and dominant personality of this period was Herbert M. Macaulay, founder of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). His supporters were the House of Docemo and Lagos market women.

As parochial as the actual concern of the NNDP was, the founder envisaged for the party a much wider role. His long-term aspiration was to see an eventually free nation under the Commonwealth,

to secure the safety or welfare of the people of the colony and protectorate of Nigeria as an integral part of the British Imperial Commonwealth and to carry the banner of "Right, Truth, Liberty, and Justice" to the empyrean heights of Democracy.⁴

The immediate goal of the NNDP was to win the Lagos election as a means of protecting the economic and political interests of the native traders and producers of Nigeria, to press for Africanization of the civil service, and to promote the development of higher education and the introduction of compulsory education through the country.

Macaulay was preoccupied with championing the rights of the traditional ruler of Lagos against the colonial government. This insulating effect on his party of the indirect rule which shield the interior of Nigeria from the political

⁴Constitution of Nigerian National Democratic Party (Lagos, Nigeria), p. 1.

influence of Lagos, prevented the NNDP from becoming truly national.

In 1938 the young, educated elite united to protest the standards applied to higher education (specifically the granting of degrees under British University standards by Nigerian institutions, in particular the Yaba Higher College), discrimination in civil service, and the issuing of licenses to African lorry owners. The protest became a movement, and the movement soon outgrew its modest beginnings to become the first major attempt to build a political party on a national level. Branches of the party were opened in most larger towns and cities. The branch was called the Nigerian Youth Movement. The leaders included men like Ernest Ikoli(Ijaw), Samuel Akinsanya(Ijebu), H. O. Davis, Dr. K. A. Abayomi, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe(Ibo), and Obafemi Awolowo. The party's goals included:

1. abolition or reform of indirect rule;
2. representation of provinces, including the north, in the legislative council;
3. higher appointments in civil service;
4. representation of Nigerians in London;
5. attention to the problems of the farmer and rural communities;
6. aid and support to African business entrepreneurs;
7. improvement of conditions of services of African employees in mercantile firms.

The party's thinking was national; its reforms were directed toward the removal of particular abuses (the indirect rule) which prevented the effective politicization of the masses and the abolition of discriminatory practices against Africans both socially and economically. While it sought greater

African representation in the decision-making bodies of the government, it still accepted the framework that the British system provided.

The importance of the Nigerian Youth Movement lay in the fact that it was the last party in which most of the Southern political leaders who later played important roles in Nigeria would work under one banner. Azikiwe and Awolowo, symbols of two of the three major tribes in the country, men who have been prominent in making Nigeria what it is, were members of the same party, working for the same national ends, until 1941.

In 1941 the Ikoli-Akinsanya incident split the Movement and introduced the issue of tribalism for the first time.⁵ A seat in the legislative council had become vacant with the resignation of Dr. K. A. Abayomi, President. Party protocol and precedent directed that this seat should be filled by Ikoli, next in command, but Akinsanya(Ijebu) chose to contest for the party nomination. After his bid for candidacy was thwarted, he and his backers, the Ijebus and the Ibos under Azikiwe, left the Movement, proclaiming that they had been victims of tribal discrimination.

Whether a case to back this charge could be made is debatable. Among the supporters of Ikoli there were prominent

⁵Obafemi Awolowo, The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Cambridge, England; Cambridge University Press, 1960.

Ijebus like Awolowo who saw the issue as one of maintaining party discipline and precedents. Ikoli himself, on whose behalf the Yorubas were supposed to have acted, was not a Yoruba but Ijaw. If at that time there would have been tribalism, it would have worked against him too. Also at this time, Ikoli, as an editor of the Daily Service, had come into the newspaper market at a time when Azikiwe's newspaper enterprises were experiencing some financial difficulties. Another reason for the conflict could be Azikiwe's dissatisfaction with his minor role in the Movement--a movement, moreover, dominated by the Yoruba intellectuals more conservative than he.

Some of these factors could have accounted for the final break. The important thing was that a practical and political move was made and tribalism was called in to justify it.

In 1944 a melange of improvement associations, clubs, labor unions, and tribal unions met in Glover Hall in Lagos to form the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. Membership in this party was organizational. The original members included two trade unions, two political parties, four literary societies, eight professional associations, eleven social clubs, and one hundred and one tribal unions.

The party's immediate goal was to secure the independence of a united Nigeria within the Commonwealth. Its

ultimate objectives were to disseminate ideas of representative democracy and parliamentary government by means of political education. "Specifically, the objectives of the NCNC are political freedom, economic security, social equality and religious toleration. On attaining political freedom, the NCNC looks forward to the establishment of a socialist commonwealth."⁶

The NCNC started as a national party, a purpose which was reflected in the compositions of its leadership: Herbert Macaulay (Yoruba), president and Azikiwe (Ibo), general secretary. Its made a tour of the country in 1946-1947 to arouse the people against the projected Richard's Constitution. However, between 1946 and 1948, the tribal tensions which had been initiated by the Ikoli-Akinsanya dispute of 1941, coupled with the dissatisfaction of the Yoruba elite, who felt that the NCNC was dominated by Azikiwe and the Ibos, culminated into the tribal cold war of 1948. Threat of war almost turned into civil war as members of both tribes began to purchase weapons. Some of the men who had worked for the national interest said this:

We were bunched together by the British who named us Nigeria. We never knew the Ibos, but since we came to know them we have tried to be friendly and neighborly. Then came the arch devil to sow the seeds of distrust and hatred..... We have tolerated enough

⁶Nnamdi Azikiwe, Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Cambridge, England; Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 181.

from a class of Ibo and addle-brained Yorubas who have mortgaged their thinking caps to Azikiwe and his hirelings.⁷

The Ibos then appeared as though they were acting out that to which Azikiwe was to give national significance when he depicted the national destiny, the Ibos' ineluctable destiny to conquer and rule the nation.

It would appear that the God of Africa has specially created the Ibos nation to lead the children of Africa from bondage of the ages....the martial prowess of the Ibos nation at all stages of human history has enabled them not only to conquer others⁸ but also to adapt themselves to the role preserver.⁸

The Yoruba's specific answers to the threat of the Ibo represented by the NCNC and the Ibo State Union were the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (1948), an equivalent to the Ibo State Union, and the Action Group (1951), a party deriving its initial energy from the Egbe.

The membership of the AG was to be on an individual basis without any social, religious, or class discrimination. The founders of the party intended to concentrate on the Yoruba section of the Western Region, with hopes of winning the election to be held under the new McPherson Constitution of 1951. The central committee of the AG was to consist of representatives from each of the twenty-one divisions in the

⁷"Alikijn in Egbe Omo Oduduwa," Monthly Bulletin, June, 1948.

⁸Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe--Editor, Western African Pilot, July 6, 1949.

Western Region and members of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa who were interested in politics. They were to be persons who could be relied upon to carry out a concerted program.

The basis of the AG was to be two complementary strategic guidelines of action:

1. To bring and organize within its fold all nationalists in the Western Region, so that they may work together as a united group, and submit themselves to party loyalty and discipline.
2. To prepare and present to the public programmes for all departments of government, and to strive faithfully to ensure the effectuation of such programmes through those of its members that are elected into the Western House of Assembly and the federal legislature.

Its immediate purpose was to win the election of 1951 to the Western House of Assembly. Its long-term goals were:

1. The immediate termination of British rule in every phase of our political life.
2. The education of all children of school-going age, and the general enlightenment of all illiterate adults and illiterate children above school age.
3. The provision of health and general welfare for all our people.
4. The total abolition of want in our society by means of any economic policy which is both expedient and effective.¹⁰

⁹Obafemi Awolowo, AWO, "The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo," (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

¹⁰Ibid., p. 224.

The party was prepared to use modern political means, programs, party discipline, and political manifestos to capture a parliamentary election, but realized that only with the support of the traditional leaders in the Egbe Omo Oduduwa could the party image be quickly and efficiently propagated. The instrumental use of the Egbe was a political necessity, since it was through the Egbe and its traditional leaders that the new language of parliamentary politics could be effectively translated. The Egbe had evolved into an effective medium of cooperation between the new elite of the Western Region and the Yoruba chiefs. And among the people of Yorubaland, the influence of the chief was considerable. As Obafemi Awolowo wrote in 1945, chieftaincy has an

incalculable sentimental value for the masses in Western and Northern Nigeria. This being so, it is imperative, as a matter of practical politics, that we use the most effective means ready to hand for organizing masses for rapid political advancement.¹¹

This tactical use of traditional means to advance a modern political goal was important. It later appears to be one of the keys that unlocks the seemingly confusing mysteries of the Nigerian political scene.

The emergence of a highly disciplined party in the Western Region, combined with the necessity to organize for the elections taking place in all of the regions, had its

¹¹R. L. Sklar, Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 101-102.

political consequences in the North and the East. The NCNC at its meeting in Jos in 1951 reorganized a party which had been almost moribund for three years, changed from organizational to individual membership, and launched a vigorous election campaign in the East and the West.

The first important political developments unfolded in the Northern Region. Before 1947 Northern Nigeria had been effectively screened from Southern political influence, due to a joint effort of the traditional rulers and the colonial government; it now found it had to organize or see the North captured by Southern political parties whose secular ideologies were inimical to the traditional regimes of the Hausa-Fulani emirates. In 1948, two cultural groups, the Bauchi General Improvement Union and the Youth Social Circle of Sokoto, both composed of young men interested in politics, amalgamated. Jamiyan Mutanen Arewa (Northern People's Congress) was the result of this merger.

The traditional rulers, suspicious of any political activity not controlled by them, did not support this political party at the beginning. The leaders of the Jamiyan were cautious reformers who knew that without the support of the native rulers they could never succeed. They made a special effort to convince the rulers that they were only interested in helping the traditional authority stave off the Southern political invasion. In return, they asked for a measure of

reform within the native authority system, stating that

Jamiyan does not intend to usurp the authority of natural rulers; on the contrary, it is our ardent desire to enhance such authority whenever and wherever possible. We want to help our natural rulers in the proper discharge of their duties..... we want to help them in enlightening the Talakawa (the mass).¹²

The party was regarded as containing radical elements, especially the articulate leader, Aminu Kano, who was for drastic curtailment of the power of the rulers. In 1950, Aminu Kano broke away from the NPC to form the more dynamic Northern Elements Progressive Union.

In preparation for the 1951 election, the NPC was revived and declared a "Progressive Political Party as from October 1st 1951." It had received the endorsement of the rulers who now planned to use it to stabilize their regime. Its leadership was drawn largely from the ranks of higher officials in the native administrations (emirates). Its program included:

1. Demands for regional autonomy within the united Nigeria.
2. Local government reform within a progressive emirate system.
3. The voice of the people to be heard in all councils of the North.
4. Retention of the traditional systems of appointing emirs with a wider representation of the electoral committee.

¹²Daily Comet, 29 December 1949.

5. Drive throughout the North for education while retaining and increasing cultural influences.
6. Eventual self-government for Nigeria within the British Commonwealth.
7. One North, one people, irrespective of religion, tribe or rank.¹³

The elections of 1951 found all three parties victorious in their respective regions. The NPC controlled the Northern Region, the Action Group the Western Region, and the NCNC the Eastern Region. Apart from the AG, whose leadership in the 1962 crisis led to a government dominated by a coalition of the NCNC and some former AG members, each region was dominated up to 1962 by one of these major parties.

This regionalization of the parties had manifold consequences for the nation. It led to the peculiar form of the federal setup of Nigeria, in which the Northern colossus dominates all the other regions combined. It led to the entrenchment within each region of a party drawing its greatest support from the largest ethnic group in the region. And as a consequence of this, although all claim to be national, no national party with effective support in all the regions has emerged.

To maintain a national front and to establish a government acceptable to all members of the federation, the NPC, which could secure a working majority in the Northern Region

¹³"Manifesto of the Northern People's Congress," 1 October 1951, Report on the Kano Disturbances, p. 45.

alone, had been willing to form coalition governments with the NCNC. An almost impregnable North, in a federal constitution based on universal adult suffrage, assumed that the Southern parties, to have any voice in the federal government, must content themselves with the junior partnership in a coalition which is dispensable to the senior partner.

The effectiveness of the governmental institution is based on national integration, or the nationalization of the community, the community being coterminous with the legal territorial boundaries of Nigeria. A "successful" nationalization of the community, then, would take place when each individual, group, or class begins to feel that there is a stake, the highest stake, in the preservation of the continuous existence of the community; when loyalties to individuals, groups, or classes, for certain public actions, are subordinated to the national interest; and thus, by implication, when the ultimate sacrifice is paid in terms of lives and loss of liberty in critical situations so that the nation may live. The nationalization of the community is said to be successful when in public interactions both in the political and economic market places a functional and legal equality of participants is the accepted norm; where merit in the economic market place is the criterion for mobility; and where in the political market place the rule of law and the temporary expression of the "public will" resulting from election is

accepted as a guide for political behavior (at least until enough support is mobilized to change this "will"). Therefore, in a national community, a certain degree of public behavior and consensual political style is built into the policy.

In studying Nigeria, the ethnic factor prevented the development of a national consciousness which could invest the national institutions with a primacy over tribal institutions. This ethnic factor, coupled with the relative absence of class considerations, also led to the lack of development or recognition of common interests which cut across tribes, linguistic groups, or filial associations. The existence of mass illiteracy and a minority of literate vocal elites resulted in dichotomous development of class awareness. The majority and the illiterate, existing in a tribal or linguistic milieu in which ascriptive and achieved status depended on traditional criteria, were socialized into parochial class and caste values which had relevance only within a limited group or area. Their political consciousness, because of the active politicization of the tribe, had not grown beyond the regions.

The literate few, who as members of the business, professional, and administrative elite performed in the regional and national arenas, had developed class awareness which was politically circumscribed. They were the political

as the political strategy demanded. But at the federal level, where the national interest became paramount, the clash between the local and the national were inevitable. The strengthening of the particularistic rather than the national values weakened whatever national community existed. As an actor at the national level, he sought to reconcile national demands, which he helped to define, and local demands, which were imposed upon him by his environment. His entry into the national political arena depended on the votes of the non-national majority, but his performance in the market depended on his interpretation of what the national rules were. His inability to mobilize support outside his local group compelled him to fall back on the assured group support. Yet at the federal level, stability depended primarily on the acceptance of the rules of competition. If the regulating and arbitrating institutions threatened one or more of the competitors with ruin, the whole structure would be endangered as the threatened party might opt out of the federation. Stability might therefore be stability of the status quo or the acceptance of rules of the game to channel political change.

It was therefore at the federal level that a few individuals, members of the political elite, responding to the inchoate national demands, were to decide whether Nigeria would exist or disintegrate. The December 1964 election in a way showed how fragile the national community was and how

dependent on the ideological commitment of the political elite. The federation was threatened with dissolution, elections were seen as useless solutions to the political problem, there were street riots in the cities--these were the ominous symptoms of disintegration and unfinished nationalization of various communities of the federation. However, the fact that the dissatisfied national leaders called only for boycotts of the elections, "talked" of "peaceful dissolution" of the federation should certain demands not be met, and their obvious unwillingness to advocate violence that might lead to civil war indicated at the very least the effort to "keep the Congo out of Nigeria" and to maintain the tenuous federal structure.

The army, the police, and the civil service were loyal to the government, as if it made no difference what "party" was exercising the constitutional authority of the government. The majority of the people waited, perhaps uneasily, for the decisions of the leaders. They allowed themselves to be persuaded that the results of the federal election would be accepted and the efforts towards constitutional reform would follow.

The compromise prevented the ultimate crisis, a crisis which began over the demands to use a constitutional reform to solve a political problem. The crisis still persisted, since the problem was yet unresolved and had to be resolved if any election were not to lead to a nightmare of political

disintegration. The means that the leaders chose for resolving the crisis were, however, very important. They chose reform, not revolution, and the redistribution of political power, not the destruction of the basis for political power, the nation.

