

The Nigerian Civil War

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR*

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'Tribes' and 'tribalism'

A BBC television programme on Ojukwu and Gowon once presented Nigeria as a country consisting of three 'tribes' - the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East. Political conflict among these 'tribes' led to the breakdown of civilian government and the attempt of the 'Igbos' to secede from the Federation. Nigerians belong to tribes, tribes to go to war with one another. Tribalism 'caused' the civil war. In this way, post-independence Africa is presented as reverting to the supposed situation before colonial rule brought law and order to Nigeria and ended the endemic state of 'tribal warfare'.

Let us examine this account briefly. First, it ignores almost half the people of Nigeria whose first languages are neither Hausa, Yoruba nor Igbo. Second, it uses the word 'tribe' to refer to language groups each of which number far more than ten million people. Third, it suggests that these 'tribes' have always existed; but in each case, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo identities have been formed in the twentieth century. Fourth, it suggests that these are tribal people, that is, that they organise their social and political life through lineages, that is, extended corporate, kinship groups. The structures of households and the forms of kinship relations vary considerably, not just among these different language groups, but within them. In the Hausa-Fulani Emirates of the north, extended lineage ties are important among the Fulani aristocracy but not among Muslim Hausa commoners (indeed, in Britain or America, kinship relations are perhaps most extensive and important among the wealthy, privileged and powerful). Among all these groups, political authority and economic transactions have never been organised primarily through kinship relations. Fifth, it suggests that people come into conflict with one another because they speak different languages and have different cultural identities. This doesn't always happen, of course. Where it does, we need to explain it.

In other words, it is not clear that there are any 'tribes' in Nigeria in any definable sense of the word, and it is certainly not true that 'tribal' or cultural identities are fixed and unchanging. Peoples' identities as 'Hausa', 'Yoruba' or 'Igbo' or, for that matter, as 'Kanawa', 'Ekitis' or 'Afikpos' (respectively Hausa-, Yoruba- and Igbo speaking groups) have been formed, reshaped and taken on new significances in the twentieth century. There certainly have been political conflicts in Nigeria, tragically leading to civil war between 1967 and 1970. Regional conflicts and animosities between ethnic groups have, indeed, been central to such conflicts. These conflicts cannot simply be explained as the result of there being different 'tribes', or even of 'tribalism'. As we shall see, it may be argued that political conflict causes 'tribalism' rather than that tribalism causes political conflict.

How then, can we try to explain the conflicts which led to the Nigerian civil war? Clearly, the issues in contention did not spring from nowhere. They had specific historic roots. They weren't always there. They developed in particular ways. Therefore, we must examine the historic origins of the civil war. We should not fall into the trap of assuming that historical developments are inevitable, that they couldn't have happened otherwise. Historical events are the results, intended and unintended, of people's decisions and actions. Such great tragedies as the 1966 killings and the ensuing civil war in Nigeria are the consequences of numerous actions and decisions by many people, great and small. We should try to explain these actions, and show why they came to have the consequences they did.

Any reconstruction of the past must be selective. This is especially obvious in the case of a brief outline of some of the origins of major events. Our account will be shaped by our moral values, political judgements and theoretical approaches, and by the problem we set out to explain. We can, at best, identify some of the aspects of the recent history of Nigeria, relevant to an understanding of the origins of the civil war.

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Pre-colonial Nigeria

The nineteenth century was a period of great changes for the peoples who lived in the areas within and adjacent to the present boundaries of Nigeria. These various peoples often vary markedly, in their systems of government and political authority, their techniques of cultivation and manufacturing, their social relations of production and distribution, their patterns of trade, their religious beliefs, and their systems of kinship and gender relations. Although there are cultural differences among people in Nigeria today, these variations were reduced considerably during the colonial period.

In pre-colonial West Africa, people were linked with one another through trade - among neighbours as well as over long distances - through migration and settlement, Koranic learning, religious shrines and cults, conquest and warfare. During the colonial period, the scale of these connections was extended considerably and their character and directions were altered, often very significantly. Colonial rule incorporated people into a common political and economic system. In many ways, they came to have more in common with one another. They also came into competition with one another for the same limited resources.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, numerous Muslim Emirates were established, usually under the control of an aristocracy usually drawn from Fulani lineages, across the Hausa-speaking areas of northern Nigeria and the present-day Republic of Niger, and further south among non-Hausa populations, such as the Nupe of Bida or the Yoruba of Ilorin. They owed ultimate allegiance to the Caliphate of Sokoto, established by Uthman dan Fodio, the leader of the *jihad* (War for Islam) and his followers. The Fulani aristocracy maintained a form of administration in which the ruler allocates official positions and the right to extract tribute in cash and kind from subordinate towns and districts. The Emirates were ruled from walled cities in which the aristocracy lived. They were linked to Ashanti in present-day Ghana through the kolanut trade, to North Africa and Europe through the trans-Saharan caravan trade, and to the Muslim state of Kanem-Bornu by Muslim scholars. The aristocracy provided for their own consumption by taxing their Hausa subjects and Fulani pastoralists, by appropriating slaves and tribute from conquered people, by tolls on trade and by maintaining slave estates. Most agricultural production, cloth weaving and dyeing, for distant markets as well as self-consumption and local trade, was carried out by independent rural households, often incorporating a small number of slaves, and sold by rural-based migrant traders. In the densely-populated areas around the major cities land was manured and permanently cultivated. Islam was the religion of the rulers and the towns; its penetration of the countryside was less thorough (and is not universal today).

In south-western Nigeria, the most powerful state in the area, the Oyo Empire, collapsed in the 1820s. This led to the migration of many people southwards to the forest, the creation of new states, including the Muslim Emirate at Ilorin, and several extended wars for the control of slaves and tribute. These wars brought different Yoruba-speaking peoples into conflict with one another, and also with the kingdom of Abomey, in present-day Benin (Dahomey) and the Fulani. The wars both depended upon, and also disrupted, the trade with the British as Lagos, in palm produce, guns, and other commodities. The most powerful of these new states was Ibadan, founded as a war camp about 1829. Here personal security, access to war booty and to farmland and claims to political offices were organised through military households, rather than through the established institutions of kingship, titles and lineage more common in older Yoruba kingdoms. Access to positions of power was more open to those who were able and ruthless enough to take it in Ibadan than in some older Yoruba states. Very likely, there was a greater concentration of control over the allocation of land among households and over other resources in the hands of a few military households in Ibadan than in the smaller Yoruba cities and towns.

The development of the slave trade and subsequently the trade in palm oil, in the Niger Delta, led to the rise of a number of trading principalities who organised and controlled the trade between European firms and the interior. They were organised in large trading households, incorporating large numbers of slaves, some of whom rose to head trading houses and even principalities.

In large parts of what was to become Nigeria, especially to the east of the Niger and Benue rivers, many societies were 'stateless'. That is, not only were they not ruled by a monarch, but they did not have any specialized institutions of government exercising political authority. Public affairs were regulated through diverse institutions, based variously on clan membership, social prestige and religious offices. Thus there was no Tiv state, or states, nor did any form of 'chieftaincy' exist among most Igbo communities (Onitsha, on the Niger river, was an important exception). Colonial rulers had to impose 'chiefs' or invent them. In these societies rights to cultivate land were generally allocated among groups of kin by communities. Periods of cultivation alternated with long periods of reversion of land to bush in places where extensive areas of land were

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available for clearing and cultivation. By contrast, intensive and permanent cultivation was practiced by hill peoples, as well as in the vicinity of household compounds, especially in the more densely settled areas.

Thus we see that, prior to colonial occupation, the peoples of present-day Nigeria varied widely in their political systems and their organisation of production, as well as in the extent to which they were involved in external trading links and in the direction of those links. Generally, it was only in the immediate hinterland of the Atlantic Coast and the Niger Delta that these links were oriented to the sea trade with Europe.

The colonial political economy

Jacob Ajayi has presented the colonial period as an 'episode' in African history, after which Africans resumed control of their political destinies. In opposition to an older imperial tradition, this approach emphasises that Africans made their own history. It naturally focusses on the continuities between pre- and post-colonial Africa, on political movements and particularly on African resistance to foreign rule. Here we take a rather different approach, which suggests that African societies were reshaped fundamentally during the colonial period. This reshaping was not always in accordance with the design of colonial administrators and foreign economic interests. Some of the most important changes in this period, such as the production of crops for export, were the result of initiatives by African merchants and farmers. The differences between the two approaches can never be a simple matter of a right and a wrong way of doing things; it is rather that different approaches bring out different features of a society's history.

Both local and long-distance trade preceded the colonial period. The West African coast and its hinterland were integrated into the Euro-American economic system through the trans-Atlantic trade in slaves and other commodities and, in the nineteenth century, the palm oil trade with Europe. However, the expansion of these market relations was constrained by the high cost of transport, which limited trade to high-value products, slaves who transported themselves, and crops produced near the coast. It was only with the building of railways and then roads that bulky crops could be produced for export markets. The development of the transport system in turn directed trade links along the railway lines to the sea ports and thus from the Sahara to the Atlantic, and along a north-south rather than an east-west axis. There was thus a close relation between the establishment and policies of the colonial state and the development of a commodity producing economy, but they were not identical.

The colonial state

British rule in Nigeria began in 1861 when Lagos was annexed as a base from which Britain could control the shipment of slaves to the Americas. As early as 1849, a Consul was appointed at Fernando Po, an island off the Nigerian coast, and gradually assumed increasing power to regulate relations between Europeans and African traders, an implicit assumption of authority without a commitment to colonization. The conquest of what became the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria proceeded northward from the Colony of Lagos and from the Niger Delta in the 1880s and the early 1900s. The conquest of Northern Nigeria was initially undertaken by the Royal Niger Company. They established a trading monopoly and political control over the southern and northern banks of the Niger and Benue from their base at Lokoja, British Government forces, under Lugard, then proceeded to subjugate the Hausa-Fulani Emirates.

The boundaries of Nigeria were defined by this process of conquest and agreement with the rival colonial powers and France and Germany so that borders resulted from Anglo-French and Anglo-German accommodation and often cut through the territories of particular African states. Similarly, the diversion between the northern and southern provinces was determined by the military and economic activities of the Royal Niger Company, which explains why present-day Kwara and Benue states (Ilorin, Kabba and Benue provinces) were incorporated into Northern Nigeria. Separate administrations, with different policies, were established in the two Protectorates. They were joined in 1914 under the authority of a single Governor-General, Lord Lugard, so that the northern administration could draw on the import and export taxes of the south. The separate administrations for the southern and northern provinces continued, with the headquarters at Enugu and Kaduna respectively. Throughout the colonial period the Northern administration was staffed separately from the southern, followed their own policies and developed a distinctive style and tradition.

In 1939, the southern provinces were divided into eastern and western regions, with headquarters in Enugu and Ibadan respectively, along the arbitrary dividing line of the Niger River. This separated the speakers of Ijo languages in the delta from one another, and similarly the Igbo-speakers of Asaba from Igbos across the Niger in the Eastern Region. In this way, the administrative convenience of colonial administrators laid down the

regional boundaries which were to shape the patterns of political competition after the second world war, and, in the case of the Eastern Region, define the boundaries claimed by the 'Republic of Biafra'.

The first priority of the colonial state was to establish its authority over the territory it purported to control. Many states rulers and peoples resisted or revolted against the British. They could not match British fire-power and were defeated and punished, often with terrible brutality. Recalcitrant rulers were deposed. By installing their own candidates in office, the British established that they were the ultimate source of political authority. Having done this, the British could then administer the country through their appointees, while claiming for them the legitimacy of indigenous traditional titles.

The second priority of the colonial state was to encourage trade and to raise the revenues necessary to pay for the colonial administration and to meet the debts on railways. The railway from Lagos to Kano was begun in 1895 and reached Kano in 1912. It provided contracts for British industry, strategic control of the country, and transport to export and import commodities to and from Europe. The railways were the one investment which the colonial state funded from loans rather than from current revenue.

Colonial administration was based on a philosophy of 'indirect rule', according to which the British governed people through their 'traditional' rulers. Relations within the administration were vertical ties of domination and dependence, in which subordinate clients jostled, at each level of the hierarchy, for the favour of patrons, with the Resident of each province at the 'Great White Patron' at the apex of the system. Office-holders were paid salaries, most of which were very low. Formally, taxes were collected and authority exercised on behalf of the colonial state. In practice, the colonial authorities tolerated a large element of corruption and extortion which enabled office-holder to supplement their meagre salaries and maintain the styles of consumption appropriate to the status of their offices.

Colonial administration assimilated kings, aristocrats and petty officials into a hierarchy of 'chiefs', a uniform system for defining their position, as 'first-, second- or third-class chiefs' within the colonial hierarchy. In the Moslem Emirates, the British simply took control over appointments and sent urban office-holders to administer the subordinate districts. In the western provinces, they transformed the system of title-holding to fit their needs, raising rulers who had been first among equals to authority over their peers and turning titled offices into a system of patronage. Where no indigenous 'nobility' existed, they simply appointed intermediaries without noble status, in some cases even strangers to the area, as chiefs by 'warrant'.

The colonial administration encouraged the expansion of trade by ending tolls and monopolies imposed by African rulers, by placing foreign merchants under the authority of colonial courts, and by introducing a uniform currency, encouraging its commercial use and requiring it for tax payments. For the building of the railway the government used administrative means to conscript labour, which was also sued for roads and other public purposes and to supply labour to the Jos tin mines. As government revenues, and the cash needs of families for taxes and commodities increased, wage labour replaced conscripted labour (and indigenous systems of slavery). Nevertheless, until the 1960s, Northern district and village heads were able to command "communal" labour on their private lands.

The assessment of the taxable capacity of communities and the collection of taxes was almost an obsession with the Northern Nigerian administration. Taxes on exports and imports could not cover the costs of administration. Direct taxes both provided revenues and encouraged people to produce cotton and groundnuts and to work in the tin mines, which in turn generated taxable exports and imports. In northern Nigeria, taxes were set at a high level, relative to cash earnings, and were not reduced when earnings from export and food crops fell during the depression, imposing a severe burden on poorer communities and households. Indirect taxes on exports and imports provided adequate revenues for the administration of the southern provinces, where the opportunities to earn more and to purchase commodities provided the necessary stimulus to producing for cash. Direct taxes were only introduced in the southern provinces from 1918 as a source of local revenues and a symbol of recognition of government authority. In the south, taxes were generally lower than in the poorer northern provinces and they were collected far less effectively.

By 1929, 'native administration' in the southern provinces was in crisis. People resented the extortionate practices of chiefs, courts and their messengers, most notably by the 'warrant chiefs' in the eastern provinces. Local rulers and their councils were ill-equipped to administer the large populations and increased budgets of the Native Authorities. Opposition to the threatened extension of taxes to women at a time of falling produce prices and trade crises provoked the Aba 'women's war' of 1929 in the eastern provinces whose major target was the 'warrant chiefs'.

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The government responded by seeking a new system of local government which would be both legitimate and effective. Ostensibly, the numerous 'intelligence reports' which the government commissioned were designed to discover the 'traditional' authorities in each community. However, their concern was not with the past but with the present. They wished to bring into the system of local government the 'progressive' traders and the educated class who, in the south, were not necessarily drawn from families which could claim any 'traditional' status of authority. By contrast, in the north, government policy had restricted mission activity and provided English language education mainly to people connected with the ruling houses and entering the service of the Native Authorities.

In the eastern provinces, a new system of local councils was instituted. In the West, the administration encouraged the election of educated men to political office, notably Adesoji Aderemi, an educated produce buyer, to the most ancient Yoruba throne as Ooni of Ife. In Ibadan, wealthy Muslim traders and educated Christians entered the lines of chiefs with the encouragement of the colonial rulers, who wished them to take over the reins of local administration from the geriatric scions of warrior families, who succeeded to higher offices by seniority. They in turn resented the attempt to place men of 'commoner' origins above them, and provoked a series of crises from 1936 to 1951 over the advancement of such 'upstarts' to the most senior titles.

In Nigeria as a whole, constitutional arrangements continued to reflect the differences between the two 'protectorates' and also the Colony of Lagos. Lagos, and Calabar, elected representatives to the Legislative Council. In the southern provinces, the authorities nominated some African representatives. Northern representation was confined to Europeans. Officials commanded a majority of the council. Constitutional advance was planned to be through the Native Authorities rather than by extension of direct elections. However, in post-war Nigeria, the claims of the classes created by colonial rule could not be satisfied by incorporating them into local government, they would be pursued within, and among, the regional administrative structures laid down in the colonial period.

The colonial economy

As we have seen, colonial rule followed the production and sale of crops for export to Europe. In the 1880s and 1890s there was a slump in the palm oil trade, resulting from the European depression. This led to bitter competition both among African traders and European traders and between them, as each sought to protect and expand its share of a declining market. European firms sought to extend their activities into the interior, which brought them into conflict with the African middlemen they were displacing. They also opposed the monopoly of the Royal Niger Company over the territories they had occupied. These issues were resolved by the extension of colonial rule throughout Nigeria.

The economic policies of the British government were generally governed by two policies: expenditures should, if at all possible, be paid for from direct taxes and customer and excise revenues not loans, and government should not intervene in the freedom of firms to trade, or their freedom to combine. However, as we have seen, the government funded the railways by loan. The administration also cooperated with the British (later Empire) Cotton Growers Association (BCGA) to persuade Nigerians to grow cotton. The colonial venture was premised on a vision of railways carrying cotton to the coast, returning with Lancashire textiles. However, in many areas, Africans preferred to grow other crops where they yielded better returns than cotton. In Nigeria, the British lacked the control over the land, or the people, necessary to force them to produce cotton as happened elsewhere in Africa.

Lagos traders, faced with the slump of the 1880s, initiated the production for export of cocoa, one of several crops with which they experimented at the time. Traders, migrant cocoa labourers and Christians spread cocoa cultivation to Abeokuta, Ibadan and Ilesa. Production expanded later to Ife and to Ondo province, now the main producing area. Once the railway reached Kano, Hausa traders advanced money to farmers to grow groundnuts rather than cotton. Production spread across the north, especially to Gusau, Katsina and Kano and across the border to the Republic of Niger. Rubber was exported from Delta province and sesame from Benue. The production of crops for export created a large, rural demand for food. Beyond the forest zone and south of the main groundnut producing areas, farmers produced yams and guinea corn (sorghum) respectively and, especially along the northern river valleys, high-value crops like onions, tomatoes, rice and sugar. Livestock from the north were sold extensively in the southern provinces and kola nut trees planted in the south-western forest and their fruits sent southwards. Fish were traded extensively from the major rivers, the Niger Delta and the coast. The commitment of labour time to export crops encouraged farmers to produce foods needing low labour inputs, such as cassava (manioc) and, recently, maize. The expansion of agricultural production encouraged people to migrate to find jobs and land. During the early colonial period there was a move into the countryside and, in the case of cocoa, into the forest. Farmers who lacked other sources of cash income migrated seasonally from Sokoto, Kabba and Owerri provinces to earn wages and get food before the harvest season. People migrated to find land to grow food crops in the less populated areas of the central savannah and Cross Rivers and, later, to grow cotton in Bauchi province. Yoruba migrants from Kabba province worked for wages and in the 1950s used them to acquire land in the cocoa belt.

In Northern Nigeria the administration declared that it owned the land and the land could not be sold. As Polly Hill has pointed out, farmers ignored this declaration, if ever they heard of it. As production for the market expanded, land acquired a cash value, especially improved (e.g. manured) land and land suitable for cocoa cultivation or bearing valuable trees. Systems of rotational tenure and communal allocation gave way to heritable family ownership. In most northern provinces migrants could generally buy land. In the south, migrants have paid rents in cash or kind to recognise the formal rights of the local community or landowner. Throughout Nigeria, rural producers became 'peasant' smallholders, producing crops for sale and for the consumption of the household family land with family labour, supplemented by wage labour. Rural families generally combine farming with other ways of earning money - manufacture, trade and wage labour.

Administrative centres and other ports and towns on the railway line expanded during the colonial period. Some, like Kaduna or Port Harcourt, were colonial creations: others, like Ibadan or Kano, expanded alongside the old cities. Traders, labourers, clerks, railwaymen and schoolboys migrated to the colonial cities. Distinct stranger quarters developed accommodating southerners in the Sabon Gari in Hausa cities, or Hausa traders in southern cities. European reservations were established at a proper distance from the African population. Migration was especially high from the poor and densely-populated areas of the eastern provinces. Initially, strangers tended to take jobs which were shunned by the local population or engage in different forms of trade from local people. Increasingly, they began to compete for the same limited resources, trading opportunities, urban land, and in later years, jobs. 'Sons of the soil' responded by claiming prior rights to these resources.

Sir William Lever (later Lord Leverhulme) made several attempts to persuade the government to allow him to acquire land for plantations, a monopoly of the export of palm produce and a guaranteed labour supply. The government rejected this. African producers had succeeded in developing agricultural exports where attempts at plantations had failed. Merchant firms were not willing to concede a monopoly to Lever. He responded by buying up major trading companies in 1921 and 1929 and founding his own shipping line.

During the colonial period, particularly when prices crashed in 1921 and 1929, large European firms displaced African traders from exporting and importing and cut small European firms out or took them over. The massive growth of commerce expanded absolutely the commercial opportunities for Africans at various levels of the bulking and distributive system, but excluded the wealthiest African traders from the lucrative spices of the import-export trade. Similarly, the import of cotton and other European products displaced many African manufacturers. In Ibadan, for example, many weavers turned to cocoa farming. Woven cloths continue to be produced beyond the cocoa belt, where there are fewer alternative sources of cash. The colonial period also saw the introduction of new crafts and the adaptation of old ones: motor mechanics, machine tailors and blacksmiths making burglar guards, for example. In absolute terms local craft production increased to meet the expanded demand generated by the earnings of rural producers.

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By 1929, Nigeria had become a major exporter of tropical crops and tin. Its people had become increasingly dependent on the sale and purchase of goods to provide for their needs. Consequently, they were very vulnerable to the depression. During the 1930s, the price of export crops fell. The same volume of export crops now bought, on average, forty to fifty per cent fewer imported goods than it had in 1927-8. The prices of staple foods, and thus the earnings of food exporting communities, fell even more drastically. Wages fell in tin mining but held up better in the government coal mines. The production of crops for export continued to expand in the 1930s since it provided farmers far better returns than any other way of earning money to buy commodities and, particularly in the north, pay their taxes.,,

The depression saw a more favourable attitude to state intervention in economic activities and increased cartelization of the import-export trade. Government spending was reduced. In 1933 the government initiated cocoa marketing cooperatives in Ibadan and established a Cooperative Department in 1935. The cooperatives sold cocoa to foreign firms.

During the 1930s, six firms virtually monopolised the import and export trades until they were undercut by two Lebanese firms at the end of the decade. United Africa Company, which brought Lever together with Dutch firms, handled almost half the trade of British West Africa. The merchant firms responded to the depression by organising a series of 'pools', that is agreements on prices of specific commodities and allocation of market shares. In 1937, the formation of the cocoa pool and the fall in the cocoa price led to a hold-up of cocoa by farmers in the Gold Coast and protests by Nigerian traders. The Nowell Commission of Inquiry recommended expansion of the cooperatives with government support which would, in theory, eventually eliminate African traders, called 'middlemen', and left the firms in tact. The Nowell proposals were rejected. However, the wartime government took over the export of produce, fixed prices and appointed the firms as its agents. Import shares were allocated to the firms in accordance with their previous market shares.

Colonialism and culture

During the twentieth century, Islam and Christianity have spread so widely that, today, in every part of Nigeria, most people adhere to one or the other of these two world religions. Nigerians attribute great cultural significance to this process of religious conversion. Many Yoruba people identify the 'age of enlightenment' (*aiye olaju*) with the spread of Islam and/or Christianity (and certainly not with colonial rule).

The spread of world religions, and the formation of new religious sects and beliefs is a varied and complex process. Scholar-traders spread Islam throughout their own societies and took its message to new areas. Some peoples, especially in the wake of the Fulani *jihad*, followed the religion of their rulers. In the Sokoto Caliphate, as in Bornu, Islam legitimated political authority and the exaction of tithes (*zakka*) and Muslim (*shari'a*) courts regulated social order.

Elsewhere Muslim and Christians had to spread their message from below. The expansion of colonial rule made it easier for missions to expand their activities and the increase in trade and improvement in transport aided both Muslim and Christian evangelism. In some cases, as among the Ijebu Yoruba and many Igbo, who had both initially resisted mission, military conquest was followed rapidly by extensive conversions to Christianity and, in Ijebu Ode, Islam as well. Often, the first converts to the new religions were, in some sense, 'outsiders' in their communities. They were strangers, or of slave or low status, or had travelled widely, or, especially in the case of Muslim converts, were traders with links to and experience of other places. Freed slaves who had returned from Brazil or Sierra Leone were prominent in the Lagos Christian community and maintained ties with their towns of origin. Conversion itself marked the early converts out as different, and often required them to reject the ritual practices of their kin and communities. As the world religions spread, new adherents followed the examples of influential people, kinsfolk and peers. Conversion brought them in line with the new beliefs and loyalties of their communities.

Religious conversion met intellectual, emotional and material needs. Horton suggests that as social relations beyond the local community became more important and the scale of people's experience broadened, so they paid more attention to the Supreme Being, who symbolised the macrocosm beyond the local community. Hence their sympathy for world religions with their developed ideas of God or Allah, and the revelation of his word to man. People continued to seek divine intercession through their new religion in pursuit of mundane aims, such as deliverance from illness or barrenness or fortune in trade. The proliferating uncertainties and wider opportunities of the changing society demanded new and more powerful religious practices - these could, if occasion required, be combined with older beliefs and rituals. Prayer was, and remains, central to Muslim and Christian religious life.

As the spread of Islam was associated with networks of traders, the spread of Koranic learning and the use of Arabic script, so Christianity was associated with the spread of literacy in Roman script and the expansion of schools. Literacy gave people access to useful skills, as well as to the divine word. Mission education offered some a path to clerical and teaching jobs which might open opportunities for a more independent and lucrative career.

Gifts to churches and mosques, membership of religious associations and performance of the hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) all conferred social status. Muslim and Christian networks offered commercial contacts. Muslim and Christian networks offered commercial contacts. Muslim brotherhoods provide security, and mutual trust and assistance to their members. Thus the Tijaniyya brotherhood provides the framework of contacts and credit relations through which Hausa entrepreneurs organize the long-distance trade between north and south in cattle and kola nuts.

Some African churches broke away from the missions in order to take control of their own affairs, while retaining the style and doctrine of the missions from which they had separated. Others have created their own distinctive Pentecostal style and prophetic leadership, such as the churches which grew out of the Aladura (Yoruba: people who pray) movement, which began in 1918, the year of the great influenza epidemic, reaching a climax in 1930. Catholic and Protestant mission churches have themselves been shaped by Nigerian cultures, as well as shaping them. In many parts of Nigeria, multi-denominational communities have emerged in which Muslims and adherents of the various Christian churches share a common culture and respect for one another's religious beliefs. By contrast, the culture of Bornu and of the Emirates has been shaped in a distinctly Islamic image.

Christian missions established schools to serve their evangelistic aims. They taught literacy, gave religious instruction and tried to inculcate sober and industrious habits. Schools and, more especially secondary boarding schools, took children out of their homes and the culture of their communities and into the 'Christian' environment of the school. The opportunities provided by schooling encouraged adherence to churches - followers of other religions were often excluded from mission schools.

Schools trained the catechists and teachers who would spread religion and enlightenment. They also provided the clerical and technical staff needed at the lower levels of the colonial administration. By the 1920s it was clear that most schools were poorly financed, of indifferent quality, and that the education they provided bore little relation to the life of Nigerian societies. The government increased its contributions to mission schools, demanded that the missions improve their supervision of schools and declared that 'Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, and traditions of the various peoples', which appears to mean that it should be more practical. However, schooling provided qualifications for clerical positions requiring literacy in English, the sole language of administration in Southern Nigeria, and wages for manual jobs were very low. Pupils and teachers thus pursued academic qualifications. Mission schools produced a new generation of people, often of humble origins, with new skills and new claims to status and influence, who would challenge the predominance of their elders and betters in the communities, and their own limited position in the colonial order of things.

In the northern Emirates, the administration limited Christian mission activities and established their own schools, drawing pupils initially from the mallamai and later from the children of the aristocracy and their retainers. Educational provision was limited to the needs of the administration and designed to train its products for careers within the 'native authority' system. Hausa was used as a language of administration in the northern 'native authorities' and provided a commercial lingua franca in the northern provinces. Northern education policy saved money and contributed to the political stability and conservatism of the Emirates. It left the northern provinces far behind the south in the extent and level of 'western' schooling and qualified people.

Schooling offered a very few people the chance to pursue their education further and to seek higher positions in the independent professions, government service and the church itself. The expansion of colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century was accompanied by increasing discrimination against Africans, excluding them from senior posts in the government and even the church. In 1932 the government created Yaba Higher College, Lagos, the first post-secondary institution in Nigeria, but limited its courses to sub-degree and sub-professional level courses, in the face of bitter opposition from the Nigerian Youth Movement, itself drawn from those who had advanced themselves through education and resented this blatant check to African educational and professional advancement.

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Classes, tribes and nationalism

Colonialism created the Nigerian state, albeit one whose policies and administration differed between North and South. Throughout the country it created a hierarchical and decentralized system of government, carried out through provincial Residents directing local 'native authority' 'chiefs'. After the 'women's war' of 1929, the colonial government began to reform local administration in the south, adapting it to the changes in the class structure and relations of social status which the expansion of trade and schooling had brought about. Post-war constitutional reform would not be contained within the 'native authority' system. It would be shaped by the regional and provincial boundaries laid out by the colonial government

The political economy of the colonial period created a Nigerian society, with a distinctive class structure. The foundation of this class structure was a commodity-producing peasantry, dependent both on the market and on production for their own consumption. The expansion of commodity production led to the spread of wage employment in agriculture which did not rely on a rural proletariat but on daily or seasonal work by other 'peasants', whether local or migrant. A vast and complex hierarchy of traders, rising from a multitude of petty traders to a small and significant group of rich merchants and transporters, linked producers to one another and to the few foreign firms who controlled the export-import trade.

Government and missions employed clerks and teachers. There were relatively few full-time manual wage workers, of whom the main concentrations were in the railways and ports, in the Enugu coalmines, and in the Jos tin mines where migratory labour predominated. In the towns, manual workers were outnumbered by craft producers and traders. Even in Nigerian cities, self-employment is more common than wage work, and preferred to it as a way of life.

Although colonial society generated a variety of class positions, many people moved between them as they sought ways of earning a living and improving their conditions, combining, at different times, urban and rural wage employment, petty trade or crafts and peasant agriculture. Educated people combined clerical or professional employment with trading activities and aspirations.

In southern Nigeria, 'traditional' rulers began to be chosen from the ranks of the educated and wealthy, and to confer honorary titles on them. In Northern Nigeria, the merchant class, derived in many cases from nineteenth century merchant families, aligned themselves with the aristocrats and officials of the 'native authorities'. Thus, distinct *Stände* (status groups) emerged, with their own styles of life and patterns of consumption, which linked together people of different class positions. People from different classes and status groups came to share a common, entrepreneurial ideology of individual advancement, though they might well view the structure of opportunities rather differently. All classes depended for their prosperity on the incomes, profits and revenues generated by the export of crops, and suffered, in different degrees, from the successive falls in the prices of agricultural exports - in 1921, 19209, 1931, 1934 and 1937.

Success in trade depended not only on individual abilities, but also on the favour of those better placed in the bulking and distributive systems. Rich traders depended on the custom of a network of clients through whom they bought and sold their products. Similarly, relations between patrons and their clients shaped competition for political office and even access to jobs and promotion in government. Consequently, people manipulated patronage and clientage as a means of advancing themselves and their immediate families.

Colonial rule and the expansion of commodity production brought people into more extensive and different relations with people from other places, with different customs and some speaking different languages. This led to the formation of new 'tribal' identities. At the same time, people have acquired a 'Nigerian' identity.

Social identities are always relative and contextual. People define their own identities in contrast to the identities of others. How they define themselves, as 'workers', or 'Igbo', 'Ijebu' or 'Yoruba', 'Christians', or 'Tiv', 'Northerners' or 'Nigerians' depends on the situation referred to and the goals they wish to realise. Competition for access to economic opportunities and political resources has shaped the ways in which 'ethnic' and other social identities have been defined and redefined in response to changing circumstances.

Migration to farm, to trade and to seek employment took many people to distant places. Sometimes, as with many migrant Hausa farmers, people established themselves in new communities and broke their ties with their natal villages. Others, such as Yoruba tenant farmers who migrated to the cocoa belt, or migrants to the new or expanding towns and cities, relied on ties with people from their own villages to find housing, and work or access to land. Migration involved them in ties of reciprocal obligations and the formation of new and extended networks linking townspeople to their 'home' communities. More generally, people seek the favour of patrons and the support of clients to protect and advance their own interests. To form and consolidate these relations, they appeal to the claims of communal solidarity and obligations.

Prior to colonial rule people generally defined their social and political identities by their social status and their inclusion in a particular state or political community. In the colonial period, these were fixed by the boundaries of the 'native authorities' and the authorities of the 'chiefs' over their subjects though not, in the same way, over 'strangers'. During the colonial period new 'tribal' ('pan-tribal' or 'national') identities were formed based on membership of much larger language groups, such as Igbo or Yoruba. These did not exclude the narrower identities based on older communities and locally-based groups, such as town improvement associations, were incorporated into broader 'pan-tribal' institutions, such as the Ibo State Union.

The origins and social bases of these new nationalisms varied in different cases. Leaders were drawn from an educated elite who often shared a common boarding school background, and were employed or conducted business beyond their own communities. Tiv 'nationalism' (like that of other Northern 'minorities' such as the Igala and the Birom) developed in response to their subordinate position, as a non-Muslim society, with the Northern administrative system, and focused initially on the demand for the creation of a 'Paramount Chief' and a single 'Native Authority'. Igbo 'nationalism' emerged from the extensive migration by Ibos to other parts of Nigeria, and the concern of migrants to protect their interests abroad and to bring improvements, particularly in education, to their home communities. The extent of migration gave many humble people the experience of being an Igbo stranger and gave Igbo 'nationalism' a broad, popular base.

Yoruba 'nationalism' was developed by the educated businessmen and professionals, particularly those resident in Lagos but coming from the provincial towns of the hinterland. It was they who particularly came into conflict with non-Yorubas. They were loyal to the interests of their home communities, but were also concerned at the rivalries among Yoruba towns and were determined to maintain the leading position of the Yoruba in education and business against the 'challenge of the Igbo.'

Similarly, it was the business and professional classes who developed Nigerian nationalism. They had taken best advantage of the opportunities offered by the colonial system, and it was they whose opportunities for further advance were most directly blocked by the monopolistic practices of foreign firms and the discriminatory practices of government. The earliest 'nationalist' spokesman demanded equality of opportunity and treatment for Africans within the Empire. The slump of 1921 hit African businessmen particularly badly and Garvey's ideas of African economic nationalism became popular among them. During the slump of 1929-31 an African exporters cooperative attempted without success to challenge the export monopoly of the foreign firms.

The first Nigerian political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by Herbert Macaulay, a famous spokesman for popular grievances, was essentially a Lagos party which appealed to Lagosians on local, plebeian issues. The Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), which challenged the NNDP's domination of Lagos politics in the 1930s drew its leaders from business and professional men from outside Lagos, though mainly resident there. The two main issues raised by the NYM in the 1930s were of particular concern to these classes, namely the failure of government to introduce degree courses at Yaba Higher College, and opposition to the 'cocoa pool' imposed by foreign firms in 1937.

The colonial period shaped the political boundaries, the export-import economy, the class structure and the aspirations of the nationalist movement. The very different political circumstances of the post-war era would decide how they worked out.

Decolonization

Between 1948 and 1960 the British government transferred political authority to Nigerians. Decolonization took place in the context of major changes in the international political economy of Nigeria, which arose out of the second world war.

The Nigerian Civil War

The United States emerged from the war as the dominant international power. It opposed the protection of British economic interests in West Africa in favour of the 'open door' policy which has long been imposed on China and Latin America, and favoured self-determination for colonial people, as long as they determined in favour of an economy open to U.S. penetration. 'Self-determination' defined the claims of Asian and African nationalists, as well as the rhetoric of ideological competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Britain faced problems of paying for the war, meeting the consumption needs of its own population, and defending the exchange rate and international position of sterling. These required Britain to cut back consumption and reduce dollar imports at home and in the colonies it controlled. More generally, Britain wanted to protect its established position in colonial markets from international competition.

The creation of the war-time produce control boards gave the state an instrument for controlling producer prices and earnings, and thus for taxing producers and restricting the demand for imports. They offered a way of financing development expenditure and exercising imperial and state direction of colonial economies which were based on the export of primary produce. Consequently the produce control boards proved to be more than a war-time expedient. The post-war marketing boards were central to the political economy of Nigeria, and to political conflict and accommodation, until export crops were replaced by oil revenues as the major source of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings.

The political economy of decolonization

After the war, the Labour Government converted the produce control boards into commodity marketing boards for the major cash crops - cocoa, groundnuts, palm oil, cotton, each with a monopoly over the export of their crop. They justified their policies of buying cheap and selling dear by arguing that their trading surpluses would form a stabilization fund which could subsidize prices when they were low. By the time prices fell in the late fifties and the sixties, funds had already been committed to other purposes. Marketing boards reduced producer prices as world prices fell, in order to protect their revenues. However, the marketing boards served less hypothetical aims of imperial policy than price stabilization. Nigeria agricultural exports earned dollars; and low producer prices reduced the demand for imports, which were also subject to direct controls. Most of the profits of the marketing boards were invested in Treasury bonds in London at low rates of interest - an early example of foreign aid from Nigeria to Britain. Part of the profits were allocated to development projects, mainly roads and higher education.

During the colonial period, the government expected African involvement in government to be extended through the 'native authorities' which would promote the 'development' of their own communities. The 1945 Richards Constitution increased the representation of Africans on the Legislative Council. Apart from Lagos and Calabar, they were elected indirectly from three regional assemblies which were nominated by the 'native authorities'. The constitution met a hostile reception from nationalist opinion.

In 1948 the British government replaced its governors in West Africa and initiated constitutional reforms which would give African politicians access to legislative and executive authority. In Nigeria, the 1950 'Macpherson' constitution was approved by an assembly elected indirectly by a series of electoral colleges which reflected the local and generally conservative concerns of the 'native authorities'. In 1951 regional assemblies, which were elected indirectly, were given legislative powers and an executive council. They elected the members of the House of Representatives, in which the North secured half the seats, the East and West (including Lagos a quarter each, and the Council of Ministers, consisting of four members from each region. The formation of regional ministries led parliamentarians to identify with particular parties.

Constitutional reforms brought the educated and commercial classes into government at a regional rather than a local level. In Western Nigeria, the administration carried through reforms of local government which would give to the local 'middle class' the leading position enjoyed by their counterparts in the east. The transfer of political authority to regional governments would, even in the North, subordinate local authorities to the dictates of regional governments, and the classes and parties who controlled them.

Post-war British colonial policy conceived of government directing colonial development in accordance with the interests of colonial people and the imperial economy. Political representation, the expansion of higher education and the appointment of Africans to senior service posts in the administration would involve Africans in the process of development. In 1948 the Foot Commission set in motion the Africanization of the civil service. The University College, Ibadan was opened to prepare students for London University examinations. 385 scholarships were made available to train future administrators.

A number of agricultural development schemes were initiated. They tended to involve mechanization, controlled population resettlement and soil conservation under official direction, and proved expensive and ineffective. The Niger Agricultural Project managed to replicate the failure of the notorious Tanganyikan groundnuts scheme, albeit on a smaller scale. Meanwhile, peasant farmers used their own resources to migrate, invest and increase production in a period of rising producer prices.

From 1948 government agencies began to give African businessmen more sympathetic consideration in such matters as import and produce buying licences and guarantees of bank credits. Faced by demands for a larger Nigerian share of established commercial lines, foreign firms began to move away from produce buying and the wholesaling of cheap, stable commodities to the import and more expensive goods and the local manufacture of consumer goods such as beer, tobacco, textiles and toiletries.

The creation of state monopoly marketing boards laid the foundations for the post-colonial political economy. Government was intended to take on a central part in promoting development though its actual commitment of funds remained meagre. An African 'middle class' was bought into government through elections and administrative appointments, and measures were taken to expand the economic opportunities available to African businessmen. Rising prices for agricultural exports in the early 1950s provided better incomes for farmers, more trade for businessmen and more revenues for government.

Nationalism and politics

Nigerian nationalism originated in the demands of the 'middle class' of merchants, professionals, clerics and teachers for access to the opportunities in commerce, government and even the church from which colonial practices excluded them. Initially they accepted the framework of imperial rule, seeking to abolish discrimination and extend opportunities for Africans within it. The failure of African traders to prevent foreign companies from monopolizing the import-export trade in the 1930s and the continued limits to the educational advance of Africans convinced a growing number of Nigerians that they could only realise their economic aspirations by gaining access to state power. During and after the Second World War the demand for national independence replaced the demand for an end to discrimination and political representation.

It would be wrong to see nationalism as only a vehicle for middle class interests. During the nineteen forties other groups came into direct conflict with the colonial government over issues which arose out of their class situations, and nationalist ideas spread widely in the southern provinces.

The war brought a demand for more wage labour, combined with shortages of consumer goods and rising prices. Trade union membership rose quickly, and workers demonstrated for higher wages. In 1942 a government commission conceded a cost of living increase, but prices continued to rise. In June 1945 government workers, defying the caution of their union leaders, sustained a forty five day general strike. A further commission awarded a 50 per cent wage increase. In 1949 miners on strike at the Enugu collieries were shot. In 1950 strikes were extended to the United African Company: a first strike was successful, but a second defeated.

Oladipo Akeredolu Ale who was closely associated with nationalist and commercial interests, organised a Nigerian Farmers Union in the cocoa belt, opposing the low prices paid to producers. He failed to involve farmers in Ibadan Division, who resisted the compulsory cutting out of trees affected, in that area, by swollen shoot disease. This campaign confined within the local politics of the Ibadan Native Authority.

Import controls continued after the war. Foreign firms sought to exploit the situation by the practice of 'conditional sales' - farmers could buy scarce commodities, such as salt, if they also bought other lines which the firm wanted to dispose of. Opposition to 'conditional sales' provoked riots in Delta Province. The Enugu colliery shooting was followed by attacks on the trading stores of the foreign companies throughout the eastern provinces. Import controls affected all consumers, and particularly harmed petty traders. Thus they were important to the spread of a general sense of popular grievance and nationalist sentiment. However, the relations of nationalist politicians to popular demands was always tenuous. In 1949 the Enugu shooting led rival politicians to come together in a National Emergency Committee. Its only achievement was the abolition of salary differentials between foreign and Nigerian lecturers at the University College of Ibadan.

The Nigerian Civil War

The chances of gaining political offices opened up from 1948 by the Macpherson reforms shifted the attention of politicians to the forthcoming competition for electoral support. In the 1950s economic prosperity and the end to import controls created opportunities for 'life more abundant' to cite a Nigerian political slogan. People were concerned to ensure that they and their communities shared as fully as possible in the new opportunities. To use another Nigerian metaphor, politics came to the about 'sharing the national cake'.