This crisis during three weeks of December 1964 was not unforeseen. It was long in the making. It was implicit in the Richards' Constitution of 1946; it was unresolved in the McPherson Constitution of 1951; it was left for further negotiation in the Constitution Conference of 1957. The problem had to do with the distribution of power within the federation and with the creation of more states within the existing states of the federation. In the absence of a national consensus about what was to be divided, in the absence of an overriding loyalty in all groups to the nation, Nigeria, the problem of creating new states also merged into the larger problem of creating the national state itself. In arguing over the issues of new states, or in refusing to discuss the "insoluble," there was a tacit agreement that all debates would be conducted within this framework. The fact of negotiating and acting within this framework imparted an attachment to that framework. For most, the issue was not what framework should be adopted, but how it should be strengthened to enable it to withstand the strain of future demands.

In the immediate postwar years, the Nigerians nationalists expected and demanded greater participation in the

government. The sacrifices they endured on behalf of the British Commonwealth were to be repaid by British gratitude expressed in greater devolution of power to the Nationalists. The presence of the Anti-Colonialist Party, the Labour Party, in Westminster, increased Nationalist hope. The Labour Party was not unwilling to act in accordance with its avowed purpose, that of gradual liberation of the oppressed.

In 1946, the Richards' Constitution was promulgated.

The objectives were:

1. to promote the unity of Nigeria,
2. to provide adequately within that desire for the diverse elements which make up the country,
3. to secure greater participation in the discussion of their own affairs.¹⁵

Though the constitution met hostile public desiring more than mere "discussion in their own affairs" and sorely dissatisfied with the representational system which would leave most of the discussion to those already sympathetic to the government, the one invocation introduced into the Nigerian political structure, that of regionalization, was not criticized.¹⁶

In fact, it was seen as a belated recognition of a principle long advocated, a federation in which diversity in unity, or unity in diversity, would be preserved.

Federalism was accepted by all Nigerians, Nationalists,

¹⁵Nigeria Sessional Paper, No. 4 (1945), Cond. 6599.

¹⁶Ibid.

and non-Nationalists alike, as the most suitable system for the organization of a country diverse in its ethnic composition.

The rationale for such an approach seemed to have been provided by M. Venkatarongaiya, who wrote in Federalism in Government that

Federalism may be said to be the best kind of government for people among whom there is a considerable amount of diversity in respect to language, religion, and culture and for countries which are vast in size and which contain provinces and sections with varying geographical and economic characteristics. In such situations, no other form of government can thrive so well and produce such good results as federalism does.¹⁷

Although it can be shown that federalism itself seems to fare badly in a situation in which the various linguistic groups are interested in preserving their own identity (for example, English and French-speaking Canadians), the thorny question of the distribution of power between the center and the federal components may become insoluble if adequate checks and balances to equilibrate the influence exerted by each region are not provided. Where the conditions defined by Venkatarongaiya exist, the process of preserving the linguistic and cultural differences results in the weakening of the unifying bonds. Linguistic autonomy soon merges into the desire for political autonomy. The dialectics of decentralization rarely produce a synthesis of a unity in diversity. Stability

¹⁷M. Venkatarongaiya, Federalism in Government, (England: University Press, 1960), p. 183.

is achieved if the regional components are approximately equal in size and thus are able to form coalitions in which the diverse interest are well protected, and if the constitution provides for checks and balances in which the interest of the minority will find adequate expression.

The worst possible situation exists where there are not only linguistic and cultural differences, but where one state or region of the federation is so large that its influence overshadows those of the other states or regions. Thus, when Awolowo advocated the creation of several states along linguistic lines, the assumption was that none of the states would be large enough to threaten the other states within the federation; otherwise the reasoning for such a system would not have existed.

We advocate the grouping of Nigeria into various autonomous states or regions, purely on ethnical basis. Experience of other countries shows that this basis is more natural, and invariably more satisfactory than any other basis..... It is a matter of general agreement that a lasting unity of the peoples of the vast country can only be achieved through federation and not fusion. Consequently, it is absolutely necessary to lay the foundation for federation dividing the country into the regions that will form the units of the proposed federal constitution. This undoubtedly is the reason why regionalization has been about the only acceptable feature of the Richard's Constitution.¹⁸

Then, how large should a state be? Should there be as many states as there are linguistic groups? Awolowo had

¹⁸Obafemi Awolowo, "The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo," (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

answered these questions when he made one of the criteria for the creation of more states for the financial viability of the proposed state.

I hasten to add, however, that we advocate ethnical grouping only as the ultimate objective. We realize that if this basis is strictly adhered to at present throughout the country, some states would emerge which would be totally incapable of finding money to run their affairs. We consider it desirable, therefore, that for the time being such ethnical groups as are unable financially to maintain their own separate states should be amalgamated with other larger and neighboring groups until they are able to maintain their own separate autonomous states. Such smaller ethnic groups should be free to decide within which larger groups they are willing to temporarily amalgamated.¹⁹

Awolowo envisaged a federated system in which the unit would be the ethnic group, enjoying within the federation an autonomous existence. Whether this group will be so autonomous that the federation would become more like a confederation was not the important question he wanted to answer. He was more concerned with preservation of the integrity of the ethnic group within a "united" Nigeria. Political reality would soon lead to the abandonment of this theory and to the acceptance of larger aggregations as the basis of a federation with the problem of unity and diversity still unreconciled.

Azikiwe, also, thought along the same line, but he tried to reconcile the demand for linguistic states with the problem of economic and political unity of the country. If

¹⁹Ibid., p. 176.

the boundary of the states were to be drawn to preserve the cultural integrity of each ethnic group, how was power to be shared between the group and the federal government? Were the states to be so small that the federal government was only to be given power to perform functions which that state could not otherwise perform?

To reconcile the demand for cultural diversity and unity in diversity, Azikiwe agreed with the substance of recommendation of the Nigerian Students Conference in Edinburgh in July, 1949, which he maintained was in keeping with the Freedom Charter of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons.

The Constitution of Nigeria should be based on some form of federation which would permit all nationalities of Nigeria to develop to full political and national cultural maturity, while at the time insuring that Nigeria as a whole, progresses towards a more closely integrated economic, social and political unity, without sacrificing the principle and ideals inherent in their divergent ways of life.²⁰

The demand that the constitution should permit the various groups to develop to "full political and national cultural maturity" implied that the states must enjoy a great measure of autonomy. However, the demand that economic, social, and political unity of the country should be preserved implied that each state would have to sacrifice some of its autonomy for the greater good of the whole. If the whole were itself autonomous and independent of the parts, the sacrifice by

²⁰Ibid., p. 109.

parts would be easier to make, since the balance would still be maintained among the parts. If the whole were to be supreme over the parts, the problem of reconciling cultural and political autonomy of the parts, with the distribution of control over the whole by the parts could be a task. Unity in diversity could be achieved if there were institutions to which the diverse parts owed loyalty and if the parts were equal and thus had equal say in control of the whole. But short of these two alternatives, something would be sacrificed; either unity or diversity would have to be modified by politics.

The introduction of tribalization into Nigerian politics in the late 1940's and the regionalization of the political parties imposed a solution which froze the political status quo but left unanswered the delicate problem of power distribution among the entities in the federation. In 1948-1950, proposals for the revision of the Richards's Constitution were put before the Regional Conferences for discussion. There was a choice between a unitary system of government (the whole should be supreme over the parts), the continuation of the three-regional setup, or a federation with many more states than then existed. The overwhelming choice was that as no one group enjoyed the support of the diverse groups sufficiently to be entrusted with the task of governing the whole, the affair at the center would be carried on by a coalition, a coalition which would be acceptable even to those excluded from it.

Do we wish to see a fully centralized system with all legislative and executive power centralized at the center or do we wish to develop a federal system under which each different region of the country would exercise a measure of internal autonomy? If we favour a federal system should we retain the existing Regions with some modification of existing Regional boundaries or should we form Regions on some new basis as the many linguistic groups which exist in Nigeria? Without exception all the Regional Conferences recommended a federal system of government with the existing three Regions as the units. But opinions differed on the question of boundaries.²¹

They could not agree on how the boundaries should be drawn. Since each group was bent on preserving its own region intact, the three major parties, the NPC, the NCNC, and the AG, which in 1951, 1953, and 1957 had to negotiate with the Colonial Office on constitutional questions, were unable to decide what should be an acceptable formula. For revising boundaries or creating new states, even though the Federation was as it was, was an unbalanced Federation. The Northern Region was bigger than the other regions put together. Its leaders, with the motto of "One people, one North, irrespective of rank and religion," would not discuss the partition of the North into smaller states. The other two parties, representing the Western and Southern Regions, accepted this incongruity, perhaps to preserve the unity of the country. They had to accept the Northern demand that it get at least 50 percent of the seats in parliament. The North made it clear

²¹Kalu Ezera, "Nigeria: Constitutional History," (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 228-229.

enough that that was the irreducible minimum it would accept as a condition of belonging to the Federation, and the British strategy made this concession of Southern leaders almost impossible to refuse, since they would only deal with a unified Nigerian delegation at constitutional conferences.

Thus the position of the Northern Region in the federation, like that of Uttar Pradesh in the Union of India, creates great uneasiness about the future stability of the Nigerian Federation. In Population as well as in size, the Northern Region is very much larger than the Eastern and Western Regions combined. It is therefore feared that this form of imbalance creates an ominous potential to the stability of a federation. John Stuart Mills in discussing the federal form of the government, pointed out that "There should not be any one state so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of lying in strength with many of them combined. If there be such a one, and only one it will insist on being master of the joint deliberations; if there be two, they will be irresistible when they agree; and whenever they differ, everything will be decided by struggle for ascendancy between the rivals."²²

Between 1951 and 1953, Nigeria did not have to pay the price John Stuart correctly set for such lop-sided federations. At the center, a national coalition, equally representative of the three regions, formed the Cabinet. In 1953, the North and South confronted each other on the issue of setting a date for independence. The South was united in its opposition to the North. The result was a threat by the North to secede. In 1964, the North and the South once again confronted each other; the result was a threat to secede by the South--

²²Ibid., pp. 248-249.

by the East most vociferously, and the West and Mid-West could be counted on to follow the East out of the federation.

In 1953, the coalition government of the NCNC, NPC, and AG had been split on the motion for independence from the British in 1956. The NPC opposed such an early date because they feared that they were not as equally prepared as the Southern Region for independence and that independence would only lead to Southern exploitation of the Northerners. Tempers flared, riots took place in Kano, and while the two Southern leaders, Awolowo and Azikiwe, embraced each other, the Sarduana of Sokoto stalked out of the parliament muttering, "The mistake of 1914 has been revealed."

The Northern leaders' answer was the Eight-Point Programme, almost tantamount to demand for secession, and the most important of these points were:

- (1) all revenue except customs should be levied and collected by regions;
- (2) there should be a central agency which should be non-political in nature, having neither legislative nor policy-making powers; and
- (3) Lagos, the capital city, should be made a neutral territory.

The North, in effect, asked for a confederation in which the three regions would be completely autonomous, a customs union in which only the economic needs would bring the three regions together.

The constitution reviews of 1953 in London, and of 1954 in Lagos, gave formal structure to the Federation. The three parties established themselves in the regions. At the center, a coalition sprang up between the Northern People's Congress and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons. The NPC was willing to accept 50 percent representation, instead of seceding, in lieu of its demand for confederation, and this meant it had to ally with one of the Southern parties. The Action Group, much more than the NCNC, had been carrying on active political campaigns in the Northern Region; the AG challenged the NCNC in the East, and was in opposition. The NCNC and the AG also were kept apart by strong personal rivalries, rivalries which started early in the Nationalist movement and had resulted in deeply engraved suspicions on both sides. Thus, the two Southern parties, which logically should have formed a coalition since their programs and goals were more similar to each other than either was to the Northern Peoples Party program, could not act together. From 1955 to 1964 the NPC and the NCNC were in alliance in the federal parliament. "The coalition government was rightly characterized as a 'political marriage conference.' This government gave rise to certain rules. One of the conditions, definitely necessary for the coalition to have been stable and acceptable to the AG was that both parties, NPC and NCNC, would leave each other alone in their respective regions, that the AG was prepared

to accept a position of ineffectual opposition in parliament so long as its regional base of strength was not weakened, and that the NCNC would accept with equanimity whatever unwholesome pressures were brought to bear on its Northern ally, the NEPU."²³ To institutionalize this status quo, rigid procedures for the creation of new states were inserted into the Constitution.

In 1962 the balance was upset. The crisis in the AG leading to the problem in its leadership became a subject of national concern. A state of emergency was declared by the national parliament. The AG was in disarray, and the two parties in the federal government had taken more interest in the demise of a rival than in the preservation of law and order. The Western Region had been ruled by a government deriving its legitimacy from the Emergency Legislation, and no election was held from 1962 to 1965.

This demonstrated the power of the federal government. Its constitutional authority, which had not been employed because of the tacit agreement of the national parties to limit the federal government's participation in governance to the federal territory of Lagos, to the promotion and coordination of the economic policies of all the components of the federation, and to the conduct of foreign policy, was now invoked to effect a major change in one of the regions. The federal government had shown it had powers, powers which could be used

²³Ibid., p. 215.

by a party or parties, with the appropriate majority. Henceforth, the struggle to control the federal government would be fiercer than if the federal government were not the supreme political body.

From 1962 to 1963 there were signs that the coalition between the NPC and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens was under severe strain.²⁴ The NCNC, as a junior member of the coalition, had been given more ministerial positions than its numerical contribution to the coalition merited. It controlled three strategic ministries--finance, foreign service, and communications. Thus, the attempt by the NPC to assume in practice what was politically a fact led to resentment on the part of the NCNC. The sense of frustration and impotence at the continued self-assertion by the NPC increased as the merger into the Northern Region of the Northern Cameroons, through the United Nations plebiscite in 1962, gave the NPC an overall majority in the federal parliament, thus putting the NPC in a position to end the coalition when it chose to.

In February of 1964, the figures of the census taken in 1963 were released. The effect was electrical. It changed the whole political atmosphere of the nation and prepared the ground for the crisis later on in the year.

²⁴Ibid., p. 215.

Prime Minister Abubaker Tafawa Balewa had magnificently violated all the rules of government by consultation when he let loose a bomb-shell that shook the very foundation of the much acclaimed Nigerian unity.

The month was February, 1964, and the National Convention of Nigerian Citizens was rounding up its talk at the Kano Convention of the party. Then came the thunder-bolt--the release of the 1963 population census figures for the nation, the delay of which had caused quite a stir in the country. Instead of consulting his brother premiers from the other regions as was originally agreed (or if he did, he carefully side-tracked the Eastern and Midwestern Premiers), the Prime Minister acted unilaterally

The figures released, and referred to as "preliminary yet final" were as follows:²⁵

Northern Nigeria	29,777,986
Eastern Nigeria	12,388,646
Western Nigeria	10,278,500
Midwestern Nigeria	2,533,337
Lagos	675,352

This lengthy quotation, taken from the issue of the political magazine of the NCNC, demonstrates the effect of the census on the party. The figures showed two facts which could not be ignored if the census were accepted.²⁶ First, it established as a fact what had been feared for a long time, that the North alone could overrule all the other regions put together, that the North could now form a government solely on the votes it got from its Northern base. Second, it showed that the Eastern Region itself was no longer larger than the

²⁵The Nation, "Official Organ of the NCNC," People's Magazine, vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1964), p. 19.

²⁶Ibid.

other two regions, the Mid-West Region and the Western Region, thus weakening further its position as a strategic ally. The balance of power had been upset. The stage was set for the split. What the census said was simple; in fact, its strength lay in bringing to the fore the issue of boundary revision. It spelled out the short-term alternatives for the parties. The NPC would win any election in the future if the Southern party could not make any headway in the North and if it maintained its opposition to the creation of new states from the existing regions.

The NPC's control of the North was almost absolute. The cost of being the opposition was not lightened by the native administration system which made political opposition criminal.