The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) was founded in 1944, under the leadership of the aged Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe, a nationalist newspaper publisher of Igbo origin. It sent a delegation to petition Parliament against several government proposals in 1945 and in 1946 its leaders toured the whole of Nigeria. It evoked some response throughout Nigeria, but its support was greatest in the south, especially in Lagos and the East.

Ethnic antagonisms came to the fore in 1948. There was a serious threat of Igbo-Yoruba conflict on the streets of Lagos. The pan-Yoruba *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, formed in London 1945, was established in Nigeria to promote education and the unity of the Yoruba kingdoms. This was rightly seen as an attempt to win Yoruba support away from the NCNC. The NCNC declared itself in favour of a federal system based upon 'tribal' units. The Ibo Federal Union became the overtly politicised Ibo State Union and other groups followed suit, such as the Ibibio State Union or Warri National Union. In the north, the Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa (Northern People's Congress, or NPC) was founded as a cultural organisation and a forum for ideas of reform in the north. The Zikist movement, a radical wing of the NCNC, alone tried to maintain the nationalist momentum and force their party's leaders into confrontation with the authorities without success. Government repressed them effectively in 1949 and 1950. Politicians had created the foundations for mobilizing support by appeals to 'tribal' loyalties and identities.

New political parties were formed in 1950 and 1951 in the north and west on regional rather than 'tribal' lines in response to the regional basis of executive and legislative office. The Action Group was formed in 1950 under the leadership of Obafemi Awolowo, a founder of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. Although it favoured a federal constitution based on ethnic units, it was created as a Western Region party, with participation from some non-Yoruba minorities in Benin and Delta Provinces. Its leaders reckoned on being able to defeat the NCNC within the Western Region, but not in a national electoral contest.

In 1950 northern radicals established the anti-aristocratic Northern Elements Progressive Union which came to be led by Aminu Kano who had been forced off the NPC executive. As elections approached the NPC declared itself a political party, operating only in the Northern Region. The NCNC now saw federalism as a tool of its 'tribalist' (in fact regionalist) rivals and declared itself for a unitary state.

The indirect elections of 1951-52 were decided mainly on personal and local issues rather than party affiliations. Each major party was able to recruit a majority of parliamentarians in one region: NPC in the North, NCNC in the East, AG in the West. Lagos voted NCNC, and Azikiwe won a seat there. However, the Western House of Assembly could decide which Lagos members should be elected to the House of Representatives, and choose a renegade NCNC member rather than his party leader. The election results strengthened the regional basis of party conflict.

The Macpherson Constitution did not grant self-government, and thus control of state funds. Consequently, it led to conflicts between nationalist parties and the government. The exacerbated conflicts among Nigerian parties, which in turn provoked conflicts on the streets in Kano. The NCNC ministers were willing to work the new constitution, but the party, bitter at the exclusion of Azikiwe from the House of Representatives, was not. The NCNC expelled the ministers from the party, and the Eastern Assembly refused to pass government bills, but could not force the ministers to resign. In 1953 Anthony Enahoro (AG), with NCNC support, moved a motion in the House of Representatives for self-government in 1956. The NPC opposed this, feared that it would subordinate the North to domination by southerners, and were insulted by crowds in Lagos. The Northern Assembly, and House of Chiefs, proposed a confederation, which would leave only defence, foreign affairs and customs to the centre.

In May, AG leader Akintola, a Yoruba, proposed a tour of Kano, which was opposed by NPC officials. Hausa from the city attacked Igbo in Sabon Gari, the strangers quarter, leading to three days of violence and 36 deaths. They also attacked the offices of NEPU, the Northern and Muslim opposition party. Many features of these riots were to be repeated in the attack on Igbo in May 1966. By 1953 the Sabon Gari market had replaced the city market as the premier market of northern Nigeria. Ibos had taken a significant share of the semi-skilled and clerical jobs which commercial and industrial development had brought to Kano. The political challenge to Northern political interest at the federal level was seen to threaten their ability to protect their economic interests at the local level.

A new round of constitutional conferences revealed the different priorities of the major parties, yet found a basis for agreement among them. The primary concern of the AG was to gain control of the revenues of the cocoa marketing board, the richest of the boards. Similarly, they argued that taxes should be distributed among the regions on the basis of 'derivation'. These revenues would pay for their ambitious plans for free and universal primary education and industrial development and, through government loans and contracts, finance the development of a capitalist class. AG demanded that Lagos remain part of the west and that the constitution include the right of regions to secede. The NPC was primarily concerned to defend the 'unity' and 'traditions' of the north. This meant defending the authority of the 'native authorities', through which they organised support and exercised control, and the incorporation of non-Muslim people into the 'northern system' within which the NPC claimed a monopoly of political representation. This given a half share of seats in the central legislature, enabled them to defend northern interests at the federal level. The NPC and AG commitment to federalism conflicted with the support of the NCNC, the only nationally-organised party, for a unitary constitution, and within the interests of the Eastern Region in a greater share of government revenues than would come to them on the basis of 'derivation'.

The 1953-4 constitutional conference agreed to self-government for those regions which desired it by 1956, allocation of revenue on the basis of 'derivation' and regionalisation of the marketing boards. Lagos was, on NPC as well as NCNC insistence, to be a federal territory, and the right to secession was not accepted. Clearly, the AG and NPC won their more important demands, at the expense of NCNC and the Eastern Region. NCNC agreed to the new constitution because it gave them access to state funds with which the party leaders could pursue their political and commercial ends. Azikiwe returned from Lagos to become Premier of the East after winning the 1953 elections. The three party leaders: The Sardauna of Sokoto, Awolowo and Azikiwe were now all regional Prime Ministers.

The British transferred political power to the three parties which governed the three regions of Nigeria. Control of governments provided politicians with the means to maintain political power and fund commercial activities. Regional power and the appeals of the competing parties to 'tribal' interests formed the basis of the politics of dividing the 'national cake'.

The age of politicians

Politicians, bureaucrats and the Nigerian public all share a common conception of 'development'. They identify 'development' with the creation and expansion of factories, jobs, roads, hospitals and schools. The first task of 'government' is to promote 'development'. This is to be brought about by government spending and investments by capitalists, local and foreign. The main aim of 'politics' is to ensure a share of that development to oneself and one's community. Throughout the period up to the civil war, agriculture continued to be the foundation of the economy. Earnings from export crops provided most of the foreign exchange earnings, government revenues, and the demand for food, craft produce and manufactured goods. Nigeria began to export mineral oil in 1958. By 1964 exports were 120,000 barrels per day, by 1966 418,000. This was thirty-three per cent of all export earnings. (In 1976 exports were two million barrels a day, providing ninety-three per cent of Nigeria's export earnings). Between 1954 and 1966 a number of industries were established, mainly by foreign firms with government support. They catered mainly for urban consumer markets - beet, mineral waters, tobacco, processed food and textiles. Nigeria continues to have an 'export-import' economy. Oil has now replaced agriculture as the main source of exports. The pattern of imports has changed from mass consumer goods to the machinery, raw materials, managerial salaries and the 'intermediate' goods which are assembled in Nigeria. The most lucrative opportunities to make profits have continued to be concentrated in the export and import sectors. These must have been controlled, as in the colonial period, by foreign firms, and increasingly by government. Nigerian businessmen and politicians have depended on the favour of government and foreign firms for access to money and economic opportunities. They have used state power to transform themselves into a 'bourgeoisie', a capitalist class.

The Nigerian Civil War

In the 1950s the colonial trading firms, led by the United Africa Company (UAC), moved out of produce trading and wholesaling imported consumer goods into manufacturing. New firms invested in manufacturing to gain access to the Nigerian market. Foreign firms continued to dominate the new industrial sector thanks to their superior access to credit, supplies and technical and managerial skills. Nigerian businessmen moved into the fields they vacated, and acted as agents for and even as partners to foreign firms. Shell began oil production in Nigeria. After independence concessions were extended to other international oil companies. Nigerian politicians, businessmen and governments competed amongst themselves for the rents and profits to be derived from foreign business activities and foreign public investments (aid).

Governments taxed imports and exports directly and through the trading surpluses of the marketing boards. The federal government extended its capacity to regulate the economy, through producing-buying licences, contracts, loans, import tariffs and tax reliefs. Increasingly, government allocated economic opportunities both to local and foreign capitalists. Increased state activity and Nigerianization of the civil service expanded opportunities for bureaucratic employment, especially for the increasing number of graduates of Nigerian and foreign universities. 'Politics' became the main form of competition for commercial and bureaucratic opportunities. It was an instrument of class formation and intra-class competition for the 'bourgeoisie' of businessmen, bureaucrats and politicians who dominated Nigerian political life.

The political economy of regionalism

The politicians who controlled the three regional governments in 1954 were determined to use state power and government funds to consolidate control over their respective regions, to provide funds for African business activities, notably their own and those of their close associates, and to promote 'development' in their regions. The Korean war boom had raised the prices of export crops and enabled the marketing boards to accumulate large trading surpluses while still paying out increased prices to producers. They provided the regional governments with the means to pursue their goals.

The regional and federal governments agreed on a strategy of 'industrialization by invitation': governments would pay for the roads, ports, factory sites, electricity and other services necessary to persuade foreign investors to establish industries, encourage them with tax and other incentives and a promise of free transferability of profits and a guarantee against nationalization. Governments established regional development corporations and placed government money in African-owned banks to provide investment funds to African businessmen. They spent money on roads, schools, hospitals, universities. These provided contracts to foreign and to local businessmen. They increased wages of government workers considerably. The West, enriched by revenues from cocoa exports raised wages most, spent most and embarked on an ambitious programme of free and universal primary education.

Government funds and powers offered the instruments for rewarding friends and punishing enemies. In 1955 the Eastern Region government invested marketing board funds in the African Continental Bank in which the Premier, Dr. Azikiwe, had an interest and to which the NCNC was in debt, attracting an unwelcome inquiry set up by the Colonial Secretary. At a more local level, the AG government in the West dissolved the NCNC-controlled Ibadan City Council after an inquiry identified better corruption by its leader, Adelabu. Azikiwe and Adelabu were using power to promote African business and rewards their supporters. The Western Region government diverted several million pounds of marketing board funds to companies controlled by some six AG supporters to finance their investments and channel public money to party funds. In all regions, control of government was the key to success in business and securing political support. Victory became imperative to politicians: there were no rewards from 'loyal opposition'.

At every level of government and society loans, contracts, produce licences, jobs and development of funds were allocated to individuals and, it was widely believed, communities who supported the government in power. Regional governments used their powers of appointment to 'traditional' offices and their powers over 'Native Authorities' (in the North) and local councils to win 'chiefs' to their side and to dissolve recalcitrant councils controlled by opposition parties. Customary courts, tax assessors, local authority police and even hired thugs were used to intimidate opponents. In these ways, in a period of continuing prosperity, the parties which had assumed power after the indirect elections of 1951 won the subsequent regional elections of 1956 (West and North), 1957 (East), 1960 (West) and 1961 (North and East) with increased majorities. Nigerian politics was marked by a tendency to one-party regions. However, this was contradicted by the competition for office and control of resources at the federal level.

The 1954 federal election had been expected to produce a majority for the party in power in each region. The majority party in each region would nominate three ministers to the federal government. In the event of NCNC beat the AG in the West which, with their win in the East, gave them six seats, the NPC taking the other three. In 1954 NCNC formed an alliance with NEPU, the radical party in the Hausa-speaking northern provinces. While the NPC remained firmly regional, the AG and its leader Awolowo had definite national ambitions and began to organize in the North and East. In 1957 it formed alliances with 'minority' parties, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) and United National Independence Party (UNIP) who wished to create separate states in the North and East respectively., The NCNC was still committed to creating a number of new states and strengthening the powers of central government.

Each of the three regions was dominated by a large language group, the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West. Throughout the North, the 'Native Authorities' aligned themselves with the ruling NPC. Among several minority groups, such as the Idoma and Igbira, this strategy won majority support. People appreciated the benefits of supporting the ruling party. They also recognized the advantages which a policy of reserving employment for northerners offered their educated sons. In several cases, such as Bornu and Ilorin, opposition to the NPC arose from opposition to the local 'Native Authorities'. In Bornu, this led to serious rioting and several deaths in 1958, and the break-up of the opposition Bornu Youth Movement. Strongest support for the creation of a 'Middle Belt' state came initially from the Birom of Plateau province and later from the Tiv of Benue province. Arbitrary actions by the Tiv N.A. against the majority who supported the UMBC were to produce extensive and bitter rioting in 1960 and again in 1964.

In the East, the UNIP originated in successive conflicts within the leadership of the NCNC. UNIP and the AG were able to win support, mainly in Calabar province, for a COR (Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers) State. However, in the Rivers, there was more support for a Rivers state, propounded by the Niger Delta Congress. In the non-Yoruba Benin and Delta provinces, most people supported the creation of a Mid-West Region. NCNC was the strongest party in the area, but the AG had also declared itself in favour in 1954. After the AG's electoral victory in the West in 1956 and the dissolution of his Ibadan City Council. Adelabu, leader of the NCNC in the West, took up the demand for a 'Central Yoruba' state, covering Oyo province, as he saw no prospect of reversing his exclusion from power at the regional level. He argued that, as a 'political minority' within the region, he and his people were entitled to their own state. In a sense, this claim recognized the logic of the political system, and the consequent demands for separate states, that all power and patronage was concentrated in the hands of the ruling party to the exclusion of opponents or outsiders. The claim for new states was not so much a claim for fair treatment within the existing regions but a demand for control of power and patronage within one's own territory.

At the 1957 constitutional conference the North adamantly opposed new states in the North, which would threaten its ability to control the central legislature. Both AG and NCNC wanted new states, but their proposals varied according to their calculations of political advantage. For example, there was no chance of the AG considering the proposal for a Central Yoruba State, which was the central object of Adelabu, leader of the NCNC in the West. The West did not wish to surrender the 'Mid-West' without a corresponding gain elsewhere. The NCNC wanted a federation of fourteen states; the AG wanted six. The conference referred the issue to the Willink commission of inquiry 'to ascertain the facts about the fears of minorities in any part of Nigeria and to propose means of allaying those fears whether well or ill founded'. The commission accordingly recommended a development area for the Mid-West, an independent police force and constitutional protection of human rights. It did not consider the balance of power among the governments of the federation, nor did its terms of reference allow it to do so. The 'integrity' of the North and its dominant position within the federation were maintained. Entrenched in office in Enugu and Lagos, the eastern and national leaders of the NCNC welcomed the report, which had left their western (and mid-western) colleagues empty-handed. Only the AG was still opposed. The Colonial Secretary insisted that the creation of new states would delay independence. The regional bases of political power had been consolidated. They would shape political conflict after independence.

The West and East became self-governing in 1957, the North in 1959. Conferences in 1958 and 1960 secured agreement to an Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact and to independence in 1960. In 1957, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (NPC) became Premier of a national government, to which he added two AG ministers. This was condemned by Aminu Kano, leader of NEPU and Adelabu, leader of the NCNC in the West, who had had to relinquish his federal ministry after findings of corruption in Ibadan, as 'an unholy alliance of the reactionary forces of regionalism'. As opposition leaders within their regions, they were threatened by the mutual accommodation of the parties in power in each region.

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Awolowo and the AG fought a determined and expensive national campaign to win the 1959 federal election. They used the resources of the Western Region government to fund their campaigns in the North and East. However, they could not undermine the support for the NPC and the NCNC in their heartlands. NPC and its allies won 148 seats, nearly all in the North; NCNC eighty-one (fifty-eight in the East) and its northern ally NEPU eight. AG won seventy-three seats (plus recruiting two independents), thirty-nine in the 'minority' areas of the North and East, and gained a narrow majority of Western seats. NPC and NCNC had collaborated in the federal government since 1954. They were united in their mutual hostility to the AG who had challenged their control of their 'own' regions, and with whom the NCNC had always been in contention in the West. They had only confronted one another indirectly, through NCNC's alliance with NEPU. Thus it is not surprising that the apparently most 'nationalist' party, NCNC, should have joined a government lead by the most 'regionalist' party, the NPC under Sir Abubakar's Premiership. Dr. Azikiwe was appointed Governor-General and in 1963, when Nigeria became a republic, President.

Nigerian businessmen were agreed, across party boundaries, on the responsibilities of governments to them. By 1959 government contracts, produce licences and credit had created an area of politically-protected profit-making. In 1959 an all-party parliamentary committee demanded that foreign firms act with local partners and through local agents. Only when Nigerian private business was unable to invest should the state set up firms whose shares could later be transferred to private owners. They even asked to be relieved of direct taxes to free them to meet family responsibilities and accumulate savings. They shared a commitment to private entrepreneurship, assisted by the state

The 1958 fiscal commission increased the share of revenues going to the federal government. In the event, federal revenues increased more rapidly than expected, and more quickly than regional revenues. Regions retained personal taxes, export taxes and marketing board surpluses. Export prices and revenues fell during the sixties, and expenditures, particularly on education, rose. The West fared particularly badly, as cocoa prices fell sharply and they had committed themselves in the 1950s to higher levels of spending than the other, poorer regions. Regions did obtain half the royalties and rents on mining, which benefited the East and, when it was set up in 1964, the Mid-West. The federal government also assumed increased powers to regulate the economy. A Central Bank was established and in 1962 was given powers to regulate foreign exchange, credit and even to consult regional governments over marketing board prices. Foreign aid projects were allocated through federal ministries.

During the 1950s, ruling parties consolidated control over power and patronage within their own regions. A certain accommodation of regional interests took place, which was partly undermined by the competition of the major parties and their affiliates within each region. After independence, control of government revenues shifted decisively from the regions to the federal government. Federal government acquired ultimate authority over regional governments. The allocation of power at all levels came to be dependent on conflicts within the federal arena.

Compromises and crises

The 1950s had been a decade of rising prosperity; the 1960s were not. World prices for Nigeria's major export crops fell and producer prices were reduced. Consumer prices rose, but wage levels did not. This did not discourage the powerful from their pursuit of wealth, nor make them more scrupulous in the ways they acquired it. They were more concerned with who would have the chance to acquire it. People came to see them as exploiters who appropriated public resources for their own advantage, without sharing them widely among the public. Government by the white man (Yor. *ijoba oyinbo*) was replaced by government by politicians (Yor. *ijiba oselu*) not by any form of popular government. But then few people expect government to be their own.

Nigeria entered independence in a close relationship with its former British rulers, symbolized by the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact. Indeed, Sir Abubakar's government remained a pillar of African conservatism, distancing itself from 'radical' African leaders, like Nkrumah in Ghana, and generally supporting Western policies, except for bitter opposition to French atomic tests in the Sahara. Foreign policy issues provided a focus for popular nationalist sentiments. Demonstrations against the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact and news of Lumumba's murder both led to riots in Lagos. An 'All-Nigerian Youth Congress, attached the government and its policies. However, ideological issues remained peripheral to the main concerns of politics, which turned on the mundane business of office and patronage.

The AG continued to try and establish itself as a national opposition party. Chief Awolowo reversed his pro-Western stance, visited Dr. Nkrumah, and attacked the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, which was eventually rescinded. The AG adopted a programme of 'democratic socialism' which came down to aiding Nigerian businesses and nationalizing foreign ones. Awolowo also strengthened his control over party organization. However, the logic of power and patronage was moving Nigerian politics in a different direction from that taken by the AG leader.

In 1960 the AG called and won a pre-independence election in the West. In 1961, elections in the North and East demonstrated the consolidation of power by the governing parties, even in the 'minority' areas. The NCNC resented the AG's ability to block the creation of a Mid-West Region and its attempt to steal the NCNC's rather threadbare radical nationalist clothes. The NCNC looked to the federal government to reverse the decline in its fortunes in the West, alleging that intimidation of its supporters justified federal intervention.

Within the AG, Chiefs Akintola and Rosiji, respectively Premier of the West and Federal Secretary of the AG, who had been members of the 1957-9 federal cabinet, saw no reason why the West should be excluded from federal power and patronage, should use its resources in futile support for 'minorities' in the other regions and should put itself under the threat of federal intervention. Akintola resented his party leader, Awolowo, trying to direct his government, especially in the matter of appointments and the control of government funds. Rosiji drew attention to the consolidation of the power of the governing party in each region, and argued for a government of national unity.

In February 1962, the party replaced Rosiji as secretary and affirmed its policies. In May a majority of the Western House of Assembly petitioned the Governor to replace Akintola by Alhaji Adegbienro before the House reassembled to prevent Akintola asking for a dissolution and forcing them into the expense of another election before they had recouped their expenditure on the previous one. In reply, supporters of Akintola and of the NCNC deliberately caused a fracas in the House when it met to approve Adegbienro's appointment. This enabled the federal government to intervene and declare a state of emergency. It set up the Coker Commission to uncover the financial affairs of government corporations in the West, and thus of Awolowo's associates and AG party funds. Awolowo and other AG leaders were tried and convicted in September 1963 of sending men for military training to Ghana. By April 1963 enough members had declared for Akintola's new United People's Party (UPP) for him to form a UPP/NCNC coalition in the West. It would prove rather more difficult for the new government to gain popular support than it had been for them to bring politicians over to their side.

The federal government had removed the NCNC's rivals in the West. This opened the way to the creation of the Mid-West Region in 1963. NCNC won all the seats in the first regional elections and Chief Osadebay, an Igbo, became Premier. However, in other respects the NCNC, particularly in the East, was less than happy with its position as 'junior partner' to the NPC in the federal government. The NPC was determined to allocate a substantial share of federal spending to the North, and did. Recognising the weakness of his party's and regions' position, Dr. Okpara, Leader of the NCNC and Premier of the Eastern Region, now called for a united front government.

The conflict between the NPC and the government of the East came to a head over the census. The 1962 census estimates for the East and the West were inflated to incredible totals. Dr. Okpara publicly declared that he stood by the figures. In response, the North verified its figures by inflating them so that its majority share of the population was maintained. A further 'count' carried out in 1963 roughly maintained the inflated estimates all around and confirmed the North's claim to a majority of the population - and of parliamentary constituencies.

In effect, the NPC had guaranteed its majority at the next federal election. The East cried foul, but the West accepted the census. A majority of NCNC MHAs (Members of the House of Assembly) now joined Akintola in establishing a new party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), in power in the West in March, 1964. In September they were given two federal ministries.

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Nigeria - Census Returns, 1952 to 1963 (millions)

	1952-3	1962	1962 'verification'	1963	% Increase 1962 to 1963
					1952 to 1963
North	16.8	22.5	31.0	31.0	30 77
East₁	7.2	12.3		12.4	71 72
West₂	6.1	10.0		11.6	72 80
Lagos_{3 4}	0.3.	0.7		0.7	148 148 ₄
Nigeria	30.4	45.5		55.7	50 84₅

1. Not including Southern Cameroons, which joined Cameroon.

2. Including Mid-West.

3. Federal Territory only; not metropolitan area.

4. Rounded: hence increase of 148%.

5. 5.2 per cent p.a., allowing for a five per cent undercount in 1952/3.

Source: K.W.J. Post and M. Vickers Structure and Conflict in Nigeria, London: Heinemann 1972.

The battle for control of government office and patronage was leading to new political alignments, which gave rise to vicious tribalist propaganda, particularly attacks on the Igbo. The initial replacement of expatriates by Nigerians, combined with the creation of new positions in regional and, later, federal governments had led to high expectations of career advancement among graduates - and army officers. These promotions of relatively young men, however, threatened to block similar opportunities for those, often better qualified if less experienced, who came after them. People used ties of kinship, home town and language group to advance themselves and others of similar origin. More importantly people tended to attribute appointments, whether merited or not, to ethnic favouritism. In response accusations of ethnic favouritism were seen, often with reason, as 'tribally' motivated. 'Tribalism' is not only a way of acting but also a way of accounting for the actions of others. The struggle for advancement engendered distrust of one another among the educated elite and facilitated the politicization of appointments in the civil service, public corporations and universities and a fear that it would extend into the army. The most intense rivalry was between Yoruba and Igbo and centred on the distribution of jobs in federal institutions. The NNDP fuelled the fires of tribalism by publishing a vicious White Paper attacking Igbos for staffing the railways, ports, airways and the University of Ibadan with fellow Igbos.

Because of its severe lack of schools, the North was under-represented in all these federal institutions and consequently the NPC began to take steps to ensure appointments of Northerners to them. In 1961 regional quotas had been introduced to ensure that fifty per cent of new officers recruited were northerners. In 1965 a block of Northerners was transferred into the federal civil service and placed ahead of their southern contemporaries. In the North itself there were demands for the dismissal of Igbos working for government, 'Native Authorities' and even foreign firms, and the removal of land, hotels and petrol stations from them, which tapped the resentment of northerners against Igbos taking up middle level clerical and commercial opportunities in 'their' region. At all levels, politicians were claiming, and by their actions demonstrating, that people's interests could not be protected unless the representatives of 'their' community controlled power.

Popular resentment against the rule of politicians of all parties was expressed in Lagos and the main cities by support for the 1964 general strike. Since independence wages had not been increased; prices had. A brief strike in 1963 persuaded the government to establish the Morgan Commission on wages in the public and private sector, but the government shied away from publishing the commission's report. A Joint Action Committee of Nigeria's perennially divided trade unions called a general strike on 31 May to force publication and implementation of the Morgan Commission awards. Some 750,000 workers, many of them not unionized, struck for thirteen days, with the support of market traders and the rest of the urban poor, until the government agreed to raise wages, though not to the level recommended by the commission.

Despite the declared support for the strike of AG and NCNC leaders, a demonstration of 30,000 people at Ibadan race course chanted 'No AG, no NCNC' Workers' defence of their rights focussed popular grievance against politicians. However, sympathy for the strike could not be translated into electoral support. Workers' parties and trade unionists failed to make much impact on the 1964 elections and the ensuing crisis. People aligned themselves behind the established parties, according to the rules of electoral politics. The strike was about 'justice', not 'politics' which people saw as an activity of politicians.

During 1964, Tiv renewed resistance to NPC domination and to persecution and intimidation by the 'Native Authority'. Some 2,000 people were killed in Tiv in 1964 and the army had to be brought in to pacify the area. This was rather different peace-keeping from the army's earlier involvement in peace-keeping operations in the Congo and Tanzania. Some soldiers resented politicians using the army to put down violence which the government's own actions had provoked.

As oil production expanded, the East became increasingly resentful of the way in which the federal share (fifty per cent) of oil revenues was being spent disproportionately on projects in the North, such as the massive hydro-electric scheme at the Kainji Dam on the Niger, and suspicious of the large share of defence installations built in the North. However, in the Mid-West, the NCNC government looked to the federal government for help in establishing itself. Several Mid-Western NCNC leaders, such as Chief Okotie-Eboh, the Federal Minister of Finance, preferred to maintain the NCNC's alliance with the NPC and disliked any agreement with their erstwhile rivals, the AG. As in the West, regional interests threatened to take precedence over party loyalties.

As the 1964 elections approached, NCNC and AG did join in the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) together with their former Northern allies, NEPU and UMBC, now joined as the Northern Progressive Front (NPF). NPC formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), including the NNDP and small parties in the East and Mid-West. However, the NCNC's federal ministers did not leave the government their party was campaigning against.

UPGA hoped to recover the thirty-three seats its northern affiliates had won in 1959 and, with almost all the southern seats, win the election. This was never likely - as the 1961 Northern elections had demonstrated. However, the NNA were not content to allow the campaign to run its course unhindered. As always, regional governments used their powers to discourage and intimidate opponents, and prevent opposition politicians from holding meetings on 'their' territory. In several NPC strongholds in the North, UPGA candidates were forcibly prevented from submitting their nominations and in two cases killed. None of the prospective UPGA candidates were likely to threaten the NPC hold on their seats; rather the NPC's supporters were repudiating the principle that the authority of the NPC, and thus the NAs, could be opposed.

As election day neared, and as it became clear that UPGA would not be able to challenge the NNA, the NCNC began to demand postponement of the election and even aired suggestions of Eastern secession if free and fair election could not be held. They gained support for postponement from the President, Dr. Azikiwe. He sought to use his presidential authority to appoint a caretaker government, a claim which was repudiated by the chief justices of the federation and the regions and, with their advice, the chiefs of staff. Several more junior officers of Southern origin, discussed the possibility of a coup. Sir Abubakar remained in control as Premier up to, and after, the election.

The day before the elections UPGA declared a boycott. No ballot boxes were opened in the East. After polling had begun elsewhere, Chief Osadebay, Premier of the Mid-West, reversed the decision to boycott the polls, and NCNC won thirteen seats, leaving one undecided. There was no polling in three Lagos seats. An independent won the fourth with a derisory vote. The extent of the boycott varied in the West. Where it was most successful, NNDP candidates were able to claim victories from small numbers of votes. Its only effect in the North was to reduce further the small NPF share of the vote and leave it with four seats from the Tiv area.

The elections had demonstrated the determination of Nigerian politicians to use their powers, constitutional and substantive, to the limit. A compromise was now reached in which the opposition conceded to the greater power of its opponents. A 'broadly-based' national government was formed -that is, two NCNCers, both former federal ministers, were included in a seventeen-man cabinet. A 'little election' was held in March at which seats where there had been no polling were held. These seats in the East, Lagos and one in the Mid-West nearly all went to UPGA, and mainly to NCNC. NNDP was able to retain its artificial majority of seats from the West, and AG lost the chance to prove its dominance in that region. The interests of the NCNC, as a party of government, were protected, at the expense of their allies, AG, who had lost their regional base of power. After

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the 'little election' a new Cabinet of seventy-six members was created, eleven of them UPGA and eleven NNDP. Again, politicians had demonstrated their solidarity with the holders of power and patronage.

There was no truce in the struggle to control jobs. In March 1965 the Council of Lagos University replaced the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Njoku, an Igbo, by a Yoruba, Dr. Biobaku. This provoked vituperative attacks by different factions against expatriate, Igbo and Yoruba staff and a mass resignation by non-Yoruba staff. In May the Igbo Chairman of the Nigerian Railways Corporation, Dr. Ikejiani, was dismissed and his board replaced.

The AG looked to the Western Region elections in October 1965 to reclaim the government they believed to be rightly theirs. The NNDP were unwilling to tolerate defeat. Fifteen NNDP candidates were returned unopposed. Intimidation and the distribution of largesse to supporters failed to win the support of the electorate and the party had to resort to blatant rigging of the results to win the election. There followed a cut in the cocoa price from £120 to £65 per ton. UPGA supporters responded in November with two waves of riots, burning and looting, and even murders of prominent NNDP supporters. The NNDP responded with thuggery and repression, creating opportunities for robbery and extortion. Federal police and the army were brought in but could not restore law and order. Arson, violence and attacks on local police and on chiefs for siding with NNDP continued into January.

On 14 January 1966 Akintola met the Sardauna of Sokoto, Premier of the North and Lt Col Largema of the 4th Battalion stationed at Ibadan, in Kaduna to discuss the situation in the West. On the 15th all three were assassinated in the first military coup.

By the end of 1965 politicians had forfeited popular support for their claim to rule legitimately. They exercised power through their control of local, regional and ultimately federal government. Tribalism was central to the struggle for power, and corruption and nepotism to distributing its fruits. Faced with serious challenges to their own interest, politicians from all three major regions and parties had, at various times, talked of secession. At others, regional politicians excluded from, or on the margins of, federal power called for a government of national unity, in which the governing party would be left in control of 'its' region and each region would share in government at the centre. However, politicians in power preferred to press the uses, and abuses, of power to their limits and beyond. Popular resistance and the breakdown of law and order in the West exposed their dependence on the means of violence by which they would be overthrown.

The military intervenes

There can be no authoritative account of the events leading up to the civil war. Many of the key participants are dead; others remain discreet. Participants' accounts have been influenced by subsequent events, and by the need to justify particular positions or to fit experiences into a specific interpretation of the origins of the war. Official accounts from both sides, and several accounts by military officers, journalists and academics (some more than others) are tendentious in their versions of events - in what they include or exclude, what and whom they believe and what and whom they doubt, what order they put things in, which actions are claimed to have provoked which retaliation. The truth does not usually lie midway between two falsehoods, and we can't arrive at 'the facts' by presenting both sides in the hope that the truth will emerge somewhere in the middle.

The extensive murders of Eastern Nigerians in 1966 were appalling enough without exaggeration. The 'Biafran' side successively raised its own estimates from 10,000 to 30,000 to 50,000. On the other side, some supporters of the federal cause have balanced the killings in the North with the far smaller number of murders of Northerners in the East. Such attempts at balance reveal their own biases. The account which follows attempts to present a defensible account of the evidence, as far as it is available from books and official documents. No doubt it is shaped by its own biases, not all of them apparent to the author.

A further problem arises in presenting such an account. Participants believed their own accounts of events, and interpreted the actions of others according to their own pre-conceptions. These pre-conceptions tended, as so often happens to be confirmed rather than shaken by subsequent developments. In many respects these accounts were probably wrong, but they were real enough, since they were brutally real in their consequences. Two powerful images run through the most extreme versions of events. They may be called 'the Igbo conspiracy' and 'the Northern conspiracy'. Each seeks to identify a common pattern in all actions of Ibos/Northerners. For example, one seeks to implicate senior Igbo officers, notably Lt Col Ojukwu and Major-General Ironsi, in the attempted coup organized by mainly Igbo majors on January 15, 1966, while the other seeks to hold all Northern officers, notably Lt Colonels Gowon and Katsina, to account for the coup of 29 July, 1966

The first version claims that the January coup pre-empted a coup planned by senior army officers with the Premiers of the Northern and Western Regions. The second claims that the July coup was itself provoked by attempts by Igbo officers to disarm Northern soldiers, preparatory to a plan to* eliminate Northern officers, civil servants and chiefs. Each of these accounts was believed by some of the participants, and contributed to the prevailing atmosphere of suspicion and distrust.

In July and August 1966, soldiers killed Igbo officers and men, many of whom were not involved in the events of January, in revenge for the assassinations of Northern officers. Secession was justified on the argument that the North as a whole wanted to expel all Igbo from the North, and even from Nigeria, as evidenced by the 1966 massacres. What actually happened combined fear, courage, distrust, idealism, brutal and unprovoked murders, people risking their lives to protect strangers. It was too complex to be accommodated by such partisan images, or for full justice to be done to it here. On the other hand, the fact don't go away if they are ignored. This account is an attempt to make them understandable.

Coup and reaction

On 15th January 1966, Nigerian troops under the command of majors and captains killed seven of their senior officers, the Prime Ministers of the Federation, the Northern and Western Regions and the Federal Finance Minister, Chief Okotie-Eboh. They seized power in Kaduna and Zaria in the North. The GOC (General Officer Commanding) Major General Ironsi escaped assassination. He and Lt Colonels Njoku and Gowon rallied troops in Lagos and Ikeja, took control in the south, and secured the support of battalions in Kano, Ibadan and Enugu. Ironsi persuaded a rump cabinet to surrender power to him. Major Nzeogwu, who had carried out the coup in Kaduna, surrendered to Ironsi with a promise of freedom from prosecution. He was detained with other coup leaders. Major Ifeajuna, who had led the coup in Lagos., fled to Ghana. Soldiers had taken over from politicians by a 'coup within a coup'. The public welcomed the military assumption of power with relief.

The Nigerian Army was very small (10,500 men) in 1966. It had been Nigeranized rapidly and late. In 1960 fifty of 268 officers were Nigerian; in 1966 all 517 were. Its officers were young (ninety-seven per cent under thirty-five; eighty-five per cent under thirty) and had been promoted rapidly. The January coup was the work of middle-ranking officers. It was planned by a peer group of majors, and commanded by them and captains. They were drawn from the cohorts which had entered the army between 1957 and 1961 and been promoted most rapidly, cohorts which had also included a disproportionate number of Igbo officers. Future promotion was likely to be slow, blocked by their superiors for whose ability and experience they rarely had great respect. Most of the majors and captains were trained at Sandhurst, entering between 1957 and 1961 (majors 1959). Of the seven organisers, six were Igbo, and relied on the coup being accepted by at least some, mainly Yoruba and Igbo, senior officers. They blamed regionalism, tribalism and politicians for Nigeria's ills. They believed in promotion by merit and not tribal or regional affiliation. Major Nzeogwu exemplified their outlook in an extreme form in his broadcast of 15th January, which included:

1. You are hereby warned that looting, arson, homosexuality, rape, embezzlement, bribery or corruption, obstruction of the revolution, sabotage, subversion, false alarm, and assistance to foreign invaders are all offenses punishable by death sentence
2. Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten per cent, ... the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing in international circles

Their objectives were nationalist and anti-tribalist. However, the manner of the coup's execution enables it to be presented, in time, as an attempt to impose 'Igbo hegemony' on Nigeria.

The killing of Brig. Maimalari and six other senior officers, which the majors saw as necessary to the success of the coup, undermined discipline and trust within the army. Four of the officers killed were Northerners, two from the West and one an Igbo from the East. Gowon was the only Northerner above the rank of major to survive. The two Igbo Premiers of the Mid-West and East were not killed. Power was eventually assumed by an Igbo, Ironsi. Although several operations were carried out by northern troops, there were incidents where troops rejected the authority of the coup-makers and, in Ibadan, of the Igbo officer sent to replace the dead Lt Col Largema as Commanding Officer (CO) of the 4th Battalion. The deaths of the senior officers were not officially confirmed; they remained unaccounted for in more than one sense.

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Ironsi and his four military governors, Katsina (North), Fajuyi (West), Ejoor (Mid-West) and Ojukwu (East) shared the majors' contempt for politicians and blamed the country's ills on corruption and regionalism. These would be corrected by applying the military virtues of discipline, hierarchy and central command. They took public support for their assumption of power as agreement with their general views on the country's problems and how to solve them. They declared their commitment to a unified, central administration, on similar lines to the army, and resisted warnings of the political dangers they were creating for themselves. Ironsi was encouraged in this approach by the civil servants and officers whose advice he relied on and by some civilian radicals.

In February, Ironsi appointed F.C. Nwokedi to report on the unification of administration, and then set up study groups on national unity, national planning and the review of the constitution. The government saw its own intentions as non-political, providing for effective central government without regard to regional or tribal affiliations and interests. Its proposals went to the heart of Nigerian politics, the allocation of jobs, patronage and power. Ironsi declared on 21 February that:

Matters which were formerly within the legislative competence of the Regions will need to be reviewed, so that issues of national importance could be centrally controlled and directed towards overall and uniform development ...

In the new order of things, there should be no place for Regionalism and tribal consciousness.

The constitutional review was weighted towards centralist conclusions. It was to:

Identify those faults in the former constitution ... which militated against national unity and the emergence of a strong central government ... to ascertain to what extent the powers of the former Regional governments fostered regionalism and weakened the central government ...

and then to consider the respective merits of federal and unitary government. The Northern Military Governor announced that the Native Authority police, prisons and courts, key instruments of NPC control, would be abolished and incorporated into the federal police, prisons and judiciary.

Ironsi's rejection of politicians extended to opponents of the previous regime, thus losing him the opportunity to build up political support in the North and West. He did not take draconian steps against the politicians of the old regime. Lt Col Fajuyi detained prominent NNDP leaders in the West, but the leaders of the NPC were free to go about their business, to take up positions in the Native Authorities and to dispose over NPC funds. Ironsi, however, deferred the decision to release Chief Awolowo or those imprisoned during the Tiv rebellion. He offered no response to approaches from the leaders of the northern opposition parties, Aminu Kano of NEPU and Joseph Tarka of the UMBC. He appointed three Igbo public servants to key positions, viz. Nwokedi, Onyiuke as Attorney General and Dr. Okigbo as Economic Adviser and Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance, to the resentment of senior civil servants from other parts of the country.

The government evaded its most difficult dilemma: they kept the officers who had carried out the January coup in detention. This did not satisfy those radicals who saw the 'majors' as having delivered Nigeria from oppression, nor did it meet the demands of those northern soldiers who wanted them punished for murdering their senior officers. In July, the Supreme Military Council agreed to hold public courts-martial, but did not announce this. In April, contrary to an earlier moratorium, twenty-one officers were promoted to Lt. Col. Eighteen of them were Igbo.

Northerners saw the government's policies and Ironsi's appointments as a direct and insensitive attack on their own interests, which would open the way to domination of the North and of Nigeria by better qualified southerners. This fear was confirmed when a group of air force cadets, mainly northern, were dismissed because of their low level of formal education. Some Ibos in the North arrogantly proclaimed the coup as a victory for them over the Hausa. Political opinion across the North began to come together in opposition to the government's policies, expressed through the columns of the Northern newspapers.

The NPC had commanded the allegiance of a large network of clients throughout the North, notably officials of the Native Authorities, merchants and petty contractors. The merchants were threatened by the overthrow of the regional government and by the prospects of reform of the native authorities and of demands that they repay their debts to government corporations. They were in direct commercial competition with southerners, especially Ibos, without, it appeared likely, the continued protection of the northern government. They linked native authorities to the market-place and their own networks of customers and clients, and were well placed to spread information and rumours and lead opinion.

Northern civil servants and university students, as well as people seeking or holding more lowly clerical positions, were threatened by the prospect that jobs in the North would be thrown open to all-comers, and that Northern access to federal posts would no longer be protected. On 24 May, Ironsi issued a decree, against the advice of the Supreme Military Council, implementing Nwokedi's recommendations. He broadcast to the nation:

The former regions are abolished, and Nigeria grouped into a number of territorial areas called provinces ... The public services of the former federation and regions become unified into one national public service...

Political parties and tribal unions were banned. For the moment, military governors remained in charge of their old regions, now renamed groups of provinces, whose service commissions would still be responsible for all but the sixty-four most senior posts. All this was, said Ironsi, without prejudice to the review of the constitution. The government's decision on the system of administration had, however, apparently pre-empted the central constitutional question.

On 28 and 29 May, students in Zaria and in Kano demonstrated against the 'unification decree'. Zaria students carried banner declaring 'Araba' (Hausa: let us separate). More sinister forces organized mobs to attack Igbo in a number of cities and towns the following days. Many Igbo were killed, wounded and had their property destroyed. Probably, some 600 people were killed (the official figure was ninety-two, the later 'Biafran' total 3,000). As in the case of the May 1953 riots in Kano, the attacks took place at a time of uncertainty when people thought themselves to be humiliated and their interests threatened as a result of changes at the national level. The May riots occurred both in the strongholds of the NPC, especially the Hausa cities, and in the mining towns of Jos and Bukuru. Worst affected were the main commercial centres, Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, Gombe, Bauchi, Funtua and Gusau. Emirs played an important part in preventing or constraining the killings, though the staff of the native authorities were often ambivalent. There was clearly some organization of the riots, probably by former clients and supporters of the NPC.

The government took no effective steps to identify and punish the initiators of the riots. A tribunal of enquiry was set up and overtaken by subsequent events. Many Igbo sent their families home, but the majority remained. The Northern emirs and chiefs sent Ironsi a secret memorandum, said to have asked for the abrogation of the 'unification' decree and the trial of the January coup-makers. Ironsi assured them that no constitution would be imposed without a referendum and toured the North. He did not meet their demands, but replied that while in office,

the military government can run the government only as a military government under unified command.

The government was under some pressure from southern officers and some civilian opinion to press on with their programme. In July they set up enquiries into corruption under the previous regime. They announced that military governors would rotate between groups of provinces to promote 'national unity'. Army officers would be appointed 'prefects' to take charge of local administration. By this time, the army itself was riven by distrust and rumours of impending coups.