The constitutional barriers to a legal revision of the boundaries or creation of more states made this an ineffective method to reduce the preponderance of the North by breaking it into more states. Without the Northern acquiescence in the federal parliament, a two-third majority could not be obtained to pass the resolution for the creation of more states, and without this majority the bill could never become law; without the NPC agreement, no other two regions could pass the bill, for such majority must include the region affected. This was the impasse. Under such conditions the alliance between the NCNC and NPC could not be maintained on the former basis without adequate revision, especially when

the more radical members of the NCNC were becoming impatient with their more conservative ally. The coalition was at an end. The NPC would seek other allies in the Southern Region to make its government more Nigerian; the NCNC would ally with other Southern parties and attempt to fight the NPC in the North to achieve a national strength. While the NPC would attempt to identify its interests with those of the country, it maintained there was no need to change the status quo; the NCNC would accuse the NPC of tribalism and appeal to the voters first as citizens and then as members of particular social and economic classes. In this respect, the election of December 1964 was the first national election to be held, and it failed precisely for this reason. Christopher Johnson, in the October 1 issue of the London Financial Times, was nearer the truth than most of the actual participants in the drama itself when he wrote:

The Federal elections which must be held before the end of the year have a two-fold significance for the rest of Africa. Both democratic forms of government and federal-type institutional structure will be on trial, and their future may depend on whether Nigeria continues to show that they are workable.

The staying power of Nigerian democracy is dependent on that of Nigerian federalism. The Northern Region, thanks to the controversial census last year, is entitled to more seats in the Federal Parliament than the other three regions put together. If the Sardauna of Sokoto, the traditionalist leader of the North, decided to use superiority to control the federal government with no more than token support in other regions, the federation itself will be put under strain.

But if, as Sir Abubakar is said to prefer, a national coalition of all the major parties is formed, what becomes of the party system with its guarantee that there will always be healthy parliamentary opposition to the government? The problem of the Northern Region's preponderance will only be solved as other parties get a chance to make inroads into the Sardauna's still somewhat feudal support. The forthcoming elections will show to what extent this slow process is already taking effect.²⁷

That was precisely what was to precipitate the crisis, for the other parties did not feel they were getting a chance to wage an unmolested campaign in the North. From June to October, the alignment of all the parties under the NPC and NCNC banners was taking place. By October, when the campaign began, the line-up was as follows: the Nigerian National Alliance, consisting of the Northern People's Congress, the Nigerian National Democratic Party, the Midwest Democratic Front, the Niger Delta Congress and the Dynamic Party; and the United Progressive Grand Alliance, consisting of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens, the Action Group, and the United Middle Belt Congress. As a fairly generalized description of the NNA (NPC, NNDP) and the UPGA (NCNC and AG), one could say that the former represented the status quo, and the latter the challenger to the status quo. It was the UPGA that defined the issue, that published manifestos, and that publicized malpractices of the NNA. The spotlight was on its campaign--it was energetic, optimistic, and boisterous. Its manifesto, styled the "People's

²⁷Financial Times (London, 1 October 1964).

Manifesto," posed the question, "What are the causes of the crisis and the moral dilemma in which our country finds itself today?"

In the first place Nigeria came into independence without ideological orientation. From the early forties up to 1960 the one overriding aim of all social and political forces in Nigeria was the termination of foreign rule. To this end all other interests were subordinated. As soon as independence was attained in 1960, a community of interests ceased to exist among the various forces in the country. These forces began to group themselves broadly into two; those of reaction, feudalism and neocolonialism on the other hand, and those of progress, democracy and socialism on the other.²⁸

In attempting to mobilize all the citizens to stop a mammoth North and to find issues which a national consensus could achieve, the UPGA had to go beyond the tribe, it had to think and act in terms of totality of the nation, and it had to present a goal which was relevant to the problems faced by each class.

If regional parties had fed on tribal feelings in the past and if tribalism and socialism are incompatible, since socialism assumes a national consciousness in which class consideration are more relevant than the constricting ethnic loyalty, then regional parties become an obstruction to the construction of the socialist society. As an article of faith, UPGA would continue to support the idea of national

²⁸ "The People's Manifesto," Nigerian Outlook, 12 October 1964, p. 4.

parties and oppose regional parties. It is not difficult to see that one Nigerian nationality could hardly emerge on the basis of regional parties. All forms of extreme regionalism would therefore have to be openly discouraged and opposed.

If a young man from Kano (North) cannot feel at home in Ijebu-Ode (West) and a young man from Ibadan (West) feels like a stranger in Sapele (Midwest) and a man from Benin (Midwest) feels like a stranger in Enugu (East) and a man from Calabar (East) feels like a foreigner at Maiduguri (North), then we still have a long way to go before we can really claim to be one country.²⁹

In the long run, the "one country" should be able to provide for all the classes within its jurisdiction. The narrowing down of the gap between classes by better wage structure, the provision of more jobs in cities and in rural areas, the judicious use of the monetary and fiscal system to expand the economy, thus providing the means and incentive for an efficient private sector to supplement the public sector--these become some of the necessary goals to work for on a national basis. The plan of economic development would see to the expansion of the economic infra-structure, then concentrate on rapid agricultural and industrial development; "the present practice of the federal government of practically leaving industrialism to the regions and private industrialists alone will be discontinued on the day we assume office by getting the federal government to enter industrialism in a positive and practical way. We shall lead the regions and

²⁹Ibid., p. 5.

private industry rather than be led by these."³⁰ Such a plan would seem to be relevant to the Nigerian situation, especially when within one year, 1964, the workers had shown their potential strength when they struck for three weeks and almost paralyzed the whole system of public utilities, when teachers in the Western Region were on strike, and when the continuous flow of educated but employed young men and women clamoring for jobs was flooding the cities.

If these represented the long-term goals, the short-term goals would deal with how the present system could be changed to make it amenable to national, rather than regional and parochial, thinking. In the Nigerian Outlook, Dr. Okpara wrote:

We hold the view that the worst threats to Nigerian unity are the practice of regionalism which has now been carried into the political field and the fact that the most important principle of federation, namely, that it can bend the will of the federal government. Until these two threats are removed, they labour in vain who labour for Nigerian unity and solidarity.³¹

If the socialist program is designed to remove the danger of regionalism and substitute a national consciousness as a norm of political behavior, the second and the most immediate threat could only be removed by constitutional revision. The Constitution should be revised to equalize

³⁰Ibid., p. 4.

³¹"Okpara, Crusade for Freedom," Nigerian Outlook, 14 October 1964, p. 5.

the strength of the various states, the federal government should be strengthened to make it more effective as a coordinator and director of national policy, and the powers of the federal government should be controlled by introducing a system of checks and balances between the executive, legislative, and judiciary arms of government.

We shall create new states in the North, the East and West along the lines of the old provinces. As this may give a maximum number of 25 states, some contiguous states may be allowed to combine on the principle of self-determination. We shall accompany this with a new revenue allocation to shift a good deal of the burden of social services to the federal government.³²

The Senate would be given concurrent powers with the House of Representatives. The President would be given executive powers over the electoral commission, the Public Service Commission, Census and Audit. The President would set up a permanent vital statistics commission to collect figures of birth and deaths over a period of fifteen or twenty years to obtain accurate figures and avoid political conflict each time a census was taken. A permanent Judicial Commission to deal with tribalism, discriminatory practices, and violations of fundamental human rights would be created. This Commission "can initiate proceedings against these practices or act on the basis of genuine complaints or suits from citizens....."³³ The implications of these proposals are obvious. The allocation

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., pp. 4-5.

of powers over the Electoral Commission, the public service, etc., removes these institutions from direct partisan pressures, depriving one party or parties of an important patronage leverage that could be used to the detriment of the other parties. "The necessity for having reliable census figures, not only for the more efficient reallocation of resources, but also for the fundamental issues of a meaningful exercise of suffrage and adequate representational system, need not be argued if the eventual goal is the development of an active participant society."³⁴

The creation of a permanent Commission to look into discriminatory practices, but more especially into political victimization during elections, would remove complaints that the legislative and judiciary powers of the incumbent governments were used to stifle opposition and would at least guarantee participants in the political game a fair chance to play out their parts. Parties would not find it necessary to hire a team of lawyers which would accompany the politicians in their campaigns to fight an obstructionist partisan legal system.

The sum of the UPGA Manifesto was thus an indictment of the present political system, its reforms, and the projection of the ideals of a militant nation through constructive

³⁴Ibid.

programs towards a future where a national community would eventually emerge.

The Manifesto of the Nigerian National Alliance when compared to the comprehensive one presented by the UPGA, was quite different. It concerned itself with the improvement of the present system, the expansion of the public services within an unaltered federal structure. It did not take issue with the goals of socialism, nor with the revision of the state boundary; while it tried to match the UPGA in the making of promises, it announced no new ideology. It promised to see to be preservation and reformation of democratic institution in the Republican Constitution. It would ensure fair and equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation and create equal opportunity for all people. It accelerated the development of educational institutions to fulfill the goals of Nigerianization of government services. It would arrest the deterioration in spots.

Maitama Sule, director-general of the NPC Bureau of Publicity and Information, summed up the manifesto of the UPGA as envisaging a Draconian policy to effect reform.

Indeed NNA raises this timely alarm because what is now promised by Dr. Okpara, for and on behalf of the UPGA, is now compatible only to a midnight of horror with which Adolf Hitler proclaimed in June 1934 the Third Reich, knocking at the door of every opponent and of former friends and in that one night, cutting down hundreds of Germans of every class and clime. What is more, the reputation which the little

dictators elsewhere have established in the brief decade, convinced us that the happiness of our people cannot be bought at the price of the kind of dictatorship which the UPGA now promises in exchange of unity and progress, however grand.³⁵

The NNA would talk only in the terms that were meaningful to them; they were concerned with the people of Nigeria, not with the tribes or different classes within which they dwelt; in talking over such aggregates, the conflict inherent in the class concept would be resolved by defining it out of existence; also if the NNA would not change the status quo and the UPGA could not get the necessary two-thirds majority to revise the constitution, then only a dictatorial regime could coerce the NNA into submission--hence the warning of the Third Reich and small dictatorships.

The election was therefore to settle everything or nothing. The determination and vigor with which the UPGA carried on the campaign showed they believed they would succeed, or at least present such a united opposition if they lost, they could force some concession out the NNA. In October, and even in November, the UPGA still anticipated victory; it glorified the masses and the fatherland. So confident was the UPGA that Okpara could say that no region or party would be allowed to opt out of the federation because it suffered an electoral defeat. "This will be unconstitutional; we cannot allow anyone to secede," I am tempted to

³⁵The New York Times, 29 November 1964, p. 16.

add, "We cannot allow the North to secede," for this was implied in his expectations of victory.³⁶ Between November and December, however, disillusionment set in--the UPGA began to see the election would settle nothing. Between October and December there had been such a change that in December Okpara was talking of seceding from the Federation. The causes for this change were allegedly to be found in the continuous victimization of the UPGA candidates in the North.

Reports of violent attacks by hired thugs on the UPGA candidates filled the press.

With no protection from the law but that of the team of lawyers sent to keep candidates on the soapboxes and out of jails, with charges of violent suppression of opposition candidates, and with forty UPGA candidates already in jail and the twenty others denied registration, the announcement two weeks before the election that sixty-four NNA candidates would be returned unopposed to parliament could only be seen as fraudulent by UPGA.

The North was the key to the whole election; 167 of the 312 seats would be contested in that region alone; of these, 64 seats were already declared secured by the NNA; the 103 seats which were to be contested could not be contested with the UPGA candidates in jail. If there was a fair election, perhaps the UPGA could get enough votes in the Middle Belt

³⁶Nigerian Outlook, October 6, 1964.

where the Tivs were already in the arms against the Northern government, but with a state of emergency declared and with the imprisonment of the UPGA candidates the election result in the North could be said to be predetermined.³⁷

The UPGA demanded the delay of the elections until the "irregularities have been regularized."³⁸ The irregularities were not regularized; the election was not to be postponed; the UPGA would not accept the result of an election which they could see was predetermined; the call for boycott of the election was given, and the East, under Okpara, threatened to secede. They had gone the whole circle and were back where they started. How could they reconcile federalism with the uneven allocation of power characteristic of the component regions? How were they to expect politicians to act with the responsibility when the possible results of each action would be defeated? To prevent the breakdown in communication between the various parts and the whole, the part with the preponderant influence would have to exercise this weight with moderation, be generous in its use of political power, and make some concessions to the smaller members of the federation.

The NNA, with its overwhelming influence, has not been generous or moderate in its use of power, nor was it prepared to make any concession to its opponent. The impasse is

³⁷Ibid., 9 October 1964.

³⁸Time, 8 January 1965, p. 18.

symbolized in the attitude and utterance of the two most crucial figures in the whole election, Chief Michael I. Okpara, leader of the NCNC and chief spokesman of the UPGA, and the Sardauna of Sokoto, leader of the NPC and the NNA. The Sardauna had faced the crisis with equanimity and was prepared to allow the Eastern Region, rich in oil, to secede peacefully if it insisted on a separated state.³⁹

For Okpara, the practical solution was dissolution of the federation and then unification when the need for concerted action forced itself upon the consciousness of each party. "For the UPGA, prudence was in all regions going in peace their own different ways. If future events bring home to us that strength lies in unity, and suggestion for federation are put forward from any source, then we should sit down and define our terms."⁴⁰

The elections were held and were boycotted in the South. There was violence and talk of secession. The President and Prime Minister succeeded in working out a stopgap solution, necessary to allow tempers to simmer down. The election result would be accepted, elections would be conducted where they were boycotted, and a national coalition government would be formed.

The explicit adoption by the UPGA of socialism as a goal of election and policy was a confession that politics, in the future, would no longer be the manipulation of a

³⁹The New York Times, 31 December 1964.

⁴⁰Ibid., 5 January 1965.

trusting electorate and unprincipled bargains among the leaders. The alignment of all the political parties into two parties was an experience for Nigeria. It committed the parties to definite stands and policies. It introduced a new quality into the style of political behavior, the use of ideology, and the use of foreign policy (alignment and non-alignment) as election issues. The masses were promised deeds in the election manifesto that would strike for an economic goal by leaders who would not hesitate to use their political power to force the promotion of economic ends. That was why the election of 1964 was important in itself--it unleashed national forces which would direct the flow and tempo of future political behavior. It made the North realize to what extent the South could be pressed before the stability of federation was jeopardized. It made the South face the long-hidden ideological inconsistency between the national pose and a tribalistic political behavior. The North was in a way forced to think nationally; and the South forced the North to make a greater effort to seek Southern allies and to change its name, replacing "the North" with "Nigerian." Even though all of this happens, there was still a breath of dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER II

BIAFRA

Character of the Country

In area Biafra is not large, about 29,000 square miles. Yet in most other statistics it comes in the top three in Africa. The population is the most dense in Africa, over 440 to the square mile. In every sense it is the most developed country in the continent, with more industry, the highest per capita income, the highest purchasing power, the greatest density of roads, schools, hospitals, business houses, and factories in Africa.

In potential it is variously described as the Japan, the Israel, the Manchester, and the Kuwait of this continent.

Each appellation refers to one of the many facets that caused surprise to the visitors who thought all Africa was uniformly backward. Years of under-exploitation, as factories, investment and public services were sited elsewhere in Nigeria, though often staffed by Easterners, left the Eastern Region a long way short of its full development potential. Even in the south the major petroleum companies failed to boost oil production to its potential, preferring to keep the oil fields there ticking over as useful reserve while Arabian fields were sucked dry.⁴¹

⁴¹Fredrick Forsyth, The Biafra Story, (Penguin Books Co., Maryland, 1969), p. 105.