Counter-coup and pogrom

Political and military opposition to the January coup, and to the government and officers who had inherited it, came together in murderous revenge. On the night of 28th July, 1966, troops in Abeokuta shot three Igbo commanders. The next morning, Ironsi and his host Lt Col Fajuyi, Military Governor of the West, were arrested by Major Danjuma, and later killed by Northern NCOs. On 29 and 30 July Northern troops took control of barracks at Ikeja, Abeokuta and Kaduna, and the coup was accepted by the (Northern) commanding officers in Ibadan and Kano. In Enugu, Lt Col Ogunewo forestalled the coup and arranged a truce between Northern and Eastern officers and soldiers. Igbo and some other, Eastern, officers and soldiers were rounded up and killed, often after being humiliated and tortured, everywhere but in Enugu. Some Igbo officers made their escape, in some cases with the help of Northern officers, often with the help of Igbo and other civilians. Some were killed by Northern officers. Most of the killings were the work of NCOs and men. Later in August, Northern troops went to Benin where they took a number of Igbo soldiers detained after the January coup and murdered them. In August, Northern troops in Enugu were repatriated.

The operations were organized by junior officers (Lieutenants and Acting Captains) though the treatment of many of the victims was generally taken out of their hands by NCOs. Middle level officers were involved in co-

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ordinating actions and subsequent negotiations, notably Lt Col Murtala Mohammed who had gone with other officers from Lagos to take control at Ikeja. The most senior northern officers accepted the outcome of the coup, but did not initiate it. The participants at all levels were drawn from all parts of the North, including the Yoruba-speaking and 'Middle Belt' provinces.

On 29 July, Brigadier Ogundipe, the Chief of Staff, sent Lt Col Gowon to negotiate with the rebels at Ikeja. Failing to reach agreement, he tried to send troops to Ikeja, without success. Unable to command authority, he agreed to resign. Two days of negotiation followed, at Ikeja and, by telephone, with military governors and others. Initially the officers favoured secession of the North and arranged to evacuate Northern troops and civil servants from Lagos. They were persuaded to accept a continued federal government by a group of senior civil servants and judges, several from the North, backed by the view of the British High Commissioner and the US Ambassador, as long as Gowon, as the most senior Northern officer, took command of the army and government. Lt Col Ojukwu, as Military Governor of the East, agreed, by telephone, to the demand for Northern secession, but did not agree to Gowon becoming Supreme Commander ahead of more senior officers, and refused henceforth to recognise the authority of the Lagos government over the East.

The murder of officers and soldiers went unpunished; initially the killings were even denied. The deaths of Ironsi and Fajuyi were not announced. During the coup, soldiers had taken on themselves the power to kill others and had not been restrained nor disciplined. As events were to show, even more gruesomely, the army could not rely on its troops to accept the authority of their superiors. The army was itself irrevocably divided into an Eastern and a predominantly Northern force. Future political negotiations would be carried out mainly by the military and civilian representatives of their regions. Although the existence of a federal government had been preserved, its legitimacy was in question, and there were important groups in the East and the North favouring a break-up of Nigeria into its component regions.

On 1 August 1966 Gowon, announcing his assumption of office, declared:

As a result of recent events and the other previous similar ones, I have come to believe strongly that we cannot honestly and sincerely continue in this way, as the basis of trust and confidence in our unitary system of government has not been able to stand the test of time. Suffice it to say that the base for unity is not there or is so badly rocked, not only once but several times. I therefore feel that we should review the issue of our national standing and see if we can help stop the country from drifting away into utter destruction.

Gowon immediately released Chief Awolowo and his supporters and over a thousand convicted Tiv rioters. Military governors in each region called meetings of 'Leaders of thought' preparatory to a new constitutional conference. These initiatives broadened the scope of political debate and its participants, among politicians and civil servants and within the army itself. By contrast, the impact of the killings of May and July had narrowed political debate in the East to a question of the terms on which the region would associate with the rest of Nigeria.

As early as the first week of August, the government of the East was considering secession. On August 8, Ojukwu declared

This is a pogrom. This is intended as the northerners final solution to end what they call the 'Eastern menace'.

'Returnees', University teachers and civil servants who had left posts in federal institutions in Lagos and Ibadan in 1965 and, in increasing numbers, in 1966 formed an influential lobby for the secessionist cause. They had been the leading proponents of Nigerian unity. They now sought their future by turning their back on everything Nigerian and creating their own state in the East. Oil revenues and Eastern initiative would combine to create a prosperous society with none of the evils of corruption and tribalism which they associated with Nigeria.

Opposition from senior (non-Igbo) officials and, more importantly, the Igbo commanders of the police and army in the East, blocked any immediate plan to secede. Lt Col Ojukwu carefully echoed Gowon's speech in a broadcast on 27th August:

...there is in fact no genuine basis for true unity in the country. The people of Nigeria have gone through one crisis after another in the last year ... we have tended to gloss over them and find compromise in political settlement, leaving the fundamental issues unresolved ... the people of Eastern

Nigeria are determined that a permanent solution must be found. For us it has become a struggle for survival and there is need above all things else for solidarity amongst all people of Eastern Nigeria ...

On 31 August, a 'consultative assembly' called by Ojukwu declared its confidence in Ojukwu, resolved to 'urge and empower/advise him to take all such actions that might be necessary to protect the integrity of Eastern Nigeria and the lives and property of its inhabitants' and urged 'the need for solidarity of Eastern Nigeria as a unit'. From August, 1966, Ojukwu and his government remained determined to maintain the integrity of 'their' region. The admitted problems of the non-Igbo minorities were for the region to decide - in this case by creating provincial authorities. Neither the government nor the army command in the region, nor its boundaries, would be subject to any external authority.

Gowon opened the ad hoc constitutional conference in Lagon on 12 September 1966, arguing that it should rule out both a complete break-up and a unitary constitution. The central issues were the relations of central to regional governments, control of the army and the creation of new states out of existing regions. Initially, the balance of opinion appeared to favour a confederal solution in which the component regions would share certain common central services and have the right to secede. Both the East and the North favoured this solution, while the West and Lagos were willing to accept it as a second best if agreement could not be reached on a federation with new states created on a linguistic basis (and thus from the North and East but not the West). The North agreed to the 'right of self-determination' by 'minorities', but only after agreement had been reached on the future of the country, and the East insisted that the issue was one for each region to decide for itself. Only the Mid-West, a 'minorities' state, stood firmly for a federal government, preferably with new states but otherwise without.

Furthermore, it was agreed that the army be organised in regional units, under regional command, with troops serving only in their own regions. As regards the East, and Mid-West, this simply recognised an accomplished fact, but there were insufficient troops from the West to replace the Northerners stationed there. The National Defence Council would take control of regional units in the event of external aggression. Inter-regional conflict or at the request of the National Security Committee.

It appeared that the future of Nigeria would be determined by the interests of the governments of the three large regions. On 20 September, the Northern delegation changed its position to favour an effective central government, the creation of new states and no right of secession, and thus shifted the balance of opinion from a 'confederal' to a 'federal' solution.

From the July coup onwards, influential Northern opinion had been divided on the issue of new states. On the one hand, senior officials in the regional government, emirs and officials of the Native Authorities generally preferred to protect their interests by maintaining the unity and autonomy of the North. On the other hand, many Northerners, especially those from the non-Hausa Middle Belt, wanted 'their own' states. Tiv and other Middle Belters were prominent among Northern army officers and predominant among the troops. Secondly, young officers, academics and civil servants from the far North saw the economic disadvantages for the North of regional autonomy and recognised that new states were necessary if the federation was to be preserved. Before the constitutional conference, a meeting of Northern 'Leaders of Thought' had accepted a proposal for new states, but the regional government had reversed it. Now the Northern delegation did an about turn, under pressure from Middle Belt officers and troops, as well as from Lt Col Murtala Mohammed, who told them that the army would not accept a confederal solution.

On 30 September, the conference produced an interim report outlining their agreement that Nigeria should continue as a political entity, that the army should be organised into regional units and 'substantial, but as yet not unanimous agreement that new states should be created'. The agreement of the East had not even secured. The proposed creation of new states did not square easily with the regional organization of the army. On 28 September, a renewed wave of attacks on Igbo began throughout the North (except in the Yoruba-speaking areas of Ilorin and Kabba provinces). The constitutional conference adjourned on 3 October. The Eastern delegation never returned.

The massacres were the culmination of a series of incidents in different parts of the North in which soldiers and civilian thugs attacked Igbo. In July, soldiers had taken matters into their own hands, murdered senior officers and even executed the Supreme Commander. In August police, soldiers and Native Authority officers harassed Easterners leaving the North.

On 28 September, Radio Kaduna relayed, in English and Hausa, an unfounded report of mass killings of Northerners in Eastern Nigeria broadcast, in French, on Radio Cotonou (in Dahomey) two days earlier. This

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proved to be the signal for violence which spread from Bauchi through most of the main towns in the North, notably Jos, Maiduguri, Kaduna and Zaria during the next two days. On the evening of 30 September, troops from the 5th Battalion, many of them from the Middle Belt, killed Eastern refugees at Kano airport, and were joined by a city mob in attacking Igbos in Kano. On 2 October a platoon mutinied, killed an officer and their sergeant major and rampaged in the city. Some 8,000 Igbos were killed in this pogrom. Perhaps a million Igbos fled the North, many returning to the East maimed and dying. The arrival of the dead and injured in the East inflamed people, and Northerners waiting to leave the East were molested, and some were killed. Ojukwu instructed all non-Easterners (except Mid-West Igbos) to leave the region for their own safety.

It is difficult to explain the killings. They were never investigated officially and, as in May, most of the participants, except the troops who mutinied at Kano, were never punished for their part in the pogrom. Accounts of events tend to depend, in part, on hypotheses about the motives of those who may have instigated, or expected to benefit from, the massacres. Authors have prudently tended to imply which groups they believe to be responsible, without being able to identify particular people or specific incidents.

As in May, the killings took place at a time of political uncertainty. Their extent and timing suggests an element of organisation and coordination, even if individuals often joined the mobs spontaneously and the spread of attacks was fuelled by escalating rumours. The worst killings took place in the commercial centres of the country. Unlike in May, they spread through Bornu and the Middle Belt, beyond the Hausa towns and the minefields.

The bureaucrats, politicians and Native Authority officials who wanted to preserve 'one North' were threatened by the change in the Northern delegation's position at the constitutional conference. They could use the network of Native Authorities, which had provided the organisational backbone of the NPC, as a network of communication, funding and organisation. It may be that one of this group authorised the provocative broadcast on Radio Kaduna. Whatever these groups may have done, their concerns were the opposite of those of the Middle Belts, soldiers and civilians, who were involved in the attacks. The Eastern delegation to the conference was standing in the way of the proposal to create new states, the main political goal for many Middle Belt people. Different groups may have had different, indeed contradictory, reasons for instigating or approving the attacks. Nevertheless, it is not clear how either defenders of 'one North' nor proponents of new states could benefit from chasing all Igbos out of the North, let alone killing Igbos as they tried to leave.

In May, Igbos were attacked because they were powerful, or appeared to be. In September, they were attacked because they were vulnerable. Despite the efforts of some Emirs and army officers, the Igbos in the North were deprived of the effective protection of military, national and local authority. They became a pariah group, who could be presented as competing unfairly for jobs and opportunities and blamed for the current state of fear and tension. They attracted the hostility of those whom political events or their own circumstances had made uncertain of their position and insecure about the future: politicians, native authority officials and their clients, 'applicants' for jobs, undisciplined soldiers, and rootless migrants - the 'yan iska (Hausa: sons of the wind) who made up by mobs, and the men who organised them. In all parts of Nigeria, many people were appalled at the killings. Lt Col Katsina, Nigerian Governor of the North severely condemned them. However, to many people, in the West and the North, appeared indifferent to the murders: The Igbos, they implied, had it coming to them! The victims themselves are to blame!

The pogroms and exodus of 1966 affected every community, and most clans and families, among the Igbo and many other Easterners. This experience, continually recounted and even embellished in the Eastern media (and played down, in embarrassment, elsewhere), generated a mood of vengeance against the 'Hausa'; by now a generic term for Northerners, and of Eastern, even Igbo, self-reliance. A wider public was open to the appeal of secession, even to the point of civil war and the call for vigilance against internal and external enemies.

Through agreement to secession

From October, Ojukwu and his government pursued three related strategies. One was to negotiate a confederal arrangement, which would give the government of Eastern Nigeria control over its own territory, security and resources, while sharing common services with the rest of Nigeria. The second was to prepare for outright secession. The third was to detach the West from the North. This would ensure the break-up of Nigeria into its constituent regions and, possibly, pave the way for a 'progressive' alliance of the southern regions.

The first two strategies complemented one another. Secession would be declared if confederation could not be negotiated. Some senior government and army officers did not think secession justified. The more vocal leaders of public opinion were clearly not to be satisfied with any 'compromise' which fell far short of outright

independence. Ojukwu appointed his own advisers, and the consultative assemblies which approved his policies. He decided his government's policies, with the acclaim of a public for whom, after July 1966, he came to symbolise Eastern, and Igbo, resistance.

The Eastern Consultative Assembly endorsed the principle of creating more states in Nigeria, but rejected it in practice. Exclusion of the non-Igbo provinces from the region would have denied the government access to the sea, and to most of the oilfields. The government of 'Biafra' claimed legitimacy as the successor to the government of the Eastern Region. It continued to claim the entire territory of the region, even after most of it had been occupied by federal troops. Devolution of administration to the provinces was not an adequate alternative to new states to most of the 'minorities'. Several prominent people from the 'minorities' left the region, and put the case for more states in Lagos, though some stayed in the Eastern government and army. Within the region, demands for new states were repressed, sometimes forcibly, exacerbating tensions between Ibos and others.

The strategy of detaching the West from the North fitted uneasily with the pursuit of Eastern autonomy or 'Biafran' independence. A confederal solution would leave the West (and Lagos) with the same autonomy as the East claimed, as long as the West could control its own armed forces. Successful Eastern secession would leave the West vulnerable to Northern domination and thus provoke a consequential secession by the West. However, this strategy depended on the actions of the West, and on the East's own success. Neither Ojukwu, nor the advocates of secession, were willing to sacrifice their own goals for the possible advantages of an alliance with the unarmed West. There were those, on the east and west of the Niger, for whom the autonomy of the East would be a prelude to a realignment of 'progressive' forces in the southern regions. An east-west alliance was their main objective rather than a means of securing the autonomy of the East.

After the adjournment of the constitutional negotiations among the regions, the federal government emerged as a decisive protagonist in its own right, though it had to secure support from diverse, regionally-based interests. Up to the point where 'Biafra' seceded, Gowon shifted between two strategies. One was to try and conciliate the East by leaving them in control of their own region, while maintaining a central Nigerian government. The other was to assert the authority of the federal government and impose the creation of new states in the regions. In the case of the East, this could not be done without war.

From October Northern opinion favoured a strong centre. Opinion in favour of new states firmed until, in May 1967, Northern Emirs, Chiefs and Leaders of Thought passed a resolution supporting new states in the North, whether or not they were created in other regions. The Mid-West also favoured a central government and new states. However, one in six of its people were Igbo. There were few troops in the region. Most of the officers stationed there were Igbo who had returned after the July coup and were sympathetic to the East. Consequently the Military Governor, Lt Col Ejor, wished to remain neutral in the event of armed conflict and prevent the region from becoming a battlefield.

Least clear was the stance of the West. In September, the conference of Leaders of Thought acclaimed Chief Awolowo Leader of the Yorubas, with the support of the new Military Governor, Col. Adebayo. Their first priority was to promote Yoruba unity, under Awolowo's leadership and thus to the exclusion of supporters of the former NNDP government. The West followed the East in demanding the withdrawal of Northern troops from the West. They explored plans for an autonomous West and even a pan-Yoruba republic, incorporating Lagos, and Ilorin and Kabba provinces from the North. These plans were opposed by supporters of new states - in Lagos, in Ilorin and Kabba, and within the West in Oyo province, and in Ondo province. Excluded from power in the West the NNDP hoped to control an Oyo state, and looked, as before, to the federal government and the North for support against their political enemies in the West.

The constitutional conference reconvened without the East in October. All regions submitted memoranda to it which stressed the representation of regional governments at the centre,. Only the Mid-West wanted direct, national elections. Having failed to agree with the East on a venue, Gowon adjourned the conference indefinitely in November. He resisted army demands for an offensive against the East and on 30 November announced new proposals which reflected the ideas of the federal civil service. A constituent assembly would be called which would discuss a prepared draft, making provision for the creation of between eight and fourteen new states. He was preparing to associate some civilians with the Federal Executive Council. He warned that 'if circumstances compel me to preserve the integrity of Nigeria by force, I shall do my duty by my country'. These proposals were revived as the war was about to begin. For the moment, they offered no basis for negotiation with the East and were coolly received the West.

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After intensive diplomatic activity, the Supreme Military Council met at Aburi, Ghana on 4 and 5 January, 1967. The soldiers arrived at agreement on general principles by setting aside the problems of implementing them in detail. These would be referred to the officials of the respective governments. This left ambiguities in the decisions and room for disagreement among the participants, Ojukwu came to Aburi with clear aims and prepared proposals. The others came to seek a compromise and met most of Ojukwu's demands that each government exercise authority over its own region.

At Aburi, the Supreme Military Council agreed at the outset to Ojukwu's proposal to renounce the use of force as a means of settling the crisis and to exchange information on the distribution of arms and ammunition. They agreed to reorganise the army under area commands, one for each region and for Lagos. In matters of internal security these would be under the control of the military governors. The Supreme Military Council would govern the army and exercise the legislative and executive authority of the Federal Military Government. 'Any decision affecting the whole country must be determined by the Supreme Military Council., Where a meeting is not possible such a matter must be referred to Military Governors for comment and concurrence'. The Council's Chairman would be Commander-in-Chief, rather than Supreme Commander. The Council would approve all senior appointments in the armed forces, police, civil and foreign services. It was accepted in principle that Northern troops would return to the North from the West. Salaries would be paid until 31 March 1967 to government and public corporation staff who had left their posts because of the disturbances and not found employment. The constitutional committee would meet again within Nigeria at a mutually agreed venue. For at least the next six months, there should be a purely military government, having nothing to do whatever with politicians'.

The agreements did not make clear whether decisions of the Supreme Military Council required a majority or unanimity. Clearly, the regions were to resume the powers they had enjoyed before the coup of January 1966, but could they now claim authority over matters previously reserved to the centre, in view of the need for the 'concurrence' of regional governors? What day to day authority, if any, would the commander-in-chief and military headquarters exercise over the army's area commands?

Contrary to agreement, Ojukwu announced the Aburi decisions as soon as he returned. The agreement had gone a long way towards confederalism, he told reporters. That was just what the federal permanent secretaries feared. They submitted to Gowon a penetrating critique of the agreement. It divided the army into regional commands without any unified control by the Supreme Commander. Regional governors would control federal civil service posts, so that officers would be loyal to their regions. Regional governments would assume the powers of federal government and military governors could use their powers to block the creation of states. They recommended that Gowon return to his programme of 20 November 1966, bring civilians into the federal government, and restore the exclusive and concurrent powers of the federal government. The payment of salaries to displaced persons should be revised for economic reasons. This advice was partly reflected by Gowon on 26 January. He insisted that 'We definitely decided against regional armies'. The powers of the federal and regional governments would be as they were before January 1966. The programme of 30 November had not been abandoned, and 'The Federal Military Government will see to it that new states are created for those who want them ...' The Aburi agreements were themselves now a matter of contention.

Successive drafts proposed by federal civil servants were rejected as arrogating powers to the federal government which had not been agreed at Aburi. On 25 February, Ojukwu warned that if the agreement were not implemented in full by 31 March, he would give effect to them unilaterally in the East. On 10 March 1967, the Supreme Military Council met in Benin to approve Decree 8 of 1967. This implemented the Aburi agreements on the powers of the Supreme Military Council and the Commander-in-Chief and of the regional governors, including their concurrence on the most important issues such as public finance, communications, defence and the creation of states, and on the regionalisation of the army. However, the decree required the concurrence of only three of the four governors to declare a state of emergency or to invalidate any regional legislation that impeded the exercise of federal authority or endangered the continuance of federal government. Given the regionalisation of army command, any attempt to implement this provision would mean civil war.

The federal government was unwilling to go the whole way with the regionalist logic of Aburi. As it was, Northern, and some Western, officers bitterly criticised the regionalisation of the army. Against the advice of the Chief Secretary to his government, N.U. Akpan, who argued that the decrees embodied most of what the East was demanding, Ojukwu refused to attend the meeting in Benin and summarily rejected the decree. Thereby, he rejected the possibility of a 'federal', or even a 'confederal' compromise. The East was moving towards secession, but intended to be demonstrably forced out rather than to opt out. They would consider

themselves forced out if the federal government failed to implement the Aburi agreements or imposed an economic blockade of the East or used force or threatened to use it or interfered with the territorial integrity of Eastern Nigeria, that is, decreed the creation of new states in the East.

Attempts at mediation failed to satisfy Ojukwu's demands for attending the Supreme Military Council - payment of £11.8 million allegedly owed to the East, the repeal of the parts of Decree 8 to which the East objected and a public apology 'by the North' to the East for 'their' atrocities. On 31 March the East appropriated all federal revenues in the East and followed this with 'survival' decrees which created autonomous legal education and courts, and took over statutory corporations. The federal government banned Nigerian Airways flights to the East, suspended post and telecommunication links and blocked Eastern government access to foreign exchange.

The federal government now returned to its earlier programme. On 22 April it announced a detailed timetable for the return to civilian rule and the reconvening of the constitutional conference. New states would be created. Gowon warned that if the East did secede, a Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers state would be declared for the protection of the Eastern minorities and 'backed by the use of force if need be'. However, he failed to carry Awolowo, political leader of the West behind him at this stage.