The use of the comparison with Japan refers to the population. Rarely among Africans, they have the gift of unceasing hard work. In the factories the workers turn in more man-hour per year than elsewhere, and in the farms the peasants produce more yield per acre than in any other country. It may be that nature's necessity has bred these traits; but they are also backed by the ancient traditions of the people. In Biafra personal success has always been regarded as meritorious; a successful man is admired and respected. There is no hereditary office or title. When a man dies his success in life, his honors, his prestige and his authority are buried with him. His sons must fend for themselves on the basis of equal competition with other young men of the society.

The Biafrans are avid for education and particularly for qualification in one of the technical professions. It is not unusual to find a situation like this:

A village carpenter has five sons. The father works from dawn till dusk; the mother has a stall in the market; the four junior sons sell matches, newspapers, red peppers, all work so that the senior son can go through college. When he is qualified, he is duty-bound to pay the way through college for the second brother; after which the pair will pay for the education of the third, fourth, and fifth. The carpenter may die a carpenter, but with five qualified sons.⁴²

For most Biafrans no sacrifice is too much to education. Another example is that the village fathers would

⁴²Ibid., pp. 106-107.

club together to build a structure in their village--not a recreation center, swimming pool or stadium, but a school. A village that has a school has prestige.

Because they are convinced that no condition is permanent in this world (an old Ibo motto) they are adaptable to degree and prepared to learn new ways. Where others, notably the Muslim communities of Africa, are content to accept their poverty or backwardness as the will of Allah, the Biafran sees both as a challenge to his God-given talents. The difference in attitude is cardinal, for it spells the difference between a society where Western influence will never truly take root, and where investment capital will seldom bear fruit, and a society destined to succeed.

Ironically it is their hard work and their success that have contributed to make the Biafrans so unpopular in Nigeria, and notably in the North.

Other characteristics are adduced to explain the antipathy they manage to generate; they are pushy, uppity, and aggressive say the detractors; ambitious and energetic say the defenders. They are money-loving and mercenary says one school; canny and thrifty says the other. Clannish and unscrupulous in grabbing advantages, say some; united and quick to realize the advantages of education, say others.⁴³

Previously cited comparisons with Manchester refer to their flair for trade. Rather than work for a boss on a salaried wage scale, the Biafran would prefer to save for

⁴³Ibid., p. 1006.

years, then buy his own lock-up shop.

The comparison with Israel refers to the persecutions that have touched them. Like Israel, they had their backs to the wall and no where to go. That is why they preferred to die in their homeland rather than give in and live like the "Wandering Jew."

In comparing Biafra with Kuwait, this refers to the oil beneath Biafra. It has been postulated that if the Biafrans had had as their homeland a region of semi-desert and scrub, they would have been allowed to depart from Nigeria. Beneath Biafra, however, lies an ocean of oil, the purest in the world. It is said that it could be run crude straight through a diesel lorry in this form and would work. Approximately one tenth of this field lies in neighboring Cameroon, about three tenths in Nigeria. The remaining six tenths lies under Biafra.

The government of Biafra is one which is ruled with a light hand. Colonel Ojukwu (Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu) is the ruler with the light hand. Biafrans do not take kindly to government without consultation. "Soon after taking power as Military Governor in January 1966 Ojukwu realized the need for a closer line of communication to the broad masses of the people, partly because of their characteristics and partly through his own predilections."⁴⁴

⁴⁴C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Biafra (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 225.

He could not reconstitute the discredited Assembly of old politicians, and General Ironsi was against other forms of assembly, preferring to let the Military Regime find its feet first. So Ojukwu quietly began drawing up plans for a return to civilian rule, or at least a joint consultative body through which the people could let their wishes be known to the Military Governor and in which he could seek the wishes of the people.

After the coup of July he got his chance, and the plans went ahead. From each of the twenty-nine Divisions of the Region, he asked for four nominated representatives and six popular delegates. The nominated posts, although named by his office, were ex officio nominations, such as the Divisional Administrator, the Divisional Secretary, etc. The six popular delegates were chosen by the people through village and clan chiefs, and the "Leaders of Thought" conferences. This gave him 290 persons. To those he asked for another forty-five representatives of the professions to be added. Delegates were chosen and sent from the Trade Unions, the Teachers' Conference, the Bar Association, the Farmers' Union, several other sections of the community, and most important, the Market Traders' Association--imposing and outspoken Market Mammies who had kept the British in order in 1929, when they led the Aba riots.

These groups formed the Consultative Assembly, which was soon regarded, with the Advisory Council of Chiefs and

Elders, as the parliament of Biafra. Colonel Ojukwu did not make any major decisions without consulting them. He would follow their wishes on national policy.

From his first meeting with them on 31 August 1966, thirty-three days after the Gowon coup, the Assembly was consulted at every stage of the road to partition. In view of subsequent claims that the Ibos dragged the non-Ibos unwillingly into their act of separation, it is significant that of the 335 members of the Assembly, 165 are non-Ibos minority group men as against 169 Ibos-speaking members. This gave the minorities a higher proportional representation in the Assembly than their respective population inside the country. The decision to mandate Colonel Ojukwu to pull out of Nigeria nine months after the first meeting was unanimous.

Far from being unwilling victims of Ibo domination and from being coerced into partition against their will, the tribal representatives of the minorities had their full say and were active participants in the policy to pull out.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Ralph Uwechwe, Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War (New York: Africian Publishing Corporation, 1971), p. 7.

Reasons for Self-Determination

When a group of young Nigerian army majors, motivated by the best ideas and principles of their country, attempted a coup on 15 January 1966 to replace the incumbent civilian government, their immediate purpose was to establish a new regime and end the chaos and virtual state of anarchy in Western Nigeria. Many citizens praised and admired the courage and action of the revolutionaries and welcomed the consequent military regime that came to power.⁴⁶ The reasons were quite obvious among the people. The political leadership since the time of Nigerian independence in 1960, in its pursuit of the psychological and economic rewards of power, had shown itself insensitive to the plight of masses of the people--the workers and peasants.

The government whether advertently or inadvertently, seemed to be protecting the interests of the forces which were systemically exploiting these workers and peasants. Such forces included the local bourgeoisie whose financial power was being felt increasingly, the new labor aristocracy composed of senior civil servants and university teachers and related personnel who forgot the masses in their desire to reap the fruits of Uhuru, and, of course, the neo-colonialist forces represented by the Shell-BP monopoly and other

⁴⁶Kenneth E. Boulding, The Image (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1956), pp. 6, 43.

corporations which exploited most of the oil and other resources in the country. In addition, the exploitation of the rural areas by the cities continued unchecked. Dissatisfaction among the workers had already come to a revolutionary head in the disastrous general strike of 1964 when the whole country was virtually paralyzed.

In other respects national morale was at its lowest because the leadership had become incorrigibly corrupt. Morality in public service was becoming a rare exception, and despondency among the population was reaching alarming proportions. National resources were diverted in order to consolidate the elite's hold on power. For example, as the Coker Commission amply demonstrated, the Western Nigeria Marketing Board funds, ostensibly reserved for social and economic development projects, were covertly reallocated through a complex chain of banking, construction, and real estate institutions to key Action Group leaders for use in waging the 1959 federal elections and for generally strengthening the party at regional and national levels.⁴⁷

At the personal level, the political elite equated the possession of power with conspicuous personal consumption usually at public expense. To the elite such consumption underlined the need for personal economic power and thus the economic

⁴⁷Federation of Nigeria, "Report of the Coker Commission of Inquiry into the Affairs of Certain Statutory Corporations in Western Nigeria," (Lagos, Government Printer, 1962).

exploitation of the people. To aid the process, they capitalized on the parochial and ethnic loyalties in the country and in the process increased inter-group hostility. Emphasis was on the distribution of the "national cake" with no reciprocal emphasis on baking this cake. The concept of "chop politics" was popularized to the detriment and stagnation of national development.⁴⁸ The results of such politics were evident in the acts of continual brinkmanship which became part of national life and which were exemplified in the 1962 Action Group crisis, the census crisis of 1963, the federal election crisis of 1964, the Tiv disturbances of 1964-1966, and the Western election crisis of 1965. Practically every significant issue gave rise to a serious political crisis.

Thus, the coup of January 1966 was welcomed by many Nigerians with the greatest outburst of national enthusiasm ever seen in the country.⁴⁹ There was a chance for new beginning toward the recovery and reassertion of the national self. But the event was a shock to the plans and expectations of the imperialist, capitalist, and neo-colonialist forces in the country who were led by British monopoly capitalist interests. They saw in the coup a serious setback to their control of the country. When these forces successfully

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Daily Times, "The New Regime," 18 January 1966.

recovered from the shock of the coup, their propaganda machinery helped to create and consolidate in the Northern Nigerians a perception of the coup as an Ibos plot designed to destroy Hausa-Fulani oligarchical and reactionary power and thus to ensure the domination of the whole country by the Ibos. Some of the political and administrative blunders of the new military regime, which unfortunately had usurped the power which properly belonged to the revolutionaries of January and who were not motivated by the same ideals and zeal, helped to augment, confirm, and sharpen these views.⁵⁰

As the picture of the January coup increasingly became distorted as a result of the capitalist, imperialist, and neocolonialist propaganda championed by the British Broadcasting Corporation and the British High Commission in Nigeria, such perceptions and images became increasingly negative, and hostility toward the Ibos by the Northerners became intense. Unscrupulous politicians urged on by British imperialism seized the opportunity to show their pent-up hatred of Ibos.

The result was the harrowing waves of remorseless genocide against the Eastern Nigerians resident in Northern Nigeria in May 1966, within the Army in July 1966, and with the greatest fervour, destruction, and vengeance, in the North and elsewhere where Northern Nigerian soldiers were stationed, in September, October, and November 1966. In all, over 50,000

⁵⁰Ibid.

Easterners were gruesomely murdered; countless others were maimed and horribly mutilated. Over two million others, deprived of their habitation and livelihood in parts of Nigeria other than Eastern Nigerian became refugees in their Eastern Nigerian homeland. The consequences were enormous; the best in statemanship was needed if the country were to avoid impending complete disintegration.

It was obvious that the resultant crisis was of a different kind from the previous crisis which had characterized Nigerian political life. Such previous crises had been strictly political in the sense that they were struggles for power involving mainly the political elite. This time the problem was sociological as well. The masses were deeply involved at levels of greatest relevance--life and death, earning a livelihood, and obtaining shelter. This point is extremely significant because the masses operating at a level of subnational rather than national consciousness were not the greatest custodians of the national interest. This was especially true in such new states as Nigeria where forces of parochialism and subnational or ethnic loyalties were much stronger than the rudimentary forces of national unity and national interest. Furthermore, unorganized mass action when it materialized was much less controllable than elite behavior, because chaos and anarchy are usually the consequences.

It is impossible to understand the depth of feelings in Eastern Nigeria. The mood is ugly. For a long

time the military Governor has had to work hard to keep these feelings from boiling over. There are feelings of revenge and strong feelings of wishing to be left alone to build new lives in their own homeland consistent with Eastern dignity. Compromise is now a dirty word. The people demand that the future be settled at once. They are unwilling to accept any sacrifice of principles for some idealistic sense of unity they now realize never existed.⁵¹

It must be recognized that the social milieu of the new states, including Nigeria, is one in which the family is very close knit. The extended family system prevails. In addition, within such families and in the society at large a very high premium is placed on human life far and above other values. The loss of Eastern Nigerian lives in the pogrom of 1966 was so extensive that most families of the region were directly involved. In addition, an enormous refugee problem resulted with its attendant economic consequences.

The matter was all the more explosive because of similar experiences of less magnitude, which the people had suffered in 1945 and 1953. Perception of the crisis in individual and group security on their part became very serious, practically engulfing all men, women, and children. Accompanying such perceptions, of course, were negative feelings toward the other Nigerian groups, particularly the Hausas who seen with very good reason as intent on their extermination. The

⁵¹The Observer, "Report of Colin Legum Interview with Chiniua Achebe," (London, 6 March 1967), p. 1.

North, fearing retaliation by Easterners, also felt insecure. In this state of affairs one group's actions especially in the area of armaments was interpreted as an imminent threat to the existence of the other group. A conflict spiral came into existence.

One of the most serious blunders of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict was made with regard to this conflict spiral which emerged after the pogroms of 1966. Unlike the leaders in January 1966, who attempted to placate the North which suffered most from the coup, the federal military regime rendered no apology, took no concrete step to reassure the Easterners of their security and rights within Nigeria, and gave no meaningful assistance in the massive refugee problem. On the contrary, they subjected the Easterners to economic persecution. The Aburi agreements which were designed to correct this example of poor statesmanship were later disregarded by the Lagos regime.

The painful fact was that the East, but practically no other group in Nigeria or elsewhere, saw the massacres as posing a serious national problem and was courageous enough to say so. Each ethnic group retreated into a womb-like isolation as if indifference and the passage of time would make the whole problem go away. The few non-Eastern intellectuals who dared to appeal to the nation's conscience were either jailed or driven into exile. Nigeria at the time seemed

morally anesthetized. Under such circumstances, the conflict would only continue to escalate, making warfare inevitable. This widespread indifference for the Easterners' plight on the part of the Nigerian groups was then perceived by the persecuted Easterners as confirming their previous contention that they were being deliberately pushed out of the Nigerian federation and exterminated. The international community like the proverbial ostrich also hid its head in the sand of domestic jurisdictions of states.

The most significant political consequence of this pogrom and the resultant movement of populations to their respective socio-cultural areas was the destruction of the interhuman network which, in fact, was the Federation of Nigeria. The country had disintegrated and ceased to exist. The basis of the political contract which established it had disappeared and the contract had become void. The immediate task of recreating another common political unit from the components of the previous ones called first for serious efforts at social engineering.

Economic and political factors played a large part in the problem. The consequence of the many different subnationalities living within Nigeria was the development of self-interested kinds of ethnic loyalty in which X's stuck together and favored X's just as Y's and Z's did their own groups. Politicians seeking office and the spoils of such office fanned the fears

and animosities of their followers in xenophobia in order to ensure their election as the protectors of ethnic interests. Few people were confident enough of their own ability to advocate a merit system of hiring and promotion. Only very few among the well-educated persons found it in their interest to favor selection on the basis of merit. Others preferred the security of at least being able to rely on tribal preference wherever possible to exploit it. Nepotism was rife. Inter-ethnic hostility increased.

The dynamics of this form of behavior was self-reinforcing and self-fulfilling since it was in the interest of individual Nigerians to aid their own at the expense of the others. Each X feared that he was regarded as an X by any Y or Z and would, therefore, be discriminated against by them. He believed that he could in turn expect preference from any X in position to help him. It was then his interest to promote X's and to demote Y's and Z's. If any X, Y, or Z did not favor his own kind, he would get no preference from his kind in return and no one of the other groups would show him preference over his own people. As a result, any person who got outside the system of tribal preferences was nowhere. There seemed to be no end in sight for this phenomenon which increased in intensity as more and more people became educated and jobs became scarcer. No number of states or any type of bourgeois political revolution could solve the problem thus posed. A socialist revolution would probably be the solution.

It was not forthcoming. Consequently, this defensive, negative, fearful set of socioeconomic relationships among the tribes of Nigeria continued and reached its worst height after May and July 1966 when it was no longer only a matter of discrimination against the Easterners but of wiping them out ruthlessly.

This socioeconomic dynamic is made more problematic by the nature of the political economy of the country. In the African setting, including Nigeria and Biafra, the importance of who gets what is very great. To begin with, a developing country necessarily possessed such extremely limited resources that the competition for them became extremely intense. At the same time, the government was the major source of distribution of welfare goods and services, a point which made it clear that economic demands would be political. Where the gross domestic product was not increasing rapidly, as was the case in Nigeria before the crisis, the demands of one group for a larger share of the national cake entailed a smaller share for some other group. Thus, intergroup jealousy and hostility arose and increased in Nigeria.