On 1 May Awolowo declared that the East 'must be encouraged to remain part of the Federation. If the Eastern Region is allowed by acts of omission or commission to secede from or opt out of Nigeria, then the Western Region and Lagos must also stay out of the Federation'. He raised the issue of Northern troops in the West, and refused to sit on the resumed constitutional conference. Col Adebayo, the Military Governor, and the 'Leaders of Thought' in the West supported him. Awolowo had offered the East a clear opening to the West. However, Ojukwu was not interested in taking it.

Awolowo joined a National Conciliation Committee of prominent civilians, including two from the Eastern 'minorities', to Enugu. Ojukwu demanded an end to federal economic sanctions and to the 'occupation of West and Lagos by Northern troops' as a condition of entering discussions with a committee representative of regional governments. On 20 May the federal government suspended economic measures. On 25 May the government agreed to Col Abedayo's request to remove Northern troops from Ibadan and Abeokuta (but not Lagos and Ikeja). Lt Col Katsina, the Military Governor of the North, and Lt Col Akahan, Army Chief of Staff, had to intervene to persuade the troops to move. The East, however, was already committed to secession. The East greeted the suspension of sanctions with 'contempt, apathy and levity' in the words of Cyprian Ekwensi, the Director of Information.

On 27 May, Ojukwu obtained from the Chiefs and Elders and Consultative Assembly of the East a mandate 'to declare at the earliest practicable date Eastern Nigeria a free, sovereign and independent state ... of the Republic of Biafra.' Gowon responded by declaring a state of emergency and announcing the creation of 12 states, six from the North, three from the East. Of the three eastern states by far the largest, East-Central, was entirely Igbo; South-Eastern and Rivers were overwhelmingly non-Igbo. Rivers included Port Harcourt, the largest city in the East, whose population was, at that time, predominantly Igbo, though the indigenous Ikwerre people no longer considered themselves Igbo, as their spokesmen had done to the Minorities Commission in 1958.

On 30 May, Ojukwu declared the independent 'Republic of Biafra'.

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As Ojukwu had been quick to point out, Gowon's declaration amounted to a one man coup d'etat. It lacked the concurrence of even three let alone four, governors. Gowon had not secured the prior support of the West and Mid-West for the declaration, or for resisting secession, though he was carrying through the April decisions of the Supreme Military Council. On 3 June, in line with those decisions, he announced the appointment of twelve civilians, one from each state, to the Federal Executive Council. Chief Awolowo was appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council and Commissioner for Finance.

Why did Awolowo support the federal government at this moment? The East had rejected attempts at conciliation and Ojukwu had offended Awolowo in particular. There was insufficient support in Lagos, and in Ilorin and Kabba provinces, for a pan-Yoruba state. Opposition to the federal government might encourage them to switch their support to Awolowo's old NNDP opponents. Though the West lost Colony Province to the new Lagos State, it was not divided into new states in 1967 as the North and East were. Crucially, the West lacked control of its own armed forces. Western officers were hardly likely to withdraw from the army, leaving themselves without troops to command. The federal government was in a position to impose its decision on the West. Gowon sought the support of the West.

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Nevertheless, a large body of Western opinion remained aloof from the policies of the federal government. Western and Northern troops in barracks still distrusted one another. In the Mid-West, Lt Col Ejoor maintained the region's 'neutrality'. He lacked sufficient troops to defend it, and could not rely on his own officers.

The pre-war Nigerian army was tiny: some ten thousand soldiers in a population of some fifty million. Soldiers would be recruited to augment both armies, to some 50,000 on the Biafran and 200,000 on the Nigerian sides eventually. It was more difficult to provide them with arms and ammunition and transport, feed and deploy them effectively. In June, the Nigerian army moved the headquarters of its northern command to Makurdi, to prepare to invade the East from the North. Its other commands, at Benin, Ibadan and Lagos were earmarked for defence and internal security.

Ojukwu had boasted of the strength of his forces to the National Conciliation Committee and convinced many civilians of Biafra's preparedness to defend itself. In fact, his army had few arms, mainly bolt-action rifles and a few machine guns and mortars, and little ammunition. The Air Force had two planes, one of them airworthy, and three helicopters. The army did not know what arms and ammunition were available. Control of both remained in Ojukwu's hands throughout the war. Senior officers did not think the country was ready for war. Some others, notably Major Nzeogwu, were opposed to secession. Ojukwu distrusted his senior officers, particularly Col Njoku, his Army Commander, and mutual rivalries divided his officers.

Biafran resistance depended on the will of its people rather than the preparedness of its army. The Directorate of Propaganda set out, with considerable success, to convince the people of Biafran invincibility and encourage popular vigilance against the enemy without and within. Once war began, Biafran military reverses were attributed to 'sabotage' and the perpetuation of old 'Nigerian' attitudes within the 'new Biafra', especially on the part of senior officers.

Nigeria managed to secure assurances from African and western powers that they would not recognise secession. However, they failed to get assurances of unequivocal support from Britain and America who, a year before, had advised Gowon strongly against allowing the North to secede.

Of more immediate concern to both sides was the stand of the oil companies. Two-thirds of Nigeria's oil was then produced in the East, mainly within the contested 'River State'. The remaining one-third came from the Mid-West, whose share was increasing. Mid-Western oil was exported via a pipeline to Bonny, in the East. The country's only oil refinery was at Port Harcourt. Nigeria and Biafra claimed the royalties of some £7 million due from Shell/B.P. in July. On 1 July, Shell/B.P. agreed to pay a token payment, of \$250,000 to the Biafrans. On 2 July, the Nigerians declared a blockade of oil shipments, which had been exempted from sanctions against the East, to protests from Britain. Despite Biafra's seizure of Shell's local representative, the token payment was never made, apparently blocked by the Bank of England.

The Nigerians invaded the East from the North on 6 July. They had taken Ogoja and Nsukka by 15 July, and captured the oil port at Bonny from the sea. In Biafra, saboteurs were blamed for the reverses and suspicion focused on Col. Njoku.

On 9 August, the Biafran army crossed the Niger with the connivance of Igbo officers in the Mid-West, and overran all the main towns in the region. There appeared to be little to stop them marching on Lagos and Ibadan. The invasion had two objectives. Militarily, it would relieve pressure on the Biafran forces and open the way to the Nigerian capital, 'seize the serpent's head', in Ojukwu's words. Politically, the capture of the Mid-West, and a Biafran military presence in the West, would encourage Western opponents of 'Northern occupation' and hasten the break up of the rest of Nigeria into 'sovereign units' with whom Biafra would co-operate in a new association.

The invading army was commanded by Brig. Banjo, a Yoruba officer detained in the East after the January coup. Ojukwu expected him to appoint a Military Administrator and press on to Lagos. However, Banjo's objectives went beyond Ojukwu's. He declared that 'the dismemberment of our nation has commenced in the breakaway of Biafra', for which he blamed the federal government and promised 'to complete the liberation of Nigeria'. He set up his own administration. He tried, unsuccessfully, to win Lt Col. Ejoor to his side and, through an emissary, the writer Wole Soyinka, contacted potential supporters in the West, such as Awolowo, and Col. Obasanjo, also without success.

The Biafrans reached Ore in the Western state on 20 August after being checked briefly at Ofusu, on the Western border. The Nigerians sent troops from Lagos to Ore and hastily formed the 2nd Division under Lt. Col. Murtala Mohammed. The Biafrans blew up the bridge ahead of them at Ore. They failed to sustain their

advance and were forced to retreat. The Nigerians then advanced to take Benin from the North, Warri in the south, and then capture the Igbo town of Asaba on the Niger, where the retreating Biafrans commandeered food and transport and, as the war went against them, soldiers were responsible for some rapes and murders. After the Biafrans withdrew, civilians in Benin, Warri and Sapele wreaked vengeance on Igbo civilians. After the capture of Asaba, Nigerian troops lined up and shot several hundred Igbo men and boys.

Militarily, the invasion of the Mid-West was the Biafrans only alternative to slow retreat in the face of superior federal arms. It is unlikely if it could have succeeded, even if Banjo had given priority to invading the West. They lacked the men, arms, supplies and logistic support to sustain their advance and their control of the territory they had overrun. As de St. Jorre described it:

The Biafrans 'stormed' through the Mid-West in a bizarre collection of private cars, 'mammy' wagons, cattle and vegetable trucks. The whole operation was carried out by at most 1,000 men, the majority poorly trained and armed, and many wearing civilian clothes because they had not been issued with uniforms.

The invasion was a political gamble. As such, it was a disaster. Instead of detaching the Mid-West and West from the 'North', it ensured their commitment to the federal cause. The Biafrans had brought the devastation of war to the Mid-West, whose people depended on the federal army for control of their own state. The presence of the Biafran army at Ore meant for the west that the war was now 'their' war, and not a dispute between north and east. Chief Awolowo, and Col. Adebayo called on the Yoruba to give 'every conceivable support to the federal troops in defence of their homeland, and of the fatherland.' Had the Biafrans reached Ibadan and Lagos, things would have been different, but they lacked the means to carry this out themselves.

Recognising the implications of the failure of the mid-western adventure, Banjo and his close associates, Maj. Ifeajuna, a leader of the January coup, Sam Agbam, a foreign service officer, and Philip Alale, a mid-western Ijaw and self-proclaimed 'revolutionary', sought support for replacing Ojukwu with a collective leadership and a cease-fire which would, they believed, open the way to American support and mediation. They were accused of plotting the 'violent seizure' of the Head of State, secretly tried and publicly executed.

Biafran propagandists presented the events as a plot, with the British and Awolowo, 'to ruin Biafra by withdrawing its troops from the Mid-West', assassinate Ojukwu and proclaim the end of secession, and then depose Gowon for Banjo and Awolowo to take over Nigeria. Alale and the others had been foremost in alleging 'sabotage' against Biafran officers. In death they became exemplars of the myth of sabotage. It is true that they were committed to Nigerian unity, rather than Biafran secession. For them Biafra was the 'Eastern branch' of the progressive, Southern alliance. In Ibadan, Wole Soyinka was gaoled for his association with the 'third force'. On both sides of the Niger, the 'radical' vision of progressive unity across the South had collapsed.

Biafran resistance had not collapsed, despite the loss of the Mid-West and the fall of Enugu, the Biafran capital, on 4th October. It would take the Nigerians another two years and three months to take control of the rest of Biafra, and its population.

The war continues

Why did the war last so long? There are several aspects to this question -both of military strategy and international politics. First, let us ask how the war was fought. The war was an infantry war. Aircraft on both sides bombed civilian and military targets on the other but, as we shall see, the air war made little difference to the outcome. The Nigerian Navy blockaded the coast and organised sea-borne landings. Neither side possessed tanks, though they did use armoured vehicles which, on the Biafran side, were often converted trucks. Artillery was used to clear the way for the Infantry to advance. Troops advanced along the roads from town to town, as if these were the strategic objectives. The Nigerians often controlled towns without being able to move into the surrounding bush. Troops were held up by rivers whose bridges had been blown. The Nigerians relied mainly on mortar shells and small arms. After shelling the enemy, troops would advance, firing automatic rifles ahead of them, provoking Col. Scott, the British military attache, to the remark that 'the Nigerian army, in the advance, is the best defoliation agent known'. The Biafrans had to rely to a large extent on old bolt-action rifles. Short of ammunition, they were often unable to sustain an advance. Nigerians would withdraw until the Biafrans ran out of ammunition, and then regain the ground lost. The most effective Biafran weapon was their own invention, the *Ogbunigwe*. It was a large cone packed with dynamite at the narrow end, and pieces of metal, resting against a tree, and detonated with wire, which swept a huge arc in front of it with its deadly contents.

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Most of the troops on both sides, and many officers, were young recruits, with little training and no military experience. They had to slog their way into the third year of war in an area of hot, moist forest. Nigerian troops bore the cost of poor administration of supplies on their side. The Biafrans faced the pervasive and appalling shortages of clothing and food in their enclave. They had no helmets; there were never enough boots so soldiers fought barefoot, and they even had to grow their own cassava, or harvest abandoned crops, near the front lines. A Biafran soldiers' song captures their plight:

Take my boots off when I die
Send my clothings to the camp
Give my gun to someone else
to fight for fatherland

By 1969, the military situation appeared stalemated. To the chagrin of their senior commanders, troops arranged local ceasefires and even fraternised across the lines. Small traders hawked various items across the front lines and around the trenches. Some officers bullied their own men into battle. Col. Obasanjo checked an epidemic of self-inflicted injuries among his troops only by exemplary executions.

Both sides were beset by rivalries and lack of co-ordination among senior officers and different units. On the federal side, the divisional commanders each ran the war in their own sectors as they choose, until they were replaced from Lagos. The different divisions appropriated supplies and troops intended for one another and even purchased their own arms, at considerable profit to some of the officers involved. There was no overall field commander, and little direct communication between divisional commanders, except through Lagos, where the army staff's daily concerns were often a long way from the distant battlefields. The breakthrough of the Third Marine Commando Division from Aba to Umuahia which finally broke the Biafran resistance was undertaken against the existing orders of Army Headquarters.

On the Biafran side, Ojukwu kept control of the conduct of the war, but did it in such a way as to encourage rivalries among his officers and units. Throughout the war Ojukwu controlled the sources and supplies of foreign exchange, arms and ammunition. His Home Affairs Minister, C.C. Mojekwu, was personally responsible for arranging arms purchases. Ojukwu allocated ammunition to units, sometimes on a daily basis. Some battles were engaged in the expectations of ammunition supplies arriving on the nightly arms flights. Ojukwu also established special brigades, the S Division, and the Commandos led by the mercenary Rolf Stainer, which were to be personally responsible to him.

Ojukwu tolerated, responded to and at times encouraged allegations of sabotage against officers, who were accused by their own troops of withholding ammunition and by the public of collaborating with the Nigerians, thus deflecting public concern at the repeated defeats of his ill-equipped army away from his leadership. This lead to the dismissal of a number of senior officers and precipitated the final collapse of the Biafran forces. In October 1969, the Nigerians forced Biafra's 12 Division out of their positions across the Ikot Ekpene-Aba road. In response to public demand for action against those responsible, Ojukwu instructed that Brig. Eze and Lt. Col. Oji should be transferred and the divisional headquarters disbanded. In late December, Commandos disarmed the remnants of the division on orders from State House, just before the Nigerians began their advance from Aba to Umuahia. Nigeria was clearly ruled by a military administration, at both federal and state levels. Policy tended to be directed by senior civil servants, rather than by the politicians appointed to the federal and state executive councils. Biafra may be described as a consultative dictatorship. Ojukwu symbolised public resistance, and inspired in people the confidence and determination to sustain it. Public opinion would brook no opposition to his leadership or policies. He appointed the 'Consultative Assembly' which declared its confidence in him as early as 31 August, 1966, mandated him to proclaim secession, and supported his policies during the war. On Sundays he would invite a cross-section of people for a people's parliament to hear their views. Army officers and civil servants were kept out of policy-making, which remained firmly in his hands.

After the retreat from the Mid-West, the Biafrans could do no more than check the advance of Nigerian troops. On several occasions, the Nigerians failed to sustain their attack and press their advantage, when the Biafrans were on the point of collapse. The first was in 1967, after the fall of the capital, Enugu, which people on both sides thought would lead to a Biafran surrender. The Nigerians stayed to consolidate their control over the city, most of whose people had withdrawn with the Biafran troops, allowing the Biafrans time to establish defensive lines to the south of the city and to reorganize their government at Umuahia.

Lt. Col. Murtala Mohammed then attempted to follow up the liberation of the Mid-West by crossing the river to capture Onitsha. His troops succeeded in landing, and setting the huge market on fire, but were then forced to

retreat to their boats by a Biafran counter-attack and go back across the river, with great loss of life. This failure did not stop Mohammed from sending his men back across the river twice more. These times, they did not succeed in landing, and altogether some 2,000 soldiers lost their lives. The Second Division then began the long march south, from Idah in the North through Nsukka to Onitsha which they finally captured on 21 March, 1968. Four days later, a Nigerian convoy of 96 vehicles making for Onitsha was ambushed. The Biafrans cut a supply route through to the food-producing areas north of Onitsha. The Second Division failed to gain control of the Onitsha-Awka road or move south from Onitsha. In 1969, they were withdrawn to defend the Mid-West against Biafran guerilla incursions, leaving the First Division to defend Onitsha.

In September 1968, Biafra again appeared to be on the point of collapse. Supplies of food and arms were at their lowest. The Nigerians, having occupied the whole of the south-east and rivers states, had captured Port Harcourt and Aba. The Nigerian advance on Oguta left them without any oilfields, and threatened the critical airstrip at Uli. However, the Biafrans succeeded in pushing them back from Oguta and recapturing the oilfield at Egbema. They could not stop the Nigerians taking Owerri. Ojukwu warned some leading Biafrans that the war was lost. However, the Nigerians failed to pursue their advance. Biafra retained control of Umuahia and two of their three airstrips. The French now agreed to increase the flow of arms through Gabon to Biafra. Expanded relief operations improved the supply of food and foreign exchange. Biafra lived to fight another year. In April 1968, the Nigerian First Division finally captured Umushia, only for the besieged Third Division garrison to be forced to withdraw from Owerri three days later. The Biafrans followed this up with bombing raids and ground attacks on oilfields in the Mid-West and Rivers, while the Nigerians reorganised their forces under new commanders.

How did the Biafrans succeed in keeping the Nigerians at bay? By 1968, the Biafrans had fallen back on the so-called Igbo heartland (and parts of Annang Division). They were now defending a relatively small area, linked by a network of roads and short lines of communications. The Nigerians were operating on three fronts, with poor communications between them and a lack of co-ordination among military commands.

The Biafrans were determined to resist. Memories of the 1966 massacres were continually recalled in broadcasts and songs and enacted in plays. People's fears were confirmed by stories of federal atrocities in the Mid-West and at Onitsha, and by allegations of the genocidal intent of the Nigerians. Egyptian pilots flying Soviet planes bombed civilian settlements, thus scandalising the outside world and strengthening Biafran resistance. In fact, both sides committed atrocities: Biafran troops attacked civilians during their occupation of the Mid-West and Rivers people were attacked for their 'disloyalty' when federal troops forced the Biafrans to retreat from Port Harcourt. Further, the Nigerians executed officers, once before the world's television cameras, for killing unarmed civilians. However, these events were unknown to, or discounted by, most people on the Biafran side. They did not make them feel safer from the Nigerians.

The Biafran government raised no taxes and exported no commodities. After the Nigerians changed their currency notes in January 1968 the Biafran government's main source of foreign purchasing power, old Nigerian banknotes, became valueless. They financed their administration by printing money. Salaries remained fixed while the prices of food and other commodities soared. Relief agencies had to change foreign currency into Biafran pounds at a rate of \$2.80 each, which bore no relation to the purchasing power of Biafran notes. In this way humanitarian aid paid for Biafra's imports of arms, apart from their direct imports of food and medical supplies. Between April and September 1968, relief agencies and transfers from Igbos abroad were Biafra's only source of foreign currency. From September 1968 Biafra acquired arms from Gabon, who were in turn supplied by France, and paid for by loans from the Ivory Coast, backed by France. At the same time, relief agencies expanded their operations in Biafra, to which end they extended the facilities at Uli airstrip. Biafra was never again as short of food and arms as it had been in 1968.

The flow of relief aid, French support and the help and diplomatic recognition of Biafra's African allies were critical to the continuation of its military effort. Church aid flew in supplies from Fernando Po, a Portuguese colony, through which arms bought on the international market were brought to Biafra. The French Red Cross and French arms supplies were flown from Libreville in Gabon. The International Committee of the Red Cross variously used Sao Tome in Equatorial Guinea and Cotonou in Dahomey. Both relief supplies and arms were flown into Uli airstrip at night. Nigeria never accepted the principle of these night flights. However, no arms planes were ever shot down except an unarmed ICRC flight which refused a Nigerian instruction to land at Port Harcourt. The nightly flights to Uli continued until Ojukwu himself was forced to flee to the Ivory Coast. De St. Jorre says that the flights were not intercepted because the mercenary pilots flying for the Nigerians were unwilling to shoot down pilots flying for the other side, and put all of them out of business.

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De Gaulle was persuaded to support Biafra by his closest ally in black Africa, Houphouet-Boigny, the President of the Ivory Coast. Both Houphouet and de Gaulle were hostile to post-colonial federations and admired the Biafran struggle for national self-determination, which de Gaulle had supported in the Francophone context of Quebec. French military supplies were controlled by Foccart, de Gaulle's eminence grise in Africa. They were never anything like enough to give Biafra a chance of turning the tide, but were designed to sustain Biafra's heroic resistance and thus force the Nigerians to come to the conference table on terms more favourable to the Biafrans.

The motives of the four African Presidents whose countries, Tanzania, Gabon, Zambia and the Ivory Coast, recognised Biafra were similar. They did not expect Biafran military victory, but rather that Nigeria might be persuaded to negotiate an agreement which gave the Biafrans something of the substance of their demands. In turn, their support for Biafra depended on Biafra proving the determination and capacity of its people to sustain their resistance.

Thus the first target of Biafran propaganda was its own people. Biafran propaganda went through three phases. The first stressed Biafra's right to self-determination and their capacity to achieve it. Military defeat was attributed to sabotage.

In 1968 the message shifted to emphasise the threat of genocide. 'Sabotage' and 'genocide' continued to be raised to the end of the war. In 1969, Biafran propaganda tried a new tack. The allegations of genocide were no longer convincing abroad, or even to all at home. They conveyed an image of a starving people, worthy of compassion, but unable to sustain a war. Thus in 1969, the Biafrans took the offensive with attacks by air and on the ground against Mid-western and Rivers oil installations. The people were issued with the Ahiara Declaration, an ambiguous declaration of the principles of the Biafran Revolution, which emphasised the claims of the community and duties of individuals and leaders, together with 'private economic enterprise and individualism' and berated corruption in Biafra itself. By the end of 1969, propaganda could no longer sustain public morale. The Nigerians were not exterminating people in the areas they occupied. People wanted to win the war, but it was plain that they could not. Spiritualist churches found new adherents, civil and military, seeking in religion the help which was not forthcoming on earth.