On the other hand, the absence of industrialism on a wide scale in the former Federation of Nigeria meant that class formation was not so advanced that a majority of the people thought in class terms. Identity was linked to sociocultural characteristics. The politics of allocation thus became the politics of location. And finally, the real basis for legitimacy in the country was the promise of performance in the

economic sphere. To base legitimacy upon economic performance is of course risky and highly expensive especially in a situation where elections are conducted along the lines of Western democracies. Politicians could promise all manner of benefits to their parochial and ethnically based constituents who could not think in broader terms, but in order to fulfill their election pledges they must then encourage nepotism, ethnic economic chauvinism and corruption. Thus, interethnic hostility was maintained with the subsequent grievances and jealousies reinforcing the original hostility. Only in a socialist society, where the exploitation of the masses by the elite for their own economic and political benefits has been eliminated, where candidates for political office are chosen for their commitment to social and economic justice, for the individual as well as the nation, and in which a greater emphasis is paid on baking the "national cake" than in sharing it at the individual level. Can this disastrous economic consequence of inter-ethnic economic rivalry be completely abolished?

The phenomenon commonly called "tribalism" is in fact the result of elite frustration in a capitalist system in which different ethnic groups compete for social services. The fact of capitalism means an acceptance of inherent inequality within the system. In the African environment where the majority of the individuals are not oriented toward events beyond their

ethnic environments and their loyalty is first and foremost for that group, there exists a great potential for rationalization of failures in the struggle for power and wealth in terms of the hostility of the other ethnic groups. The Nigerian leaders capitalized on this potential.

The fact still remains that the masses of Ibos, Hausas, Yorubas, and other ethnic groups in the country had more in common economically than they had with their leaders. Their common and logical cause lay in joint solidarity by not playing on the feelings of ethnic division latent in the masses. The bulk of the Nigerian masses benefited little from the division of the "national cake." It was being shared among the elite of Ibos, Hausas, and Yorubas. The masses were used as pawns to support or oppose one or the other factions seeking this wealth. Then the real conflict--a struggle by the masses against the exploiting elite--was diverted into one among the different segments of the exploited masses.

From the political standpoint, the regions tended to perform for the individual the functions of the ultimate decision-maker much better than the central government. The results of this kind of government brought about the crisis of 1963 (census crisis), the federal election of crisis of 1964, the Western elections of 1965, and the conflict between the Northernization policy of the Northern region and the Nigerianization policy of the central government.

Having these economic and political problems, the creation of the East-Central, South East and River states out of the former Eastern Region became the immediate cause of the attempted secession of Eastern Nigeria and the creation of Biafra.

The Fight

Fighting started on 6 July 1967, with an artillery barrage against Ogoja, a town near the border with the Northern Region in the northeast corner of Biafra. Here two Federal battalions faced the Biafrans in what Colonel Ojukwu realized was a diversionary attack. The real attack came further west opposite Nsukka, the prosperous market town recently endowed with the University of Nsukka, renamed University of Biafra.

Here the remaining six battalions of the Nigerians were massed on the main axis, and they marched in on 8 July. They advanced four miles and then struck. The Biafrans, with about 3,000 men in arms in that sector against the Nigerians' 6,000, fought back tenaciously with Eastern Nigeria Police 303 rifles, an assortment of Italian, Czech, and German machine pistols, and a sprinkling shower of shotguns, which were in close bush country. The Nigerians captured the town of Nsukka which they then destroyed, university and all, but could advance no further. In Ogoja province, they took Nyonya and Gakem, brought Ogoja into range of their artillery and forced the Biafrans to cede the township and draw up a line of

defense along a river south of the town.

After two weeks, discomfited by this immobility of their redoubtable infantry, Lagos began to broadcast the fall of numerous Biafran towns to the Federal forces. "To those living in Enugu, it appeared that someone in Lagos was sticking pins at random in a map."⁵²

After three weeks, the Nigerians got into trouble when two of their battalions, cut off from the rest, were surrounded and broken up to the east of Nsukka between the main road and the railway line. Two more scratch battalions composed of training staff and trainees were hastily armed and thrown into the Nsukka sector from the Nigerian side.

"In the air, activity was confined to the exploit of a lone Biafran B-26 American-built Second World War bomber piloted by a taciturn Pole who rejoiced in the name of Kamikaze Brown, and to six French-built Alouette helicopters piloted by Biafrans from which they rained hand-grenades and home-made bombs on the Nigerians."⁵³

On 25 July the Nigerians staged an unexpected sea-borne attack on the island of Bonny, the last piece of land before the open sea far to the south of Port Harcourt. Bonny was the oil-loading terminal for the Shell-BP pipeline from Port Harcourt.

⁵²Time Magazine, 1 September 1967.

⁵³Forsyth, Frederick, The Biafra Story (Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 115.

Militarily Bonny was unexploitable, for once warned the Biafrans relentlessly patrolled the waters north of Bonny and subsequent Nigerian attempts to launch further water-borne attacks northwards on to the mainland round Port Harcourt were beaten back.

On 9 August the Biafrans struck in earnest with a coup that shook observers both in Biafra and Lagos. Starting at dawn, a mobile brigade of 3,000 men they had carefully prepared in secret, swept across the Onitsha Bridge into the Mid-West. In ten hours of daylight the Region fell, and the towns of Warri, Sapele, the oil center at Ughelli, Agbor, Uromi, Ubiaja, and Benin City were occupied. "Of the small army of the Mid-West nothing was heard; nine out of the eleven senior officers of that army were Ica-Ibos, first cousins to the Ibos of Biafra, and rather than fight they welcomed the Biafran forces."⁵⁴

The capture of the Mid-West changed the balance of the war, putting the whole of Nigeria's oil resources under Biafran control. Although she had lost about 500 square miles of her own territory in three small sectors at the perimeter, she had captured 20,000 square miles of Nigeria. More important, the whole of the Nigerian infantry was miles away opposite Nsukka, with the broad Niger separating them from the road back to the capital and helpless to intervene. For the

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 116.

Biafrans the road to Lagos was open and undefended.

Colonel Ojukwu was trying to convince the non-Ibo majority of the Mid-West that he bore them no harm. "For a week delegations of tribal chiefs, bankers, traders, Chamber of Commerce stalwarts, army officers, and church dignitaries filed into Enugu on invitation to see the Biafran leader and be reassured. Colonel Ojukwu hoped that the alliance of the two of the three Southern regions would swing the West into agreement and force the Federal Government to negotiate."⁵⁵

After a week it appeared this was not going to happen, and Colonel Ojukwu gave the order for a further advance westwards. On 16 August the Biafrans reached the Ofusu River bridge which marked the border with the Western region.

Here there was a brief scrap with Nigerian troops, who then withdrew. The Nigerian soldiers were from the Federal Guard, General Yakubu Gowon's own bodyguard of 500 Tivs.

On 20 August the Biafrans stormed into Ore, a town on a crossroad thirty-five miles into the West, 130 miles from Lagos and 230 miles from Enugu. This time the Tivs facing them took a worse beating, and disconsolately pulled back in disorder. "To observers at the time it appeared that barely ten weeks after the Arab-Israeli war another military phenomenon was to be witnessed, with tiny Biafra toppling the government

⁵⁵United Nigeria, London House (Press Briefing, 1968).

of the enormous Nigeria. A sudden motorized push at that time along any one of the three roads available would have put Biafran forces deep into the Yoruba heartland and at the gates of Lagos."⁵⁶ Such was the order Colonel Ojukwu gave.

It was later learned from sources inside the American Embassy that on 20 August the West-erners were teetering on the verge of going over to a policy of appeasing the Biafrans to save their skins; that Gowon had ordered his private plane to be made ready, the engines warmed and a flight plan prepared for Zaria in the North; and that the British High Commissioner Sir David Hunt and the American Ambassador Mr. James Matthews had had a long and serious talk with Gowon in Dodan Barracks, as a result of which the nervous Nigerian Supreme Commander agreed to carry on.⁵⁷

News of this reached Colonel Ojukwu within a week and caused anger among British and American citizens in Biafra, who felt their ambassadors were playing fast and loose with their safety, for if the news had got out to the Biafran public, their reaction could have been violent.

"The decision of Gowon to stay on saved his government from collapse and ensured the continuation of the war. Had he fled, there seems little doubt the West would have swung over, and Nigeria would have developed into a confederation of three states."⁵⁸

⁵⁶Ohukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Ojukwu's Rebellion and World Opinion (London, August 1968).

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 1152.

⁵⁸Hawkins, E.F.C., "Notes on the Nigerian Civil War" (London, 1968).

The taking of the Mid-West had one other by-product. It opened Nigeria's eyes to the fact that they were fighting a war. Ore was as far as the Biafran forces had gotten. At this time unknown to all, the commander of the Biafran forces in the Mid-West had turned traitor.

Victor Banjo was a Yoruba and had been a Major in the Nigerian Army, imprisoned by General Ironsi for allegedly plotting against him. His prison had been in the East, and it was from here, released by Colonel Ojukwu at the outbreak of war and offered a commission in the Biafran Army, that he came to join Biafra rather than go home to the West and face the possible danger of revenge from the Northerners ruling there. With the rank of Brigadier, Banjo commanded "S" Brigade when it moved into the Midwest.⁵⁹

By mid September, Banjo was ready to move. The Nigerians had gotten stronger. With a crash recruiting program putting into uniform after a brisk one-week training course such diverse elements as college students and prison inmates, the Nigerians had formed first one fresh brigade and then another. "These forces, named the Second Division and commanded by Colonel Murtela Mohammed, had been fighting back from the Western Region."⁶⁰ On 12 September, Banjo gave orders without authority to evacuate Benin City without firing a shot. Mohammed did not enter Benin until 21 September.

Banjo followed up with orders to withdraw from Warri, Sapele, Auchi, Igueben and other important positions without

⁵⁹N. C. Perkins and E. S. James, "The Nigeria-Biafra War Memorandum," (London, 1969).

⁶⁰Ibid.

fighting. Simultaneously the Biafran defences south of Nsukka collapsed and the Federal forces pushed several miles down the road to Enugu, lying forty-five miles from Nsukka.

"At this point, Banjo decided to strike directly at Colonel Ojukwu. He conferred in the Midwest with Ifeasjuana and Alale, and they worked out the final arrangements for the assassination of Ojukwu."⁶¹ On the 19th of September, Banjo was summoned to explain what he was doing in the Midwest. At this summons, Ifeajuana and Alale were arrested. "The four ringleaders were tried by special tribunal, sentenced to death for high treason, and shot at dawn on 22 September."⁶²

The damage in Biafra was enormous. By 25 September the Biafrans had withdrawn from Agbor in the Midwest, half-way between the Niger River and Benin City, and by the 30th were back in a small defended perimeter around Asaba with backs to the river. North of Enugu the demoralized infantry retreated disconsolately before the Nigerians coming south from Nsukka, and Enugu came within shelling range by the end of the month. On 6 October, the Biafrans at Asaba crossed the Niger to Onitsha and blew up the newly completed bridge behind them to prevent Mohammed crossing. Two days previously, on 4 October, the Nigerians had entered Enugu.

⁶¹Christian Aguolo, Biafra: The Case of Independence (California: California Press, 1969).

⁶²Ibid.

"Two things saved the country from disintergration; one was the personality of Colonel Ojukwu; the other was the people of the country who made it clear they did not intend to give up."⁶³

"Colonel Ojukwu felt obliged to offer his resignation, which the Consulative Assembly unanimously refused."⁶⁴ That marked the end of the Banjo episode and Biafra began to buckle down to fight.

By this time the enormous weight of firepower imported by Nigeria, notably from Britain, Belgium, Holland, Italy, and Spain, was becoming overpowering. A further recruiting drive had enabled them to boost the Federal Army to over 40,000 men. The troops in the northern part of Biafra now formed the First Division, those across the Niger under Mohammed the Second. The first was commanded from Makuridi, miles away in the northern region by Colonel Mohammed Shuwa. With Colonel Ekpo the Chief of Staff Armed Forces, and Colonel Bissalla, Chief of Staff Army, four Hausas controlled the Nigerian Army.

The late autumn and winter was very unhappy for Biafra. In the north Enugu fell, while further east in the Ogoja sector the Nigerians troops had pushed down from Ogoja to Ikom, astride the main road to the neighboring Cameroons.

⁶³Amali, S.D.O., Ibos and their fellow Nigerians (Ibadan, 1967).

⁶⁴Michael Mok, Biafra Journal (New York, 1969).

Then on 18 October, the newly formed Third Federal Marine Commando Division under the command of Colonel Benjamin Adekunle, made a sea-borne landing at Calabar in the south-east. With Bonny still festering and the menace of Mohammed trying to cross the Niger, that made five fronts on which the Biafrans had to fight.

Despite fierce counter-attacks, the Nigerians could not be dislodged from Calabar, and with massive backing their beach-head grew steadily stronger until Adekunle burst out and forged northwards up the eastern bank of the Cross River in an attempt to link up with the First Division at Ikom. In closing the second road (out of Calabar) to the Cameroons, the Nigerians cut Biafra from road contact with the outside world.

"The single air link that now remained had been transferred to Port Harcourt and the lone B-26 at Enugu, having been riddled with bullets on the ground, had been replaced by an equally lone B-25 flown by a former Luftwaffe pilot known as Fred Herz."⁶⁵

During October and November 1967, Colonel Mohammed tried three times to cross the Niger by boat from Asaba and captured Onitsha.

On the first occasion, 12 October, he got across with two battalions. One of the operational commanders at

⁶⁵Fredrick Forsyth, The Biafra Story (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 116.

Onitsha was Colonel Joe Achuzie who ambushed Mohammed. Losing both their armored vehicles, the Nigerians were pushed backward towards the river, and were finally destroyed near the landing stage.

Subsequently, two more attempts were made to cross the Niger by boat, but on each occasion the crafts were machine-gunned and sunk, causing heavy losses, mostly by drowning. The bulk of the losses were taken by the Yoruba soldiers in the Second Division, until their commander objected to further crossings. "Leaving the Yoruba to keep watch at Asaba, Mohammed took his Hausas northwards, crossed into the Northern Region, entered Biafra from that side, intending to take Onitsha from the landward approach."⁶⁶

By the year's end, the situation south and east of Enugu was stable, with Nigerian forces east of the town at a distance of about twenty miles, while to the south the Biafrans faced the Nigerians in the extreme outskirts of the town.

In the northeast, the Federal forces possessed the whole of the Ogoja Province, and were facing the Biafrans across the Anyim River, a tributary of the Cross. Further south, Adekunle's forces were half way from Calabar to Ikom, while in the deep south the Bonny sector was much as it had been five months before, several attempts at water-borne push northwards having ended in disaster.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 116.

But with Nigeria receiving an ever-increasing supply of arms, while Biafra's supplies remained roughly static at two planes a week, fighting became increasingly hard. The Nigerian firepower, particularly in artillery and mortars, was getting steadily more murderous, while they had also got fresh supplies of armored cars from Britain, not only to make up losses but to expand their armored contingents. These armored cars made progress for Biafra.

In late December, Colonel Mohammed, with his Division now swollen to 14,000 men, set off for the 68-mile march down the main road to Onitsha. Just outside Enugu, close to the town of Udi, the Second Division met the Biafrans and one of the biggest running battles of the war was fought.

"True to Hausa tradition Mohammed massed his troops in solid phalanxes and thus reached Awka by mid-February."⁶⁷ This was about thirty miles from Onitsha. His losses were heavy, since his path was known and the Federal soldiers did not like to move far from the main road.

Biafra concentrated on attacking Mohammed from his flank and rear. This caused high casualties. Then Colonel Ojukwu switched extra forces to the main axis. The Northerners spent three days totally destroying Awka township.

By this time, the Biafrans had regrouped. Further north, Achizie with his 29th Battalion had marched 92 miles

⁶⁷Okon Banu, Obarogie, Nigeria: The Army and the People's Cause (London, 1966).

taking from the rear the town Adoru in the Northern Region. From there, he recaptured Nsukka also from the rear, having vetted the defences from inside.

From Nsukka, he marched south towards Engu and linked up at Ukehe, a midway-point town between Nsukka and Enugu, with Colonel Mike Ivenso who had cut across country. The episode greatly heartened Biafrans and upset the Nigerians at Enugu, for the road was their main supply route. Ojukwu called both colonels south to help fight the war going on between Awka and Abagana. Mohammed made it to Abagana, sixteen miles to Onitsha, in the first week of March.

The fight got tougher with the arrival of the two extra battalions of Achuzie and Ivenso. Mohammed called for more men and got another 6,000 from Enugu, stripping the town of its garrison. Mohammed pressed on to Ogidi, eight miles from Onitsha, leaving his main force at Abagana.

The spearhead of the two Hausa battalions, the 102nd and the 105th, with Mohammed leading them burst through Onitsha on 25 March. Achuzie realized they could not be stopped, decided to swing behind them and follow them into Onitsha. On this road another Biafran battalion mistook Achuzie's men for the Nigerians. When they had been sorted out, Achuzie marched on.

After being delayed for eighteen hours, Achuzie found the Nigerians well dug-in. "He decided to set up an ambush

for the main forces trailing behind. This ambush was set outside of Abagana. The next morning the Nigerians marched right into it. This ambush was the biggest ever."⁶⁸

Mohammed had made Onitsha, but of 20,000 men he had brought 2,000 into Onitsha and lost more on the way. Lagos was not pleased with this. The 102nd and 105th in Onitsha were relieved, and fresh troops sent across the river from Asaba.

April 1968 was a very disastrous month for Biafra. They had heard through communications that the British were helping the Nigerians set the Bailey Bridge.

East of Enugu the Nigerians crossed a steep and narrow gorge at Ezulu and their armored cars raced the last twelve miles to capture Abakaliki. This cut off the Biafrans east of Abakaliki facing the Nigerians across the Anyim, and they withdrew to a new line south of Abakaliki. Within days the Nigerians in Ogoja province had crossed the Antim on another Bailey bridge and linked up with Abakaliki. For the first time, the two wings of the First Nigerian Division had made contact and passed an east-west strip running along the north of Biafra.

"Adekunle's Third Division, using two battalions of black mercenaries from Chad, called Gwodo-Gwodo, had pushed up the valley of the Cross River on the eastern bank to Obubra,

⁶⁸Walter Schwarz, Nigeria (London, 1968).

the last major town in Ekoi country."⁶⁹ Under the direction of Major Williams, they held along the river line for twelve weeks.

In late April, Williams' group crossed at two places of the river and captured Afikpo, the main town in that area on the western side.

It was further south that Adekunle got his big break. In the last days of March, with assistance of a handful of British amphibious experts he staged two landings across the Cross River at its broadest point, almost a mile of water. Capturing Oron and Itu within a few days, his fast-moving mercenary-led columns swept through the land of Ibibios within a week taking Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Abak, Eket, and Opobo in quick succession. "Their task was made easier by the provision of guides who knew the bush tracks, the hardness of the ground after the winter sun, and a certain degree of collaboration on the part of some of the local chiefs."⁷⁰ Later, after several weeks and finally months of occupation by Adekunle's men, these chiefs were to send pathetic appeals to Colonel Ojukwu. Eventually no people in Biafra suffered greater brutalization under Nigerian occupation than the Ibibios and Annangs.

At the northern fringe of Ibibio territory, where

⁶⁹Chinua Achebe, "Biafra," "Transition" (Kampala, 1961), 36, 31-7.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 37.

Ibo-land begins, about thirty miles from Umuahia, the Nigerians were halted. In any case, Adekunle's main target was not northwards but west--the glittering prize of Port Harcourt.

From April onwards, the First and Second Divisions quietened down, and attention switched increasingly to Adekunle in the south. The Second Division made repeated attempts to link up from Onitsha to Abagana, while the First Division fortified the series of towns along the main Enugu-Onitsha road. They could motor as far as Abagana but could not make the link-up to Onitsha. This failure inhibited any more major moves south, though the First Division attacked southwards in June and took Awgu, to the south of this main road, on 15 June.

But throughout the summer of 1968, Adekunle became the most important of the Nigerian commanders and was favored with the majority of arms and ammunition from Lagos. While the strength of the First Division remained stable at about 15,000 men and that of the Second Division at about 13,000, Adekunle's Third Division, responsible for the whole of the south, grew to over 25,000 by the end of 1968.

Relying again on foreign amphibious experts for his water-borne operations, Adekunle's advance units crossed the River Imo, the last barrier to Port Harcourt in the second fortnight of April. He had forty miles to go to the biggest city in Biafra.

At the point of Adekunle's twin crossing, the Imo flows south from Umu Abayi to its estuary at Opobo. Upstream

of Umu Abayi the river flows in west-to-east direction forty miles from Awaza. "This oblong of land, forty miles long and thirty miles from north to south, is completed in the west by Bonny River on which Port Harcourt stands and in the south by creeks, a myriad of swamp and tangled mangrove which in turn gives way to the open sea. Inside this block of land, apart from Port Harcourt, lie the natural gas-driven generating station at Afam, lighting the whole of the south of Biafra, the petroleum town of Bori, the Shell BP refinery at Okriks, and numerous oil wells. Although Port Harcourt itself was largely an Ibo city, the surrounding land is that of Ogonis, Ikwerres, and Okrikans, with the Rivers folk living down in the creek along the west on the other side of the Bonny River."⁷¹

"At this time, Biafra was already sheltering some four million refugees from other occupied areas, about one and a half million Ibos and two and a half million minorities. Port Harcourt and its food-rich surrounding countryside was a favorite shelter, and the pre-war population of half a million had swollen to close to a million."⁷²

After a swift build-up on the western bank of the Imo, beating off counter-attacks aimed at dislodging the beach-heads, the Third Division launched itself at Port Harcourt in the last of April. "The Biafrans took the onslaught of the usual

⁷¹Lindsay Barrett, "The Nigeria Crisis," (Chicago: Negro Digest, October, 1969), pp. 10-15.

⁷²Ibid., p. 10.

spearhead of armored cars, a drenching in shells and mortars, and then the Nigerian infantry. In a lone stand, the Italian fighting for the Biafrans, Major Georgio Norbiatto, was lost, missing presumed killed."⁷³

By the middle of May, Afam, Bori, and Okrika had fallen. The Biafran defence was hindered by thousands of refugees, while the Nigerian advance was assisted by small groups of local levies, volunteers and guides.

With a fast right hook, the Nigerians cut the road northward out of Port Harcourt towards Aba, and on 18 May advance units occupied the eastern outskirts of the city. A fierce shelling bombardment had been going on for days, and the road northwestwards from the town towards Owerri was choked with nearly a million refugees pouring out for safety. This human tide immobilized Colonel Achuzie, the newly appointed commander to the sector, and by the time it was cleared the Nigerians had ensconced themselves in the town and occupied one side of the airport, with the Biafrans at the other. Here both sides paused for a month to take a breath.

Early in April Major Steiner, the German ex-Foreign Legion sergeant, who ranked senior among the four mercenaries, was ordered by Colonel Ojukwu to train and bring into being a brigade of troops. Steiner who had had his own band of guerrillas operating around Enugu airport to the great discomfiture of the Nigerians, set up camp and ordered Williams to

⁷³Ibid., p. 12.

join him. The two began to put together the Biafran Fourth Commando Brigade.

Williams wanted to remain on the Cross River, but was overruled. A fortnight after he left the Gwodo-Gwodo crossed over.

Throughout July, the Commandos raided the positions of the Second Division along that road with some success. During June, Adekunle in the south launched out of Port Harcourt with orders to capture the remainder of Gowon's River State lying west of the Bonny.

Adekunle later made the rivers pay a stiff price for their loyalty to Biafra. As Ojukwu had predicted, the territory was impossible to defend against a force equipped with scores of boats and ships. Defending units had to split into penny-packets to watch every spit of land and island. The Nigerians could pick their spot and move in off the sea. By the middle of July, landings had been made at Degema, Yenagoa, Brass, and a score of other places. On the mainland, Nigerian infantry forces moved through Igritta, Elele and Ahoada, to capture the rest of the "Rivers State."

In July, Adekunle prepared to make his first move into Ibo-land and began to push toward Owerri. He had developed his "O.A.U. plan," the capture of Owerri, Aba and Umuahia.

Towards the end of July his forces had pushed up the Port Harcourt to Owerri road as far as Umuakpu, twenty-three

miles south of Owerri. "Colonel Ojukwu, wishing to go to Addis Ababa but not liking to see Owerri fall while he was away, ordered Steiner and his Commandos to leave Awak and come down to Owerri."⁷⁴

South of Owerri, in the face of Umuakpu, Steiner put Erasmus to work to build a ring of obstacles in the path of the Nigerians. These obstacles were never breached because they were outflanked and dismantled from the rear by the Nigerians.

Leaving the Biafran infantry ensconced behind this Maginot Line, Steiner sent Williams and five hundred Commandos round the side. They struck on 4 August not at Umuakpu, but at Nigerian battalion H.Q. at the next village down the road, Amu Nelu. Within an hour, Williams had destroyed the H.Q., recuperated a large quantity of equipment, arms, and ammunition, left over 100 Nigerians dead on the road, and departed. "The Nigerians sent an emissary through the lines to the Biafran infantry asking for a local truce."⁷⁵

Within a week, the Commandos had to be transferred again, this time to Okpuala, halfway along the road from Owerri to Aba. The Nigerians were moving from the south against this road junction as well, and the Scot and the Corsican were detailed to stop the advance. A series of fierce battles

⁷⁴Joseph Okpara, Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood (Connecticut: Greenwest Publishing, 1972), p. 125.

⁷⁵Kirk, Green, Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria (London: Oxford Press, 1971), p. 175.

ensued during which both were wounded. But a mixed force of Commandos and infantry held the Nigerians short of Okpuala until after Aba had fallen.

Aba, shielded from the south and west by the curve of the Imo River, was presumed to be safe from attack. It was the biggest city left, now overflowing not only with its original refugees, but many from Port Harcourt. It was also the administrative center of Biafra. Across the Imo there had been two bridges, one at Imo River Town on the main road from Aba to Port Harcourt and the other at Awaza further west. The first bridge had been blown up, the second was intact but mined. It was the Awaza bridge the Nigerians chose. When they appeared on the bank, the Biafrans blew the charges, but they had been badly placed. The bridge went down, but a gas pipeline a few yards to one side escaped the blast. Along the top of this pipe ran a catwalk, and the Biafrans, out of ammunition, watched helplessly as the Nigerians started to cross on foot in single file. This was on 17 August. Williams was sent for with 700 men, but he did not get there until morning. By that time, the Nigerians had put across three battalions.

The Commandos fought for two days to try to get the bridge head back, but while two Federal battalions held them a mile from the water, the third marched south and captured the northern bank of the other, bigger bridge. Seeing that it was useless, Williams pulled back to the main Aba-Port Harcourt

road. For six days the Biafran Twelfth Division assisted by Williams' men now made up to 1,000, fought back as a tide of Nigerians crossed the Imo on foot. "Feverish work was in progress, reportedly with Russian engineers, to re-build the Imo River Bridge to bring over heavy equipment."⁷⁶

On 24 August the bridge was completed and the attack column rolled across. The ensuing battle was the bloodiest of the war. Williams threw in his 1,000 Commandos in attack rather than wait in defence. This caught the Nigerians off guard.

For three days Williams and Erasmus led less than 1,000 Biafrans clutching rifles against the Nigerians. "They had no bazookas, no artillery, precious few mortars. The Nigerians threw in a rain of shells and mortars, five armored cars, and monsoon of bazooka rockets. Their machine guns and repeater rifles did not stop for seventy-two hours."⁷⁷ The backbone of the defence was the "ogbunigwe," a weird mine invented by the Biafrans.

The Nigerians came up the road singing and Erasmus let go the "ogbunigwes" at point range. The Nigerians were cut down very quickly. The survivors moved on. One of the Saladin armored cars had its tires shredded and withdrew. Biafran ammunition ran out, but the leading Nigerian Brigade had been ruined.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 175.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 179.

As the leading Nigerian brigade was changed, Williams urged his exhausted men to take advantage of the disorder in front of them and charge. They won back the three miles they had lost during the day and returned to their original positions. Waiting for the next day the troops slept while Erasmus started preparing more booby traps and Williams returned to Aba for ammunition. But the ammunition planes were not arriving. Steiner appealed to the Army Commander, then to Colonel Ojukwu. There was no ammunition. Williams returned to the front. For Sunday, 25 August, his men had two bullets each.

There were battles for three days, then calmness for six days.

At this time, the Third Division launched another attack on Aba, but not up the main road. They took the Commandos' right flank and the flank crumbled as the armored cars rushed through. Aba fell on 4 September, not from the front but from the side. Williams was still six miles south of the town holding the axis when Aba fell behind him. He came out with his men across country.

Colonel Ojukwu ordered the Commandos to return to base camp, recruit fresh men, reform and re-fit. From both axes, Aba and Okpula, 1,000 returned of the 3,000 who had moved to Awka nine weeks previously. In mid September, Steiner went on leave and Williams took over acting command.

The assault on Aba of 24 August left the town in flames. In the south from Ikot Ekpene had changed hands six times, to

Owerri; in the north Haruna burst out of Onitsha and linked up with his men at Abagana. The First Division threw all its force against the demilitarized Red Cross airstrip at Obilagu. This fell on 23 September.

On 11 September, the Nigerians launched a fast attack by boat up the river Orashi towards Oguta, a lakeside town not far from Uli Airport. Unspotted, the boats crossed the lake and the men disembarked. Oguta was still full of people and there was a lot of killing. Nigerians came across the River Niger from the Midwest. Colonel Ojukwu called his commanders and told them to get Oguta back. They did get Oguta but it had a by-product. Some of the Biafran troops there had been taken from the right flank at Umuakpu, and on 13 September a Nigerian patrol probing the flanks discovered the weak-spot. An attack was launched which outflanked the defences and brought the Nigerians to Obinze, ten miles south of Owerri. From there they ran on into the town.

In the north, the First Division moved on from Obilagu and captured Okigwi town. This happened 1 October and the situation began to change.

The arms shippers who had let the Biafrans down over Aba and Owerri had been dismissed and a new air bridge set up from Libreville, Gabon. Pilots of British, South African, Rhodesian and French nationality ran it. Acquiring more funds, Colonel Ojukwu gained access to wider European

arms market and greater quantities began to flow in. The Biafrans went on to the counter-attack.

Williams took over Steiner's position and had led two more charges on the city of Onitsha, which was never captured but had the Nigerians sealed within. The Nigerians captured the villages of Agolo and Adazi, which threatened the Biafran heartland. The Commandos in the area fought back assisted by two battalions of infantry. The Nigerians took another beating and retired back to Awka.

Elsewhere it was the same story through November and December. The Biafrans counter-attacked in most sectors, notably at Aba and Owerri. At Aba Colonel Timothy Onuatuegwu pushed the Federal forces back to the outskirts of the town, then swung his men down the right and left flanks. At Owerri Colonel John Kalu retook 150 square miles of ground around the town and laid siege.

This recital of events over the eighteen months may seem to give the impression that the Nigerians advanced into Biafra smoothly, but this was not the case. The Nigerians fought every inch of the way. Sometimes the objectives were tried three and four times. Sometimes they were blocked for months. Their expenditure in ammunition estimated several hundreds of millions of rounds and their losses several tens of thousands of men.

Role of the British Government

Interest in Nigeria stemmed from a small caucus of British politicians, civil servants, and business men. Their goal was purely imperialistic. "The policy was aimed at the maintenance of law and order, the raising of taxes for the administration of the colony, the stimulation of the production of raw materials for British industry, and the establishment of a consumer market to purchase manufactured goods from British industry. With independence, the first two functions were handed over to selected and suitably friendly indigentes, while the latter two remained as before in the hands of the British."⁷⁸ For those inside Britain who concerned themselves in any way with Nigeria felt that the country represented not a land of real people, but a market. Any tendencies inside Nigeria that might be viewed as harmful to the market were to be discouraged, and Biafra's desire for partition from the rest of the country fell squarely into that category.