Biafran propaganda was publicised across the world by Markpress, a public relations firm based on Geneva. Although Markpress is often credited for the impact of Biafra's publicity, it is likely that Biafra got more support from priests, notably the Holy Ghost Fathers, journalists, relief officials and others who reported positively on the heroism of the Biafrans trapped in their shrinking enclave.

There is no doubt that Biafra won the propaganda war. The more important diplomatic war was a decisive victory for the Nigerians. They retained the support of Britain and the Soviet Union, their main arms suppliers, and the neutrality of the United States. Both the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Commonwealth Secretariat were keen to find a peaceful solution to this conflict in a member state, and both sought to open up negotiations. Neither body, nor the majority of its members was prepared to take a position unacceptable to the government they recognised as the legitimate government on Nigeria. The British government was under continued pressure from Biafra's supporters to end the export of arms to Nigeria. In response, the Labour government undertook a number of well-publicised peace initiatives wherever they appeared likely to be embarrassed on the issue in a Parliament which spent more time debating the Nigerian civil war than it had spent in discussing the administration of Nigeria, as a colonial territory, for 60 years.

Why did the long series of peace initiatives fail? In effect, because neither side wanted them to succeed, since success would mean sacrificing one of their fundamental aims. Nigeria was willing to allow relief to be supplied to the Biafran enclave through a land corridor from the area they occupied. Alternatively, they agreed to daylight relief flights. Ojukwu insisted on relief being flown in at night. He argued that a land corridor would open a way for Nigerians to march into the enclave, and that daylight landings at Uli would expose the airport to Nigerian bombing raids. However, night relief flights provided a certain cover for arms flights, and continued purchases by the relief agencies within Biafra, rather than just the import of goods in kind was necessary to acquire foreign exchange.

Neither side shifted from their basic conditions throughout the different negotiations. Nigeria insisted on an end to secession and acceptance of the twelve-state structure, as a condition of a cease-fire. Biafra wanted a cease-fire and a return to pre-war boundaries before negotiating the terms of their renewed association with Nigeria, and a plebiscite in the non-Igbo (and Igbo areas). The critical issue was the Biafran claim, as successor to the

government of Eastern Nigeria, to represent the whole of the former Eastern Region and not just the East-Central State created by Gowon. Once the Nigerian army had taken the South-Eastern and Rivers States it was inconceivable that they should negotiate their withdrawal from these areas. For the Biafrans acceptance of the twelve state structure amounted to surrender. Neither side wished to appear too intransigent to the world. Both depended on foreign arms supplies. They had no intention of settling the matter by negotiation, except on their own terms.

Ultimately, more than two and half years after the war had begun, Biafran resistance collapsed. The Nigerian army cut through the remaining defences. Ojukwu fled to the Ivory Coast, taking several senior members of his government with him, leaving Maj. Gen. Effiong to surrender to the Nigerians on 12 January 1970.

Explaining the Nigerian civil war

We have outlined the events of the war itself, the political conflicts which led up to it and the historical changes which shaped Nigerian society in the twentieth century. We have not explained the war. Can we do so? Is it possible to offer an explanation of why the war took place? As we shall see, these questions take us further afield and lead us to ask what it is to 'explain' historical events.

We began with the most obvious 'explanation' of the war, one which was offered, time and again, in the press and on television, namely that it was, apparently unlike European wars, a 'tribal' war. This view fits European preconceptions of Africa. It also reduces the complex chain of events to two or three simple elements, the major, and perhaps some minor, tribes. As we have seen, this account does not make much sense of the actual events.

Press and television accounts typically focused on the antagonism between the Hausa, and 'Muslim', North and the Igbo, and 'Christian' East. Most of Nigeria's Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, lived outside the East, not least General Gowon himself.

Undoubtedly, antagonisms towards Igbo, which took such a murderous form in the killings in the North in 1966, were intensified by the politicians, especially in 1964 and 1965. Anti-Igbo sentiment was not limited to the North, let alone to the Hausa. Hostilities between Igbo and Yoruba reached dangerous levels in 1949. The conflicts for control of posts and patronage in federal corporations and the Universities in the 1960s were predominantly between Igbo and Yoruba. They led some Igbo academics and professionals to withdraw to the East, where they initiated the idea of an independent East. These conflicts differed from the conflicts in the North, where Igbo occupied positions in the middle levels of commerce and clerical employment to which Northern petty traders and school-leavers aspired. In the uncertain conditions of 1953 and of 1966, these resentments led Northerners to attack and kill Igbo. The 1966 killings were not all the work of Hausa. Other Northerners, Christian and Muslim, took part.

Prior to 1966, the most serious outbreaks of political violence took place between members of the same ethnic groups, as in the Tiv rebellions of 1960 and 1964, the conflicts in Bornu in 1958, and the violence which swept Yorubaland after the 1965 elections in the West. In 1965 conflicts between the supporters of the AG and their NNDP lead to some attacks in the West on Hausa, who were identified with the NPC, as the Northern allies of NNDP. Indeed, on 13 January, 1966, two days before the first coup, the correspondent of the Financial Times predicted that if the violence in the West continued it might lead to civil war - between the Hausa and Yoruba.

The war itself was not fought between 'tribes'. Nor did the secessionists lay claim to establish an 'Igbo' territory. The Military Government of Eastern Nigeria proclaimed the secession of the Eastern Region of Nigeria, including the non Igbo-speaking 'minority' areas, and excluding the Igbo-speaking areas of the Mid-Western Region. The Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Lt Col Ojukwu, contested the legitimacy of Lt Col Gowon as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and thereby of the constitutional authority of the federal government over the government of the Eastern Region. The civil war was fought, as such wars usually are, over constitutional questions - the respective claims to authority over a specific territory of the governments of the federation and of the 'Republic of Biafra' as successor to the government of Eastern Nigeria. The boundaries of the territory in dispute were those laid down by the colonial administration.

The government of Eastern Nigeria, and subsequently, 'Biafra' did appeal to the sympathies of the Igbo in the Mid-West. Mid-Western Igbo were exempted from the expulsion of non-Easterners from the East in 1966. Igbo officers were instrumental in allowing the biafran forces to invade the Mid-West in 1967. However, 'Biafra' made no claim to the Igbo-speaking areas of the mid-west. The leader of the invading forces, Col Banjo

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aimed to establish a 'progressive, Southern' alliance. As his forces withdrew, Maj. Okonkwo declared a momentary 'Republic of Benin'.

The government of the East, and then of Biafra, was not willing to contemplate the secession from its territory of the non-Igbo-speaking people within the region. There were crucial strategic reasons for this. Loss of the minority areas meant loss of most of the oilfields and access to the sea. The government of Biafra never relinquished their claim to these areas, even after they had been liberated by Nigerian forces during the war. The claim to authority over the whole of the former Eastern Region was part and parcel of the Biafran governments claim to legitimacy.

If we take our analysis back to the breakdown of civilian government, we find that between 1959 and 1965 political conflict took place between the parties in power in the three original regions. Political office was first made accessible at the regional level. The parties which formed the first governments in each region used the powers of coercion and patronage available to them to consolidate their control over 'their' respective regions. They used the resources of regional governments and, in the case of the NPC and the NCNC, the federal government, to advance their party's activities and those of its allies in the other regions. The dissolution of the AG government in the West in 1962, and the willingness of the federal government to keep the NNDP in power in face of massive popular opposition after the 1965 elections, demonstrated that power at the regional level depended on the favour of the federal government, just as power at the local level depended on the favour of the regional government.

Politicians appealed for support by claiming to be best able to advance and defend the interests of their communities, and argued that the interests of their communities could only be protected by politicians in government. They formulated their appeals in tribal terms, whether this took the form of appealing to local communities or to wider groups, Yoruba or Hausa, or against outsiders to the region or the locality. Nevertheless, it was regions, their boundaries and their governments, and not tribes which shaped the political conflicts in Nigeria in the 1960s.

All the same, regionalism does not fully explain the outcomes of these conflicts. Were regional governments and their interests decisive in determining events, things might have been expected to turn out rather differently. Indeed, there might never have been a civil war.

Politicians from the three major parties could have agreed to leave their rivals secure in control of 'their' respective regions, and formed a coalition government at the centre which would have shared out the resources of the federal government among the different regional interests. For a short period, in 1953 and 1959, this was almost realised, when Sir Abubakar added two AG ministers, Chiefs Akintola and Rosiji, to the NCNC and NPC ministers in the federal cabinet. Such a compromise would have required the NCNC and AG to sacrifice their supporters in the regions they did not control in the interests of their regional governments. They had been willing to do this in 1954 and again in 1958 when they failed to press their respective demands for the creation of new states in order to get the British to transfer power to, firstly, regional governments and secondly, to an independent federal Nigeria. In 1962, the AG government in the West broke up over the same issue - should it continue as an opposition party in the East, the North and the federation as a whole, or should it seek its own security in joining a coalition at federal level?

Why did the politicians of the major parties fail to accommodate one another's interests? At times, they appeared to some observers to be willing to do just that. After the 1964 federal elections they retreated from the brink of constitutional confrontation and agreed to a little election and the formation of a broad-based government. This was celebrated at the time as the Nigerian ability to compromise. As subsequent events were to show, the compromise was more apparent than real.

Politics in Nigeria was a game of winner takes all. The winners appropriated all the fruits of office to themselves, and excluded their opponents from them. Consequently, politicians used all their constitutional and extra-constitutional powers to gain and maintain control of office. Nor did they show much restraint in exploiting the prerequisites of office. It was always politicians who felt themselves excluded from their share of rewards who proposed a coalition of regional interests. This proposition never appealed to those who controlled the levers of power.

In the 1950s politicians were able to compromise on constitutional issues and on revenue allocation because all gained access to something, even though some gained more than others. In the 1960s the parties, and the governments of the regions, competed for shares of the same, limited resources. They came into conflict over the institutional arrangements which would decide how these resources would be allocated, that is over census

results, control of appointments in the federal civil service and the universities, and the election arrangements. By the 1960s, compromise amounted to no more than backing down in the face of superior force.

Thus in 1965, the UPGA parties, NCNC and AG, were forced to accept the continuation of Sir Abubakar as Prime Minister when the chiefs of staff recognised his authority over the claims of the President, Dr. Azikiwe. The NCNC, who were in power in the East and the Mid-West, were able to secure the elections of their candidates in those regions and their share of cabinet posts. The AG had to forfeit the seats in the West which they had lost through the election boycott and accept their exclusion from ministerial office and the continued detention of their leaders. Their only consolation was the prospect of winning the 1965 election in the Western Region. That would have required the NNDP to accept loss of office. Before, during and after the disputed 1965 elections, the NNDP made it clear that they were not willing to allow this.

People saw politicians as exploiters who appropriated public resources to their own advantage and did not share them widely among their constituents. They could neither agree among themselves, nor accept electoral defeat. They lost any moral cohesion or claim to legitimacy. They had, simply, gone too far. On the other hand, most people thought there was nothing much that they could do about it. Achebe explains this in his novel *A Man of the People*, written before the coup of January 1966:

the military regime had just abolished all political parties in the country and announced they would remain abolished 'until the situation became stabilized once again.' They had at the same time announced the impending trial of all public servants who had enriched themselves by defrauding the state. The figure involved was said to be in the order of fifteen million pounds.

Overnight everyone began to shake their heads at the excesses of the last regime, at its graft, oppression and corrupt government: newspapers, the radio, the hitherto silent intellectuals and civil servants - everybody said what a terrible lot; and it became public opinion the next morning. And these were the same people that only the other day had owned a thousand names of adulation, whom praise-singers followed with song and talking-drum wherever they went. Chief Koko in particular became a thief and a murderer, while the people who had led him on - in my opinion the real culprits - took on the legendary bath of Hornbill and donned innocence.

'Koko had taken enough for the owner to see,' said my father to me. (Achebe 1966: 161-2, 166).

When the military assumed power in 1966, they attributed the nation's ills to tribalism, regionalism and politics. Ironsi, and the civil servants who followed him, tried to solve these problems by abolishing their regions, excluding the politicians from government, and replacing 'politics' with a rational administration, following the unified command structure of the army. Nigeria's problems could not be signed away by decree. The new government wished to rule any consideration of 'tribal' affiliation or 'region of origin' out of consideration. The personnel and policies of the new government were interpreted, especially in the North, in 'tribal' and 'regional' terms as 'Igbo domination'. Out of power, politicians argued that people's interests could only be protected if representatives of their communities, and their regions, controlled the machinery of government. The January coup divided the military itself along sectional lines. 'Northerners' and 'Southerners' were divided by the killing of Northern officers and support for the Ironsi regime.

Political violence, such as the resistance of the Tiv in 1960 and 1964, or the Yoruba in 1965, or the attacks on Easterners in 1953 and in 1966, appears to have developed when the control of government, or changes in control, at the federal and regional levels, appeared to threaten the access of particular communities to opportunities and resources within their own territories, and to symbolise their political humiliation. It took various forms. People attacked the local agents of the government who collaborated in the oppression of their own people. The attacks on the Igbo directed people's hostilities against a vulnerable, alien community, whom they blamed for the uncertain situation in which they found themselves. In July 1966, Northern soldiers sought to defend their own interests by seceding from the federation under their own government. Similarly, the government and a majority of the people of Eastern Nigeria responded to the July coup and the killings in the North by demanding the protection of their own government and consequently secession from Nigeria.

When the constitutional conference opened in September 1966 it seemed likely that Nigeria would break up into its constituent regions or, what might have come to much the same thing, formed a confederation with a weak centre, exercising limited powers delegated by the regions. The North and the East both wanted a confederal solution, including the right of any region to secede and the West was willing to agree to such a solution. Only

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the smallest region, the Mid-West, stood out against it. Some months later, under changed circumstances, the Supreme Military Council reached agreement at Aburi to what appeared to be a confederal arrangement.

In the event, regionalism failed to carry the day. Neither the regional governments among themselves, nor the federal and Eastern governments in negotiation with one another, were able to arrive at a compromise which would secure each of their interests, and allay their fears. The authority of the federal government was maintained, at the cost of a long war. Indeed, the war strengthened the power of the central government so that, by 1975, when Brigadier Murtala Mohammed replaced General Gowon as head of state, his military administration exercised the sort of central authority over the whole country which the Ironsi regime, which he had been instrumental in overthrowing, had tried to introduce.

There were several sources of power and authority of the federal government. One was its international recognition as the successor government to the colonial power and thus the legitimate government of Nigeria. This fact enabled it to win the diplomatic war, even while Biafra was winning the propaganda war. A second was the commitment of federal civil servants to maintaining its existence and authority. This was as true of the permanent secretaries who advised Gowon as it had been of Ironsi's advisers.

The permanent secretaries, with others, were instrumental in persuading Northern soldiers not to secede after the July coup. They opposed the terms of the Aburi agreement, and modified them so as to maintain the authority of the federal government. When the East rejected these modified proposals, Gowon implemented the permanent secretaries's proposals for the creation of new states and the appointment of civilians to the Federal Executive Council.

During the war, the federal permanent secretaries were able to change the allocation of oil revenues in favour of the federal government. Secession made this possible, since the Eastern Region government had seceded and the governments of the Mid-West and the new Rivers State demonstrably depended on the federal government for their very existence. Like Ironsi and his advisers, these permanent secretaries thought that public policy should not be left in the hands of politicians, but was properly the business of administrators and planners. It was only after Gowon was overthrown in 1975 that the 'super permsecs', as they came to be known, lost their predominant influence in shaping federal government policy.

Enforcement of federal authority depended on the Nigerian Army, which had been divided by the killings and coups of 1966. Northern soldiers had been bent on secession in July. Igbo officers and soldiers, and some others, fought on the Biafran side. At the beginning of the war there was considerable hostility and distrust within the ranks of the army between Yoruba soldiers and Northerners who had carried out the killing in the July coup. Nevertheless, there was a strong commitment in the army to maintaining a federal Nigeria and, especially, to maintaining the army under an undivided command. Some officers were determined not to allow the East to get away with secession, but many officers had a stronger commitment to 'one Nigeria' than that. Several senior officers in the East were sceptical of secession and were kept out of military planning and political decision-making until secession, and were distrusted during the war as potential saboteurs. Others, such as Maj Nzeogwu and Lt Col Banjo fought on the secessionist side, but out of a commitment to realising their own vision of a 'progressive' Nigeria.

At the outset of the war, Lt Col Gowon unilaterally replaced the four regions with twelve states. By 1967, the creation of new states was necessary if the federal government was to secure its political support and claim legitimate authority over the East. 'Middle Belt' officers and troops had been decisive in persuading the Northern delegation to the constitutional conference in September 1966 to change their position to favour new states, and in 1967 the North supported the creation of new states, whatever happened elsewhere. The creation of the Rivers and South-Eastern States was designed to win support for the federal cause among the non-Igbo 'minorities' within the East, and to enable the federal government to contest the Biafran claim to embody the self-determination of the people of the former Eastern Nigeria. The most vociferous claims for new states in the West came from the ousted leaders of the NNDP. Apart from creating Lagos State, Gowon's decree left the West alone, which helped secure the support of the Leader of the Yorubas, Chief Awolowo. Previously, demands for new states, apart from the Mid-West, had foundered against opposition from regional governments, and the need to agree on which states ought to be created with which boundaries. The critical circumstances of May 1967 enabled the Gowon government to decree the creation of new states.

In the event the federal cause proved successful, but only after coups, massacres and a terrible war. Politicians failed to seek genuine compromises, which would accommodate the interests of their rivals as well as their own.

Military intervention failed to settle the question of who would rule Nigeria, and on what terms. In 1966 and 1967 a series of attempts to negotiate a constitutional agreement, involving military officers, politicians and civil servants, failed to produce an acceptable compromise. The protagonists continued to rely on the possibility of settling the issue by force if they could not get their way in negotiations. During the war itself the two sides took part in negotiations to strengthen their diplomatic position rather than to achieve a settlement. The Biafrans continued to fight long after they had lost any hope of victory to try and win more international backing and strengthen their negotiating position. The issue was finally resolved by the military defeat of the Biafran forces.

Why did it prove so difficult to achieve viable compromises? To answer this, we cannot simply blame 'politics'; we need to explain why politics took the form of a 'winner take all' game in which politicians, and their followers, could not accept the possibility of exclusion from government office. Politics in Nigeria is, in the words of the 1976 Constitutional Drafting Committee, about the 'opportunity to acquire wealth and prestige, to be able to distribute benefits in the form of jobs, contracts, scholarships and gifts of money and so on to one's relatives and political allies'. It is the process of gaining control of public resources for the pursuit of private ends. There are no rewards for the loser.

To understand the nature of 'politics' in Nigeria, we need to examine the class structure of Nigerian society, the nature of the Nigerian state and Nigeria's relations with the international economy. During the colonial period a definite class structure emerged in Nigeria. Agricultural production was carried out by independent peasant smallholders. Manufactured goods were produced by craftsmen and women and, increasingly, imported from abroad. Opportunities for profit-making were found in trade rather than in the organisation of production. The trade in imports and exports was dominated by a small number of foreign firms, who bought and sold their products through a hierarchy of African traders.

The creation of state monopoly marketing boards enabled government to appropriate a large share of the value of agricultural exports. The Nigerian bourgeoisie, made up of businessmen and professionals, sought control of political power as a means of gaining access to government funds, jobs and commercial opportunities from which they had been excluded by colonial firms and the colonial government. Once in control of political office, politicians expanded government spending and employment in the name of 'development', thereby increasing the resources available for them to appropriate and distribute. They quickly took advantage of state funds to finance their own business and political activities. 'Politics' was not simply an instrument of class interests; it was the means of class formation, through which politicians and their associates acquired the financial resources and control of opportunities for profit-making with which they established themselves as a 'bourgeoisie'.

After self-government and independence, manufacturing production in Nigeria expanded rapidly. This did not alter the character of Nigeria's economy as an import-export economy. Foreign firms established the new industries to maintain, or gain access to, the Nigerian market for consumer goods. They imported much of the machinery, managerial and technical skills and materials from which the final products were produced. The foreign exchange costs of these imports still had to be met from agricultural and mineral exports. Opportunities for profit-making continued to depend on access to government, for contracts, produce-licenses and investment loans. When the government began to regulate the supply of foreign currency and imports during the war, it gained control over the allocation of profits to be made by those with access to scarce foreign exchange and imported goods.

Alternatively, businessmen looked to relations with foreign suppliers of imports and manufacturers to further their commercial activities. Since foreign firms needed the favour of government for their own operations, influence with government gave businessmen access to foreign firms. Consequently, success in business depended not on the capacity to organise production of commodities, nor on the entrepreneurial skills of the businessman., but on access to and control of government decisions. 'Corruption', the illegal appropriation of public goods or decisions for private ends was the main source of business success for politicians and their associates. Politics, that is the competition for political office, was a costly, but potentially lucrative investment. It was essential to the politicians and their backers that they secured the returns to their investments.

A relatively small number of politicians and businessmen, in association with foreign firms, appropriated a large share of the opportunities for profit-making which they controlled. They were able to distribute contracts, jobs and licenses to a much larger range of clients through their control of government ministries, local authorities, and marketing boards. Communities as well as individuals depended for the access to opportunities of their

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members on government decisions regarding the building of schools, the siting of local government offices or the building of factories by government corporations. People sought to protect their own interests by getting government to spend money and provide education and employment in their areas, and by seeking to exclude outsiders, from other areas, regions - or political parties, from sharing in the distribution of resources within their own territories. This was particularly important for people in the North, who found themselves at a disadvantage in relation to educational qualifications which gave people access to jobs in government, and in private firms. Consequently, many people, and not only politicians and their clients, felt threatened by changes in government which deprived them of access to decision-makers, however cynical they may have been about the motives and actions of those decision-makers towards most of their constituents.