Evaluating the British government policy towards the question of the Nigerian-Biafran war, two schools of thought emerged:

"One claims that the policy was in fact the absence of a policy. The other maintains there was a policy from the start, that it was one of total support not for the Nigerian people but

⁷⁸Frederick Forsyth, The Biafra Story (Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), p. 175.

for the regime presently in power in Lagos, that it was carefully masked from public view for as long as possible, and that the stupidity of the politicians and the ignorance and apathy of the general public and the men controlling the mass-communication media were used either in the furtherance or dissimulation of that policy. As an increasing amount of research into this growing pile of documentation's availability, it is becoming plainer that the evidence supports the latter view."⁷⁹

"That the British leadership should privately wish to see a single unified Nigeria so long as this was practically feasible is not blameworthy; but what happened was that its total determination to see a single economic unit no matter what the cost in suffering to the people of the country, through the grossest interference in the internal politics of that country, the British government chose to ally itself not with the people or their aspirations, but with a small clique of army mutineers."⁸⁰ This clique had shown itself through to be largely unrepresentative of the Nigerian grass-roots opinion.

"On the morning after Gowon's coup, it was clear that the British government advisers considered that Gowon's legitimacy was sufficiently doubtful to require a top-level decision--whether or not to recognize his regime at all."⁸¹

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 178.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 179.

⁸¹B. Floyd, "The Republic of Nigeria," Focus, October, 1964, p. 128.

In July, no semblance of legality was attached to Gowon's government. He controlled the capital and two out of four regions. Just when and by what reasoning it was decided to recognize Gowon had never been revealed. "It was not until November 1966, that Gowon's nominee as Nigerian High Commissioner in London, the fast moving Brigadier Ogundise, presented his credentials to the Court of St. James."⁸² It was not until December 20th, that the House of Commons was informed that Britian had decided to give full recognition to Gowon's regime.

Since July 1966, the formulation of British policy had come from senior civil servants in the High Commission in Lagos and the Commonwealth office in London. "Also, the British government advised Gowon to go along with Nigerian popular wishes but encouraged the use of force if he could not get the agreement of the course of action that he and his senior civil servants desired."⁸³

When the civil strife started, the British felt that Nigeria was in the post position to handle any conflict within the country. After Gowon asked for help in the Nigeria-Biafra situation, the British wanted to be sure of the situation. The civil servants then sent Gowon increasingly large quantities of aid. Then the question of the policy pertaining

⁸²Ibid., p. 128.

⁸³Ibid., p. 129.

to aid confused the British people as well as others concerned. When the British had heard what Gowon had done, it was too late for them to not answer to the plead. "Therefore, they took an up-holding to crushing Biafra no matter what the cost."⁸⁴

The Biafrans became disgusted because of the way the British were helping Nigeria. For twelve months, every possible effort was made to mask the facts of what was going on from the British Parliament, the Press, and the people. In Parliament, answer after answer to the questions asked about the situation were misleading, deceiving, and rebuffed. There was total frustration in both houses of parliament. "Government spokesmen deliberately told the House that the British Government was neutral, only later to admit they were not and never had been. Denials were given of the arms' shipment to Nigeria. Ministers contradicted themselves. They were completely gullible and satisfied with what they had heard."⁸⁵

While this was going on, the arms shipment continued. "Loads of shells and bullets sped through the night in covered trucks to an airport, where they were given permission to ride around the taxi track in order to load up at a secret

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 129.

⁸⁵Government of Nigeria, The Biafra Handbook (London: Crown Agents, 1953), p. 170.

bay on the side of the field. The story was eventually blown by reporters in Malta where one plane stopped to refuel."⁸⁶ Much of the purchasing on behalf of the Nigerians government was undertaken by the Crown Agents in Millbank, London, and not all arms orders fulfilled by this traditional purchasing agency for Commonwealth countries came from the British Isles.

There were several reasons why the British felt that they should secretly ship arms to Nigeria:

1. The British had always been the traditional supplier of arms. To cease supplies would have been a non-neutral act in favor of Biafra. (Also, Nigeria got arms from Holland, West Germany, France, Russia, Egypt, and East Germany.)
2. The British were obligated to support the government of a friendly country. (But there were no legal or moral obligations to supply weapons to anyone in time of war.)
3. If Britain would not have sold the arms to the Nigerians someone else would have done so. If Nigeria had the money to pay for the arms or supplies that they needed, they were able

⁸⁶Michael Mok, Biafra Journal (New York: Time-Life, Inc., 1968), p. 102.

to purchase and carry the supplies with them right on the spot. When the Nigerians were buying so many supplies the British became aware of why they were purchasing them. Just as this had happened, one by one, other countries such as Czechoslovakia, Holland, Italy, and Belgium decided not to supply.

4. Not to supply arms would have destroyed Britain's influence with Lagos. The House of Commons felt that if any final assault on the Ibos heartland were launched by the Nigerian army, or if there were any unnecessary deaths, then in either case Britain would be forced to more than reconsider her policy.

These pledges were useless and meaningless. The influence Britain was supposed to have achieved through supplying arms was either never used or, more probably, never existed. "Gowon's regime wanted to crush Biafra and the British never attempted to persuade them to change their course. The consequences of this policy had by the end of December 1968 become so serious that in terms of human lives, whatever the examination of history may have revealed to have been the offence of the Nigerian regime, the British government

had been co-responsible for the total complicity of the state."⁸⁷

Arms shipment were only one of the ways in which the British government showed its unalloyed support. "As a sideline the offices of the government became powerful public-relations organizations for Nigeria. Foreign diplomats, given the most biased briefings, believed them to be factually accurate and impartially composed. Correspondents were daily briefed to the Nigerian point of view and selected untruths sedulously implanted. Inspired leaks of myths were fed to pressmen who had shown themselves to be suitably unlikely to check the facts independently."⁸⁸

"Members of Parliament and other notables who wished to go down to Biafra were discouraged, but if desiring to go to Nigeria were given lots of assistance. No effort was spared to explain the Nigerian case as being solely a valid one but Biafra's version was demented in every possible way."⁸⁹

"The hiring of retired ex-navy and ex-army experts were under British contract and fully known by them. The Royal Navy officers directed the blockading operation for the Nigerian Navy. This was the blockade that resulted in

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁹Frederick Forsyth, The Biafra Story (Maryland: Penguin Books, Inc., 1969), p. 78.

the wide spread starvation in Biafra."⁹⁰

At the time of Biafra's self-declared independence, there were three options opened to Britain :

1. "To recognize the new state
2. To announce and stick by an attitude of neutrality, or
3. To announce and adopt total moral, political and military support for Gowon."⁹¹

Britain adopted the last option and announced the second. This made a fool out of the British Parliament, several other governments including those of Canada, the U.S. and the Scandinavian countries.

The reasons that Britain gave for standing up with Lagos that were very shakey reasons were the following:

1. "Britain must under all circumstances support a Commonwealth government faced with a revolt, rebellion or seccession. This was not true. Because when South Africa had a racion conflict with the Bantu population, the British condemned them after there was a massacre killing 30,000 Bantus.
2. Another reason for their participation came from Nigerian propaganda. It was said that

⁹⁰J. McLaughlin, "Nigeria-Biafra: A Matter of Accommodation, "(America, February, 1969), p. 165.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 165

the Ibos of Biafra had forced the unwilling minority non-Ibos into a partition from Nigeria against their will in order to grab the oil riches of the Eastern Region for themselves. But all the evidence indicated that the minority groups fully participated in the decision-making process to get out of Nigeria.

3. Then the widespread reason that got the most support was the fact that any secession in itself was and is bad, since it would inevitably spark off a chain of other secessionist movements all over Africa."⁹²

Britain fooled other countries having them think that they were remaining neutral while actually they were helping Nigeria all that they could. At this same time, they were fooling Biafra. They made Biafra think that they were trying to reach some kind of agreement. Biafra at this time was starving. Even when the British found out through independent investigations that Nigeria had misled them and were totally untrue to them, they put all agreements aside and insisted that they had done the right thing. "They blamed Colonel Ojukwu for impending death on his people, and it

⁹²Ibid., p. 166.

wasn't until the French started sending aid to dying Biafra that the British began to, in a sense, "wake-up."⁹³

⁹³J. Deedy, "Biafran Tragedy," Commonweal, June 1969, p. 378.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS OF BIAFRA'S STRUGGLE

After 18 months of fighting, three peace conferences were held. Even though Biafra failed, this was no surprise to them. Britain and America acted diplomatically. "Britain tried to keep Nigeria locked in her original conviction which was that a total military solution was as feasible and within her grasp, while a negotiated solution was by no means inevitable in the long run."⁹⁴ Nigeria in a way showed that their presence in the conference was to bring about Biafra's surrender. Failing to do this would have made the war continue.

"The Commonwealth Secretary contacted Lagos several times in the early spring of 1968 and told Biafra that Nigeria was willing to talk peace. Biafra agreed and arrangements were made for preliminary talks at Marlborough House, London."⁹⁵ At this time, Nigeria was under pressure. Since this was still during the war, repeated attempts had been made to take the major city in Biafra, Port Harcourt.

⁹⁴C. Legum, "Breaking the Nigeria-Biafra Deadlock," America, May 1969, p. 624.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 625.

"On April 13, Tanzania recognized Biafra as a sovereign state. The Ivory Coast and Gabon followed Tanzania."⁹⁶ This action made the Nigerians willing to talk. On Biafra's side they felt that Nigeria was stalling. Preliminary talks began in London on May 2 with the Biafran Chief Justice and the Chief Justice from the other side.

Biafra at this time felt that the talks were a stalling manoeuvre. With this attitude, Biafra felt that the talks would not succeed. "For one reason, the British had refused to suspend arms shipment to Lagos even while the talks were in progress. Next, the composition of the Nigerian delegations was not suitable. It was like the South Vietnamese delegation turning up in Paris with three Viet Cong defectors as their spokesman."⁹⁷ They would not send the men that Biafra asked for to talk to in this conference.

After three days, Biafra asked Nigeria to submit a list of places suitable to Lagos for meeting. London was left out as a meeting place as long as she would continue to ship arms. Nigeria submitted 17 capitals in the Commonwealth. They agreed on Kampala, capital of Uganda. Biafra asked that talks be held with a chairman and three independent international observers. Nigeria refused and asked that it would be postponed until the next meeting. Biafra agreed and

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 625.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 625.

they went on to discuss the terms.

"Biafra wanted a two point agenda. They wanted an agreement on a cease fire and more talks on the terms of the future nature of association between the parties. Nigeria wanted a seven point agenda. They wanted to discuss the ways and means of organizing Biafra's total and unconditional surrender."⁹⁸ Biafra disliked this and said that the main point for talking was for a cease fire agreement. This cease fire agreement would also be on the terms of Biafra.

The main conference opened on Thursday, May 1968. Nigeria's advanced patrol had entered Port Harcourt and the conference became an academic affair. It took two days to agree that there should be no chairman but one observer. A Foreign Minister would have to sit as an observer. Nigeria missed its stenographers and refused to resume talks. "Then the meeting began to look like a comic affair."⁹⁹ The Nigerian delegates also refused to work on Sundays and talks had to resume in private with two justices. This did not succeed; Nigeria went on to put a twelve point proposal. Biafra and Nigeria were sticking to their own first agreements and the conference had failed.

"After the recognition of Biafra by other countries,

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 626.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 626.

Biafra decided that it wanted to talk to Mr. Harold Wilson, but instead they saw the Minister of Commonwealth. Biafra drew up an agreement which Nigeria did not accept."¹⁰⁰

The next movement came from the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia who headed the six-nation committee on Nigeria of the Organization of African Unity. This meeting was held and both sides were invited. At this time, Colonel Ojukwu was trying to get food for his people. He got the food that he needed. He then met with the Executive Council and presented his case.

When Nigeria had heard that the council was giving Biafra food, Nigeria only then wanted to bring Biafra to her knees. This made world opinion grow and the world became disturbed. After this, the council tried to please Nigeria by making a suitable agreement.

After Biafra became a world issue, the following conference was bogged down in delays, stalling, intransigence, and ill-will. This conference lasted five days. The African Unity Organization then tried to get Biafra to surrender.

"After Biafra surrendered, Nigeria started its reconstruction. This attempt was to provide a more workable and equitable system of government which would in time draw the

¹⁰⁰J. C. McKenna, "Elements of a Nigerian Peace," Affairs, July 1969, p. 668.

other states into a deeper commitment of government to Nigeria."¹⁰¹ The federal government of Nigeria was now trying to achieve a new drive and dynamism which would reintegrate the whole Ibos people. By this, Nigeria would try to keep the new state structure and transfer some of the rule to the civilians.

United Nation's Role
And World Public Opinion

The United Nations had limited power where Nigeria was concerned. They tried to help all that they could. It called Nigeria and Biafra together and tried to help them bring about a quick agreement. The U. N. after consulting with both sides could only give public information about the activities that continued and explain as well as possible the actions taken on the decisions. The U. N. has no sovereignty and its authority for direct action was limited. To get anything done every single nation in the U. N. had to give consent. The U. N. Secretary could not do anything without consent. The U. N. and the countries involved could only continue to work out different agreements and search for endless consent from the other nations. Therefore, the civil war was an internal matter and the U. N. could intervene only at the request of the Nigerian Government.

¹⁰¹C. Legum, "Breaking the Nigeria-Biafra Deadlock," America, May 1969, p. 626.

On the other hand, the conflict became so deeply and widely internationalized that its solution depended to a large degree on London, Moscow, and Paris. In terms of its consequences for the human and material resources of the people involved, the war does not have any parallel in the history of Africa. The role of external involvement in generating consequences is significant.

External diplomatic and military intervention in the conflict was largely absent at the outset of the war in July 1967. Great Britain first officially announced a policy of neutrality and imposed an embargo on the supply of arms to both sides. Similarly, the United States and France adopted a neutral position. But British and United States neutrality at this time stemmed from their conviction that Nigeria would achieve a speedy military victory over Biafra.

When these expectations failed to materialize and Biafra was able not only to withstand the initial Nigerian invasion but also to threaten Lagos after capturing the Midwest, the showcase image of Nigeria built up over the years by the British and the Americans against the evident realities of the area was in mortal danger. In addition, British economic and political interests in the area were threatened. And these interests were both significant and extensive. For example, in his annual statement for 1967, the chairman of British Petroleum, referring to the closure of the Suez Canal as

a result of the Arab-Israeli war of June 1967, pointed out that his company's problem would be easier if the war between Nigeria and Biafra had not broken out. "Nigeria had assumed added importance because of the geographical advantage by comparison with oil which had to be moved around the cape."¹⁰² Although in 1966 Nigeria's share of British oil market was only 10 percent, this percentage was increasing. Commenting on the British Petroleum Company's prospects in 1966, the Financial Times of London observed that "there is no doubt that the Nigerian oil is going to be very big indeed" and that what the oil companies had done so far was "small beer compared with progress they expect in the next few year."¹⁰³ As the British increasingly perceived their Middle East oil supplies as unreliable, they "made very great efforts and spent very large sums to develop alternative sources in Nigeria."¹⁰⁴

Since the British have always felt that their oil and other interests would be better safeguarded under the control of the conservative leaders of Nigeria than under the more progressive and nationalistic Biafrans, it was to be expected that the British oil companies as well as the shipping lines and commercial companies would support Nigeria against Biafra. The intervention of the shipping lines and commercial companies

¹⁰²West Africa, (London, 20 April 1968), p. 464.

¹⁰³Ibid., 7 May 1966, p. 521.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 20 April 1968, p. 464.

in support of Nigeria dated from the time of Nigeria's embargo against Biafra. The sudden decision by the Soviet Union to grant Nigeria's desperate request for arms in September 1967 hastened the decision of the oil companies to support Nigeria. Just as suddenly the United Arab Republic agreed to provide Nigeria with a squadron of Egyptian pilots. Great Britain immediately dropped its public position of neutrality, lifted its embargo, came out militarily, economically, morally, and diplomatically in support of Nigeria. Although these external interventions were weighted against Biafra, she nevertheless had a few foreign friends. Portugal provided her with landing rights in Lisbon following the Nigerian blockade of her territory. Later France declared herself in favor of the Biafran right to self-determination while five countries granted her diplomatic recognition.

Because of the external interventions, the African society suffered serious consequences. The big powers were more powerful than the domestic forces; the outcome of the conflicts greatly affecting the nature and processes of the African life was determined by external power. Consequently, African independence and initiative was constantly being diminished and the true form of African development was suppressed by the imposition of external and unrealistic standards and structures. For example, the Nigeria-Biafra war was absurd. "War is only a means toward the achievement of

certain political objectives."¹⁰⁵ "In conflict between hostile groups it involves the use of lethal weapons to kill, wound, or capture individuals from the opposing side."¹⁰⁶ If violence is thus central to war, it is self-defeating and absurd to use it as a means to allay the fears of violence from the attacking group. Subsequent to the pogrom in the North and other parts of Nigeria in which the Biafrans lost many lives and much property, the greatest obstacle to the unity of the component parts of the former Federation of Nigeria lay in the widespread belief by the Biafrans that their persons, group, and property were insecure in Nigeria.

External intervention, particularly the British support of Nigeria, prevented the logic of absurdity from forcing an end to the conflict. As the war dragged on, Nigerian and Biafran, as well as humanitarian, interests became increasingly lost from sight while the interests of the significant intervening powers assumed greater importance.

The Causes of Failure

When the Biafrans tasted the Nigerian method of fighting, they began to fall. An example of this was written in the Biafra Story:

"Federal soldiers killed goats, chickens, cattle

¹⁰⁵Carl Von Clausewitz, "On War," (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1943), p. 41.

¹⁰⁶Quincy Wright, "A Study of War," (Chicago: University Press, 1942), p. 700.

and pigs for their own kitchens; harvested unripe yam and cassava crop for their own diets; took local girls and used them as they wished; forced villagers to watch public execution of honoured village chiefs and local elders; stopped protest and made the protester protest for their benefit; closed down schools and turned them into barracks for the army; enriched themselves in black market deals in relief food supposed to be destined for the needy; looted desirable property and sent it back home; and generally let it be known that they were there to stay and intended to live off the land, and live well."¹⁰⁷

With help of supplies and man power from certain countries, Nigeria was able to beat back Biafra in every way. The determination to bring Biafra to her knees represented their only goal.

"When Biafra could only do all that it could, the minorities in Biafra strongly began to resist secession. Being split, Biafra's control was stripped and ceased to exist within the boundaries originally fixed for itself."¹⁰⁸

It would have been almost impossible for Biafra to get away from Nigeria. Since the study of this paper is based on self-determination, these are the factors that had to be considered:

1. What attitude would have to be adopted toward the minorities in Biafra and in the North?
2. What effect would the secession of the Ibos

¹⁰⁷Frederick Forsyth, The Biafra Story (Maryland: Penguin Book, Inc., 1969), p. 10.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 11.

have on the rest of the country?

3. Were the Ibos really faced with genocide?

There is strong evidence to support the view that if Biafra had successfully broken away, the Yorubas of the Western Region would have done so too and also the Kanuris of Bornu, the state of Sokoto and possibly Bauchi-Adamawa and Kano. There were (and still remain) active secession movements in all these states.

Yet it has become fashionable among Biafran supporters to say that the danger of fragmentation of Nigeria, if the Ibos were to succeed, was merely an assumption. There is, however, concrete evidence to show that secessionism was actively and widely promoted.

It wouldn't have mattered much if Nigeria would have found itself split into six or eight states. It probably would have been nearer 12 or 14, including several small and wholly workable units. The minorities, it is said, could save themselves by alliances with some of the larger states. But why should they be forced to make such a choice? If others have the right to determine their future, why not they? Or is the right of self-determination to be regarded as one that belongs only to the powerful?

The reality about Nigeria is that contrary to current popular views, it was not entirely an artificial British creation. In certain important respects, its outline was shaped

by its precolonial history. What the colonial period did for the country was to begin the process of integrating its different parts more closely. This process was considerably speeded up in the years following independence by centralizing forces of nationalism.

"The result of these developments in the country's history was to make it difficult to split off any one part without doing great injury to the rest. Some would be landlocked, while others would control the ports; some would inherit the areas of industrial development, while others would be thrown back into subsistence agriculture."¹⁰⁹ The entire network of communications would be disrupted unless there was a political system acceptable to everyone.

If it were practical, and just, for Biafra to exist within the frontiers originally proclaimed, it could have formed a tidy economic unit. Stripped of its minority areas, it would not be viable even for the Ibos who normally live in that area. But what would be the fate of the Ibos if they were to be forced into a comparatively small area, cut-off from the sea, unless they could succeed in making real claim to Port Harcourt?

So long as the Ibos can count on this right being freely exercised, they could survive. "But if Ibos secession

¹⁰⁹Ralph Uwechwe, "Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War" (New York: Africian Publishing Corp.), p. 37.

were to succeed against the hostility of the rest of the country, there would be little doubt that the Ibos outside Biafra would be forced out; and the frontier and trade barriers would be thrown up against their independent state."¹¹⁰ Thus, unless one could be convinced that Biafra would have survived in its originally planned frontiers and that its secession could be negotiated with the rest of Nigeria, the only conclusion was that the future of the Ibos would be extremely bleak.

¹¹⁰Joseph Okpara, Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood (Greenwood Publishing Co., 1972), p. 120.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

In the life span of Nigeria, there have been a number of changes that have taken place. Some of them almost revolutionary in their import which have taken place in Nigeria between 1944, when the first national party was formed to direct the drive for independence, and 1964, when the same party, because it felt its national aspiration could not be fulfilled within the present system, talked of secession. The political changes have been most important and most salient. An independent republic has emerged from a set of colonial holdings welded together in 1914 by an imperial decree. The indigenous institution of chieftaincy, previously the instrument of colonial power which it served in order to preserve its holdings on the people through the indirect rule system, had become subordinate to the government (in the Southern regions) and was now controlled by men who had no say in the days of the colonial regime and by men who would have rights to wield power under the traditional system. Because of the continuing importance to the mass of the people of a tradition, derived from Islam, calling for unquestioning

obedience to those invested with the authority, the traditional rulers in the North successfully rode the crest of nationalist movement. They used the Northern xenophobia, coupled with the defensive regionalism of the Northern elite, to strengthen their regime. In this sense, the confrontation of 1964 could be regarded as the Southern attempt by the North to extend the Northern chieftaincy hegemony to the South. The final resolution of the conflicts may not be solely within the realm of the leadership elite. The silent masses were asked in 1964 to throw off the shackles of tribalism, to think in national terms, to evaluate a party's program by its relevance to their daily lives; these masses, the so-much praised and maligned people, might force a solution upon the leaders if the leaders proved inept and out of tune with the rumbling dissatisfaction from below. The implications of this for an orderly, continuous societal development are important. The leaders could not expect the led to have any faith in the rule of law if these laws were disregarded at will by those who were supposed to enforce them. These leaders, in sabotaging existing institutions for the maintenance of political supremacy, might inculcate an unhealthy cynicism in those led, thus rendering themselves and the institutions they represented vulnerable to revolutionary attack. The vote would be respected if the exercise of suffrage had meaning, both in the making of meaningful choices and in the periodic control

of the decision-making process. Parties would become more than an instrument of power, more than a means of meteoric social and economic mobility, and more of an instrument putting into effect popular demand or suggesting alternative solutions. In 1964, the implications seemed to have been recognized by the UPGA. Its manifesto clearly showed this concern with the transformation of the party into the instrument and executor of the public weal. It saw the necessity of protecting the national institutions from the effects of partisan manipulations of these institutions. Its final desire to sanction secession was symptomatic of the disillusionment and disaffection with the electoral process. The choice of non-recognition of the electoral process and the condoning of violence, even when the cause was good, set a precedent which could be dangerous and was later. Secession from the federation, like civil war, is the ultimate recourse available to the oppressed, but it is the mark of good politics to make the last recourse unnecessary. Nothing succeeds like success, and nothing stabilizes like stability. Violence, by its very nature, is destabilizing and may unleash dysfunctional results to negate some, if not obliterate all, that the political leadership had tried to build. For every region of Nigeria, the message of 1964 was loud and clear--the message was reconciliation or conflict. The goal on national growth cautioned against conflict; reconciliation and pooling of strength were the

sensible alternatives. But of course war did break out. The disintegration of the interhuman, sociocultural, and economic network of the former Federation of Nigeria in 1966, as a result of the massacres of Easterners and consequent movement of population to their native homelands, has been consolidated and even made worse by the war. The avoidance of intergroup contact with Nigeria has become, as a result of previous experiences, the ideal among the Ibos. Continued intergroup disequilibrium and intergroup institutional stagnation have been the consequences. Any return to peace in the area must face the task of recreating this interhuman network and these intergroup institutions. This in a sense is the primary and initial task of any peace formula, for no political settlement will be adequate in the absence of such a network no matter how rudimentary. Otherwise, a situation of intergroup apartheid is inevitable with all its possible repercussions. This process of re-creating intergroup institutions and interhuman network is, of course, made very difficult by the psychological consequence of intergroup hostility. Consequently, it is a process that is bound to take a long time.

Economically, the country's economy has been severely strained. The blockade imposed against Biafra, as well as the fact that geographically it constituted the main theatre of military operation, mean that the destruction of economic

institutions has been greatest in the East. Those institutions not destroyed have suffered stagnation. In addition, the currency situation in the East is bound to be a problem for a very long time. Reconstruction of the torn economy and the rehabilitation of the displaced persons must be undertaken in good faith if they are to succeed.

The long-term answer to the problem of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and the development is socialism and self-reliance. In the former Federation of Nigeria, for example, the chief hinderance to the more rapid development was not really the size of the Nigerian market or the scarcity of capital, or even the scarcity of trained personnel, although all three of these were important. The most significant barrier was the complacent, routine, almost lackadaisical attitude toward Nigeria's problems which were the results of a very low political consciousness and commitment at the national level. While there was much overt activity and strong motivation for personal gain, very few people thought critically about the gross shortcomings and inefficiencies in the production process. Almost no time was devoted to innovation, perhaps the most critical variable in a country like Nigeria with considerable resources, ambitious labor, and an amorphous but definite will to develop.

As a result of political considerations, Nigeria's economic integration left much to be desired. While there

was commerce between regions, the most important exchange was services through the free movement of the people. An illustration of regional economic chauvinism at the time was exemplified in the case of the cashew nut oil press near Enugu. The Northern government refused the use of equipment for pressing groundnuts produced in the South, because it was not in the interest of the North to do so. It set up its own equally inefficient mill. This sectional economic chauvinism had been growing as the individual became more and more oriented toward the region, thus undercutting the presumed benefits of Nigeria's size.

There is only one appropriate political solution for these problems posed by the focus of political loyalty at the subnational rather than the national level. This is creation of political arrangement based on programs of socialist reconstruction of the former Federation of Nigeria. What is involved here is the removal of transethnic loyalty to an ideological level of the state which emphasizes social justice, mass ownership of the instruments of production and distribution of national resources, the predomination of the interests of workers and peasants who constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, and the removal of all exploitative forces which fan the fires of intergroup hostility. This arrangement would realize the brotherhood of man which is the true interest and conception of human relationship on the part of the masses.

The workers and peasants would be highly conscious of their interests and destiny, both alone and in combination with similar progressive forces in Africa and the rest of the world, laying emphasis on the improving of the productive forces of the state for the benefit of all citizens regardless of sectional and parochial interest.

To bring this about, it is through the merit of self-reliance that the country would realize the political implication of economic relations. In the contemporary atmosphere of informal access and transnational politics, it would seek to prevent informal attack and control.

Self-reliance controls but does not prevent external interaction with other states. In order to effect this control, it must rely on the power of the Nigerian peoples. If the leaders are reactionary, selfish and corrupt, the masses will be dispirited. But if they win the confidence of the people, which they can only do by the vigorous elimination of class and ethnic privileges, they can successfully mobilize them behind state action.

Economically, self-reliance encourages local initiative and the maximum utilization of internal resources. Thus the latent energy of the country is transformed into the manifest energy for development. Foreign investment and aid are assessed strictly in accordance with the benefits they provide for development and not welcomed uncritically or

treated with automatic suspicion and disdain. Economic and other relations with advanced countries must be on the basis of interdependence and mutual benefits rather than dependence and exploitation.

It is therefore the task of all well-meaning people who wish to see peace established in Nigeria to encourage all actions which may make it possible for the country to be socialistic and self-reliant. Otherwise, just as Biafra demonstrated its dissatisfaction rightfully, there could be possible future dissatisfaction. And in this case, Nigeria would have to remain a split society.

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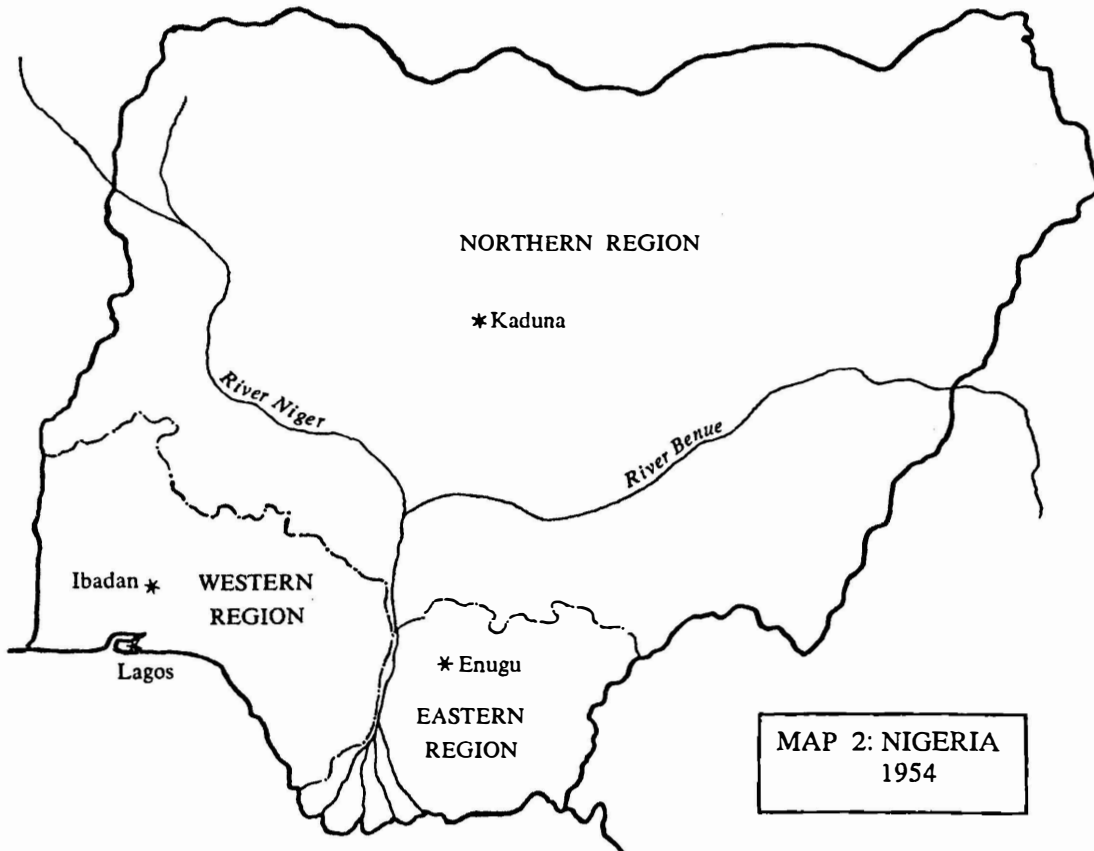
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