After the killings of 1966, a new consideration determined the political outlook of many Easterners - fear for their physical security. They could not rely on a government controlled by 'others' to protect them from assault and murder. Not surprisingly, they were unwilling to accept any compromise which did not leave control of 'their' security in 'their' own hands. 'Compromise' became a dirty word in Eastern Nigeria after 1966. The 1966 killings, and several incidents during the war itself provided the basis for the myth of 'genocide' with which the 'Biafran' leaders persuaded people to continue resistance when they had no chance of winning the war, and with which 'Biafran' propaganda sought to win international opinion to their side.

In looking for the 'causes' of the Nigerian civil war, we have moved through a number of possible explanations. 'Tribalism' is too simple an explanation to account for the complexities of Nigerian politics. 'Regionalism' draws attention to the institutional bases of political power and political conflict, but does not explain why regional interests could not be accommodated with one another or, alternatively, why Nigeria did not break up into its constituent regions. We have to look at the nature of 'politics' to explain the outcome of conflicts among regions, and regionally based parties. To understand why 'politics' took the form it did, we have to look at the class structure of Nigeria and particularly at the nature and situation of Nigeria's 'bourgeoisie'. The bourgeoisie depended for their access to resources on their access to the state and to foreign firms. The class relations of Nigerian society were shaped by the state's control of funds and its regulation of economic activities, and by the relative dependence of the economy on imports and exports. The post-war expansion of oil production, which now provides most of Nigeria's exports and revenues has expanded the money and opportunities controlled by the state, but accentuated its dependence on export revenues and thus intensified the import-export character of the economy.

In tracing our explanation through these different aspects of Nigerian society and politics, we have argued that each of them is relevant to our understanding of the origins of the civil war, but that none of them is sufficient to explain it. The regional structure of the constitution has particular consequences because of the specific character of political competition. Politics takes the form it does because it provides the main means of access to resources within a 'neo-colonial' society in which the state controls access to opportunities in the import-export economy. This is not to say that 'neo-colonialism' is not necessarily a recipe for political stability. Only the combination of a number of different elements, under particular historical circumstances gives rise to an event as complex, in its origins and development, as the Nigerian civil war. We find, when we investigate the matter, that we have to give up the search for the explanation of what the war was really about, and come to terms with the puzzling complexities which historical events present us with.

We have argued that to understand the origins of the war, we have to see it as the outcome of the interaction of different elements. This is not to show that the combination of these elements determined the war. As successive attempts at compromise broke down in 1966 and 1967 there seemed to be less and less chance of stopping the slide into secession and war. This does mean that the war was inevitable, that no other outcome was possible, or that it would have to take the form it did. Several other outcomes were conceivable. In 1962, the federal government could have allowed Alhaji Adegbienro to form a government in the Western Region without disruption from his political rivals. Or in 1965, the federal government could have ditched their allies in the West, the NNDP, since they were manifestly incapable of restoring law and order in the West, pardoned Awolowo and sought an agreement with the AG. In this way, Sir Abubakar's government might have survived by allowing each region to sort out their own affairs. In 1967, the federal government might have agreed to all the terms of the Aburi compromise, even where these appeared to compromise its own authority. The military government of Eastern Nigeria might have accepted Decree 8 as meeting the substance of their claims, and agreed to the federal government's formal claim to sovereign authority.

It is less clear what the consequences would have been had the January majors carried the day in Lagos as well as Kaduna. Their programme would, very likely, have provoked a similar reaction in the North to Ironsi's unification decree. Nevertheless, it might have given a very different direction to political developments. In 1967, Lt Col Banjo might have found more support in the West for his attempt to create a third force, especially if he had had the means to take his forces to Ibadan. This could have led to the formation of a southern alliance, and even the creation of a southern Nigerian state. The hope of support from the West was an important element in the calculations of the 'Biafran' leadership, even after it had proved to be misplaced. Alternatively, had the Biafrans not gambled on entering the Mid-West to attack the West and Lagos, and limited themselves to checking the federal advances from the East, the conflicts, in the country and even within the army, between the other regions, might possibly have undermined the political coherence of the federation and its capacity to sustain the war.

Secession only became militarily feasible because of the ambiguous outcome of the July 1966 coup. Each of the three regions had threatened to secede when they felt that their interests were not being recognised: the North over the southern demand for immediate self-government in 1953; the West over the exclusion of Lagos from the region in the same year; the East over the conduct of the 1964 federal election. In none of the three did the resisting government command the armed force necessary to sustain their threat against a challenge from the centre. The threat of secession was used rather as a counter in political bargaining. The failure of the July coup in the East and subsequent negotiations left the government in command of the kernel of its own armed forces and the federal government without a military presence in the region.

We have tried to show why some of these conceivable outcomes were unlikely, and how things worked out differently. We have not shown, nor could we, that everything had to happen just as, in the event, they did happen. To say this is not to argue for the view that history is, in the end, a matter of chance. Events of the magnitude and significance of the Nigerian civil war are the results of the interactions of complex sets of circumstances, whose outcomes cannot be predicted in advance with any certainty, but which we can only unravel after the event.

In building up an account of the origins of the Nigerian civil war, we find that different aspects of our account refer to different time periods. Some of these are to do with the events of 1966 and 1967, others look back to the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria and its impact on Nigerian society. Each of these and the relations among them are part of the explanation.

Thus the national and regional boundaries, which defined the claims to sovereignty of the Nigerian and Biafran governments were created by the British. British policies created separate administrations in the North and the South. During the colonial period, mission education expanded in the south but was restricted in the north, especially in the Muslim Emirates. New ethnic identities and 'nationalisms' took shape in the colonial period, alongside the emergence of a Nigerian nationalism.

The British devolved political power initially to three regional governments, each controlled by a different political party. The marketing boards gave the politicians in each region the means to tax export crop producers and allocate the proceeds to themselves and their clients. As the failure to create new states before 'independence' shows, the interests of regional governments took precedence over those of the 'minorities' in each region. The ruling parties used the limited force at their disposal to intimidate opponents in their regions. The British carried out decolonization in a way that established 'regionalism' as the basis of political conflict.

In the 1960s, the contending parties, and regional governments, came into conflict over the control of the federal state, as the key to control of federal patronage and the control of regional power. The NPC could dominate the federation through their ability to control the North, given the existing allocation of parliamentary seats on the basis of population. From the time of the 1962 Action Group crisis on, the federal government used force to exclude its opponents from political office. Before the coup of January 1966, control of political office depended on the command over the army and police, as the dispute over the 1964 federal election, and the 1965 election and its aftermath in the West showed. Tiv and Yoruba rioters replied in kind, resisting oppressive government with violence.

The colonial rulers, and their Nigerian successors, laid the basis from which the violent conflicts of 1966 to 1970 would develop. They did not 'cause' the civil war, but created many of the conditions which made it possible. A number of new developments had to take place before Nigerians went to war with one another: the killings, and counter-killings in the army, the massacres of Igbo in the North; the failure of the January coup in Lagos, and of the July coup in Enugu. This last event left the military governor of the East in control of the

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army in the region, and made secession a possible option. To these must be added the failure of leaders on both sides to compromise with the other, relying, in the last instance, on the possibility of resorting to force.

These events were not historically inevitable. They were the results of decisions made by different people, often without regard for the likely consequences, though sometimes the consequences could not, perhaps, have been foreseen. In some cases, the people who made the decisions, for example, the people who initiated and organised the massacres of May and September 1966, have never been publicly identified, let alone held to account for their murderous deeds. The wrongs, and rights, of the issue are not all on one side. In both coups, killings were carried out which were not even necessary to the success of the operations. Ojukwu led the people of Eastern Nigeria into a war without the means to fight it. The humanitarian intervention of international relief agencies, and the supply of arms from France, enabled the 'Biafrans' to continue the war, causing many more people to die, without giving them any chance to win it. The federal government and army preserved the unity of Nigeria, but killed many fellow citizens to do it. As Luckham (1971) comments at the end of his study of the Nigerian military and the origins of the war, both sides and many others before them contracted with the means of violence. They all bear the responsibility for the consequences.

BYM	Bornu Youth Movement (Borno, N.)
DP	Dynamic Party (E)
Mabol.	Mabolaje (Ibadan, W.)
MBPP	Middle Belt People's Party (N.)
MDP	Mid-Western Democratic Front (M.-W)
NCNC	Niger Delta Congress (Rivers. E.)
NEP	Northern Elements Progressive Union (N.)
NEA	Nigerian National Alliance
NNDP	Nigerian National Democratic Party (W.)
NIP	National Independence Party (E.)
NPC	Northern People's Congress (N.)
NPF	Northern Progressive Front (N.)
UMBC	United National Independence Party (E.)
UNP	United National Party (E.)
UPGA	United Progressive Grand Alliance

Italics = party entered government after election

() = part of Western Region at time of election.

Square brackets, [or] refer to allies, before, or after, election.

Franchise and methods of voting

Electoral college, taxpayer suffrage at first stage-1951 all bar Lagos, 1953 East, 1954 North
 Direct, secret ballot, taxpayer suffrage - 1954 West

Direct, secret ballot adult male suffrage - 1956 to 1964 North

Direct, secret ballot, adult suffrage - 1951 Lagos, 1954 East,
 1956-64 all bar North

1954 - Excludes 5 seats to Kamerun National Congress, voting in Southern
 Cameroons, which became part of Cameroon in 1961

1956-57 = West 1957 North East 1960-61 = 1960 West 1961 North East

1964 Mid-West. Follows creation of Midwestern Region

1964-65 As a result of partial boycott in East, West, Lagos, Mid-West, a further election was held in constituencies where no polling took place in East, Lagos, Mid-West. 1564 refers to : elected 1964 - 15; elected 1964 and 1965-64. Results in West reflect boycott by UPGA (AG + NCNC), not popular preferences.
 1965 West. The elections were rigged.

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Bibliographic Note

This study of the Nigerian civil war and its origins is a synthesis of work by other authors. It is not based on primary research by the author, who acknowledges with gratitude his debts to those whose writing he has drawn on. This note lists the main sources, and guides the reader through them in reverse chronological order.

Anyone interested in the Nigerian civil war might begin with de St. Jorre (1972), still the best account of the way itself, which he reported from both sides. Then you might turn to Luckham (1971), a masterly analysis of the Nigerian military and the period from the coup to the civil war. First (1970) analyses the origins of the war in a comparative study of military governments in Africa.

Stories, novels, poems and plays offer a better insight into the way people experienced the war than history books do. Some of these stories and poems are included in the course anthology. Achebe (1966), which went to press in 1965, predicted the end of the rule of politicians. Read too Achebe (1964) & Achebe (1972), his collection of stories from the war. Among the best novels from the war are Ekwensi (1976; 1980) and Iroh (1976; 1979). Okigbo (1971) and Achebe and Okafor (1978) are, respectively, a posthumous collection and a memorial anthology for the poet who died fighting for 'Biafra'. Soyinka (1971-2) is a jail memoir by Nigeria's greatest playwright. See his novel (Soyinka, 1965) for the sixties, his bitter allegoric play about the war (Soyinka, 1971) and his poems (Soyinka, 1967).

A number of accounts by participants (Akpan, 1971; Amadi, 1973; Oyewole, 1975; Obasanjo, 1980; Madiebo, 1980; Gbulie, 1981; Ademoyega, 1981) or about participants (Ottah, 1981 on Banjo and his associates; Barrett, 1979 on Danjuma) have appeared. Although they tend to offer apologies for the authors they are informative and give valuable insights into the thinking of many of the people involved.

The documents collected by Kirke-Green (1971) are indispensable to any detailed study of the war. It includes an extensive bibliography of various sources.¹ Aguolu (1973) is the most detailed bibliography of the war. Stremlau (1977) is a thorough analysis of the international aspects of the war. The Agbekoya rebellion by farmers in the West is discussed by Beer (1976), Williams (1974) and Beer and Williams (1976).

The war-time Biafran view is presented by Nwankwo and Ifejika (1969), Forsyth (1969) and Ojukwu (1969). Uwechue (1969) presents the views of a disillusioned Biafran representative. See also O'Brien (1967, 1969) and Diamond (1970). Cronje (1972) looks at the war's international aspects from a pro-Biafran perspective. Cohen (f/c) is a fascinating examination of what might have been.

Dudley (1973) uses games theory to explain the origins of the war. Melson and Wolpe (1972) bring together numerous studies of the origins of communal politics and conflict. Panter-Brick (1970) is useful on the immediate origins of the war. Okpaku (1970) offers various views by Nigerians. Smith (Oyinbo, 1971) and Balogun (1973) give brief accounts of the war.

Nigerian politics up to 1965 attracted the attention of a number of able scholars: Coleman (1958), Sklar (1963) Post (1953), Sklar and Whittaker (1964), Mackintosh et al. (1966), Post and Vickers (1973); on the North, Dudley (1968) and Whittaker (1970), and on Port Harcourt, Wolpe (1974). Post and Jenkins' (1973) biography of Adelabu is fascinating on the working of Nigerian politics and on decolonisation, Awolowo (1960) is a revealing autobiography. See also Bello (1962), Azikiwe (1970) and Feinstein (1971) on Aminu Kano. Williams and Turner (1977) offer a Marxist analysis of politics in Nigeria from 1939 to 1976. See also Osoba (1977)

Williams (1976) outlines the development of the class structure of Nigeria from the colonial period to 1975. Kilby (1969) and Akeredolu-Ale (1975) look at business, foreign and Nigerian in the sixties. Cohen (1974) is the best overall account of Nigerian labour in this period. See Waterman (1982) on the ports and docks.

Crowder (1968) is a useful study of colonial West Africa. Freuend (f/c) will provide a much-needed overview of colonial Africa. Hopkins (1973) analyses the economic history of West Africa. Hancock (1942) Perham (1948), Forde and Scott (1948) and Bauer (1954) are still the best introductions to the colonial economy. See also Berry (1975) on cocoa, Hogendorn (1978) on groundnuts and Helleiner (1966) on marketing boards. For Northern Nigeria, see Shenton and Freund (1978) and Shenton and Watts (1979). On colonial administration

see Nicolson (1969), Afigbo (1972) and Crowder and Ikime (1970). Ikime (1977) synthesizes the extensive literature on the British conquest of Nigeria, and lists the extensive writing on the period.

Nigerian history did not begin with colonial rule. Several books cover the history of Nigeria, and not just the last century. Crowder (1962, 1978) is an elementary introduction. Ajayi and Crowder (1971; 1976) is a more extensive collection. On Igbo history, see Isichei (1976)

For post-war Nigerian politics see Dudley (f/c), including an extensive bibliography by Chris Allen, Panter-Brick (1978). Kirk-Greene and Rimmer (1981), Oyediran (1979; 1981) and Joseph (1981) cover events up to the last elections. Marxist views are offered in ROAPE (1978) and by Beckman (1982, 1982). For post-war labour, see essays in Sanbrook and Cohen (1975), Peace (1979) and Otobo (1982). On the fate of Nigerian agriculture, see Williams (1976) 1980 Wallace (1981) and the essays in Heyer et al. (1981). We await an account of the politics of the second Republic. The first was tragedy; much of the second is farce. Nevertheless, with nineteen states rather than three regions, secession is no longer thinkable. The weekly, West Africa, is probably the best source of current information for those outside Nigeria.

Allen and Williams (1982) is a reader on class and gender in Africa, including several excerpts on Nigeria. It offers the reader an introductory overview to writing on Africa.

The Nigerian Civil War

Reconsidering the Nigerian Civil War*

GAVIN WILLIAMS

The events leading to the Biafran secession and the Nigerian Civil War itself were the most tragic and important in the history of Nigeria. They have also been silenced. Much is forgotten; what little is remembered is selectively constructed, as was much written at the time. There were fine analytical accounts and copious documentations of these events published in the early 1970s. Since then accounts have mainly been revived to serve current political purposes. It may be that the sadness, bitterness and bravery of the times can only be captured by poets and novelists.

Sequences of events appear with hindsight to have been inevitable; we ask what made them happen rather than what made them possible. Historical explanations contextualise complex processes of different kinds across overlapping periods of time. The origins of the civil war may, with reason, be traced back to the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates, to the electoral conflicts over political spoils from the 1950s, to the Action Group crisis of 1962, to the census 'counts' of 1962 and 1963, to the 1964 federal election or to 1965 elections in the West. More can be added; each of these can be seen as following from the preceding histories and as creating the conditions for the coups of January and July 1966 and the killings by civilians and soldiers in May and then August and September 1966. But to understand these events, we must bring all of them and their connections into play.

Political alignments changed between, within and across regions, provinces, and communities. The authority of the Federal Government and the terms of political association were brought into question at various times by politicians and soldiers from each of the regions, and by politicians from both the North and the East. The government of Eastern Nigeria was not the first to threaten secession. Northern officers and soldiers demanded separation in July 1967. But the Eastern government was the first to be in control of civil government and armed forces within its own territory.

If there was a decisive moment, it may have been when the negotiations at the Constitutional Conference were adjourned on 3 October. In the subsequent months the Government of Eastern Nigeria and the Federal Government followed comparable strategies. Each was willing to find agreement but on their own terms; otherwise they would assert their own sovereignty. Lagos and the West were important in the calculations of the North and the East. So too was the creation, or not, of new states. Apparent agreement among soldiers at broke down when its ambiguities were revealed. The key negotiators on both sides were civil servants, intent on securing their governments' sovereignty.

The war itself was the pursuit of politics by other means. Biafra seceded on 31 May 1967. The outcome of the war was clear by 4 October. A Biafran attack across the Niger with the aim of reaching Ibadan and Lagos had been repulsed; Nigerian troops had taken Bonny; Enugu, the Eastern capital had fallen. Yet the war continued until January 1970. The ability to defend a core Igbo area, despite Ojukwu blaming all setbacks on saboteurs; the incompetence of Nigerian commanders; and external military and humanitarian supplies enabled the Biafrans to sustain resistance with no chance of winning the war.

Biafra was imagined initially as the antithesis of the tribalism and corruption of Nigeria, as an idea of Eastern civil servants and academics, returning from Lagos and Ibadan in the face of anti-Igbo discrimination in federal institutions. The refugees from the massacres in the north provided the popular basis for Biafra. Support for the Federal Government was more conditional but it was able to secure civil and military alliances and to claim, successfully, the authority of the sovereign state. The events of 1966 to 1970 were most easily explained by grand theories: the Igbo plot, or the northern conspiracy. Evidence can be adduced for either account by incorporating them into the grand narratives. The coup-makers of January 1966 blamed the failures of Nigeria on tribalism, regionalism and politics, arguments which resonate in subsequent and contemporary Nigerian politics. 'Their solution was a to reject

tribalism, abolish regions and exclude politicians. 'Tribalism' cannot deal with the ambiguities of Nigerian politics. 'Regionalism' emphasises the institutional bases of political power but does not explain why they could not be accommodated with one another or why Nigeria did not break up into its constituent regions. To explain political conflicts we must ask why politics took the forms that it did. Nigeria's political class depended on the state's control of funds and its regulation of economic activities, and by the relative dependence of the economy on imports and exports.

The post-war expansion of oil production expanded the money and opportunities controlled by the state, but accentuated its dependence on fluctuating export revenues. The war and military government provided the 'super permsecs' with the opportunity to centralize fiscal resources in the hands of the federal government. Their promised revolution from above did not materialise. Oil rents were appropriated by civilian and most spectacularly by military rulers. The turnover of political leaders and senior military officers enabled rulers to marginalise rivals and to extend patronage to new generations. The allocation of oil rentals from the top down meant that state and local politics came to be about claims to multiply points of access to and increase shares in oil revenues. Political violence is most common at local or state rather than federal levels; for most people, Abuja is a long way away. Political elites have sought to rebuild regional alliances across state boundaries under new or old names.

'Minorities' have made collective claims for political recognition, the more effective for no longer being within the control of regional governments. Religion has been added to the repertoire of political tools and the fault lines of social divisions. Communal violence and military suppression have claimed far more victims than the violence of 1966. The redemocratization of Nigeria was followed by the 'generals elections' and military arbitration of presidential succession. Political interests are incorporated and electoral rivals repressed within the dominant party state. Perhaps the 2007 election shows that electoral politics has come back full circle. Or has it changed from 'competitive' to 'coercive' rigging.

Does re-examination open up political wounds and stand in the way of reconciliation? This raises the question: reconciliation among whom and for what? The attempts to interrogate past injustices opened the way for political elites to claim and defend their own shares of Nigeria's resources. Ohaneze's complaint was that the defeat of Biafra excluded them from military and political positions in the 1970s so they did not get a fair share of the spoils in the 1970s. Northern elites responded by recreating an Arewa Congress. The War raises more fundamental questions. If nobody can be held to account for murder provided it is on a large scale or by current rulers, what constraints are there on fears of exclusion and the politics of spoils and expropriation? Why does Nigerian politics break down into electoral rigging and political violence? Why, bluntly, are governments at all levels run by avaricious crooks? Have academics and writers the obligation and now the opportunity to break the silences that surround the civil war? The events of the war were the result of decisions made by different people, often without regard for the likely consequences. People were killed in coups, wars and on the streets. Ojukwu led the people of Eastern Nigeria into war without the means to fight it. The federal government and army preserved the unity of Nigeria, but killed many fellow citizens to do it. As Luckham comments at the end of his study of the Nigerian military and the origins of the war, both sides and many others before them 'contracted with the means of violence. They all bear the responsibility for the consequences'.

* Biafra and Beyond: Identity, Democracy and Citizenship in Africa. Workshop of Oxford Research Network on Government in Africa, African Studies Centre, and Department of Politics and International Relations, 15-16 June 2007. Convened by Dr Kate Meagher and Dr Ike Okonta.