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## Politics In Nigeria: The Role of The Igbos 1960-1980

P.J. Afamefuna Ifedi

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POLITICS IN NIGERIA:  
THE ROLE OF THE IGBOS 1960-1980

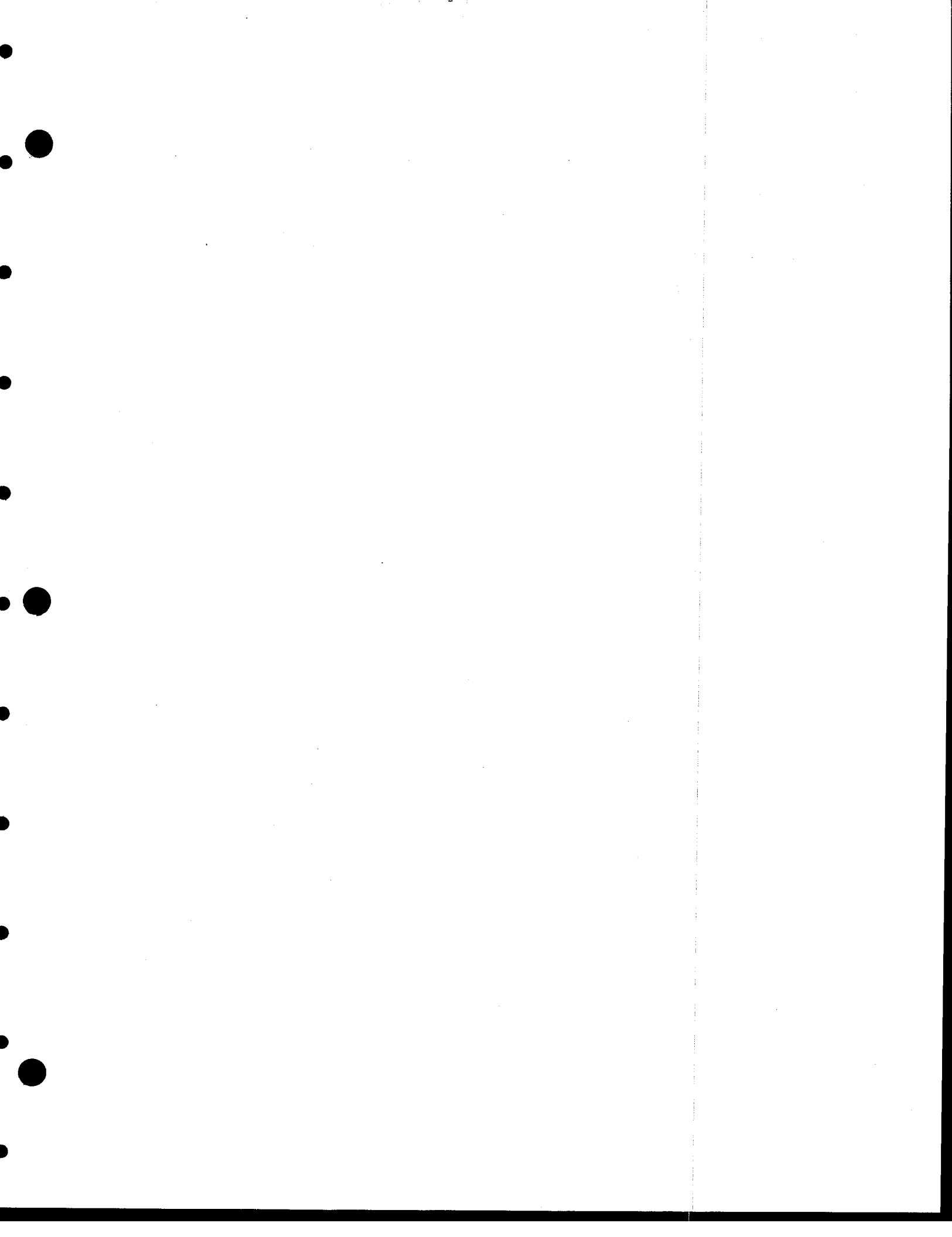
by  
P.J. Afamefuna Ifedi

Bachelor of Arts, Moorhead State University, 1981

An Independent Study  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the  
University of North Dakota  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

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May  
1983



This Independent Study submitted by Patrick John Afamefuna Ifedi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the faculty advisor under whom the work has been done.

Stephen C. Markovich  
Advisor

Permission

Title Politics in Nigeria: The Role of the Igbo  
1960-1980

Department Political Science

Degree Master of Arts

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Leus Deo



Throughout this study, the word "Igbo" and "Ibo" will be employed interchangeably to refer to the tribe that this paper deals with.

The word "Igbo" is the native name of the tribe, while the other, Ibo, is an Anglized form of the former. Both names, however, identify the same people.

## INTRODUCTION

The Igbos of the southeastern region of Nigeria were first politically united to the rest of what was the British Colony of Nigeria when it was amalgamated. The colony was divided into two parts called protectorates, North and South. The Igbos belonged to the Southern protectorate, and it was amalgamated with the northern protectorate in 1914. As part of Nigeria, the Igbos asserted themselves in the political, economic, and social fronts. They contributed immensely towards the goal of the territory to be independent under the leadership of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), the main Igbo political organ before and after independence.

After independence, an Igbo became the first president, and many Igbos held high administrative, political and military offices. It began to seem to other tribes as if the Igbos intended to gain hegemony in the country. Six years after independence, in 1966, an Igbo-led coup led to the coming to power of General Ironsi (Igbo) as the military leader of Nigeria. Soon, Ironsi began to adopt and execute policies that threatened the power of the northern Hausas, the dominant ethnic group which held power before the coup. This made the northerners

suspicious of the Igbos, and crystallized a counter coup in which many Igbos resident in the north were massacred.

This massacre and subsequent political insecurity of the Igbos led to the creation of their own country. They seceded and formed the Republic of Biafra. A civil war ensued, and after thirty months the Igbos capitulated, returned to be part of Nigeria, and were finally fully accepted.

This study attempts to portray the role of the Igbos in Nigerian politics since independence, primarily the years from 1960-1980. It shows this by tracing the role of the Igbo people and leaders in the politics of Nigeria. More specifically, it covers the policies that Igbo leaders initiated, sponsored, supported, and implemented, and assesses their impact on the Nigerian political system.

The study also attempts to show that the Igbos contributed to the pre-independence struggle. It shows how the Igbos gained prominence in Nigerian politics, and what their role has been in Nigerian politics since independence.

The sources for this independent study include books, scholarly journals, magazines, newspapers, and other publications. In the study, an objective attempt is made to describe and analyze what happened and how it happened.

## CHAPTER 1

### Geography

Nigeria, a west African nation, is slightly greater than the combined area of France and Germany.<sup>1</sup> On the south it is washed by the Gulf of Guinea; on the west and north, it is bordered by the Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Niger respectively; and on the east, it adjoins the Cameroon Republic. Its greatest length from south to north is 650 miles, and its maximum breadth from east to west is rather more than 750 miles.<sup>2</sup> This nation that lies totally in the tropics covers an area of 356,670 square miles and lies between latitudes 4°N and 14°N.<sup>3</sup>

Nigeria derives its name from the writings of the British journalist who later became the wife of the former governor general of Nigeria, Lord Lugard. She took the name from the River Niger, which runs about 730 miles inside the country.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Richard L. Sklar, Nigerian Political Parties (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>W.A. Perkins and Jasper A. Stemberge, Nigeria: A Descriptive Geography, III ed. (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 1, 2.

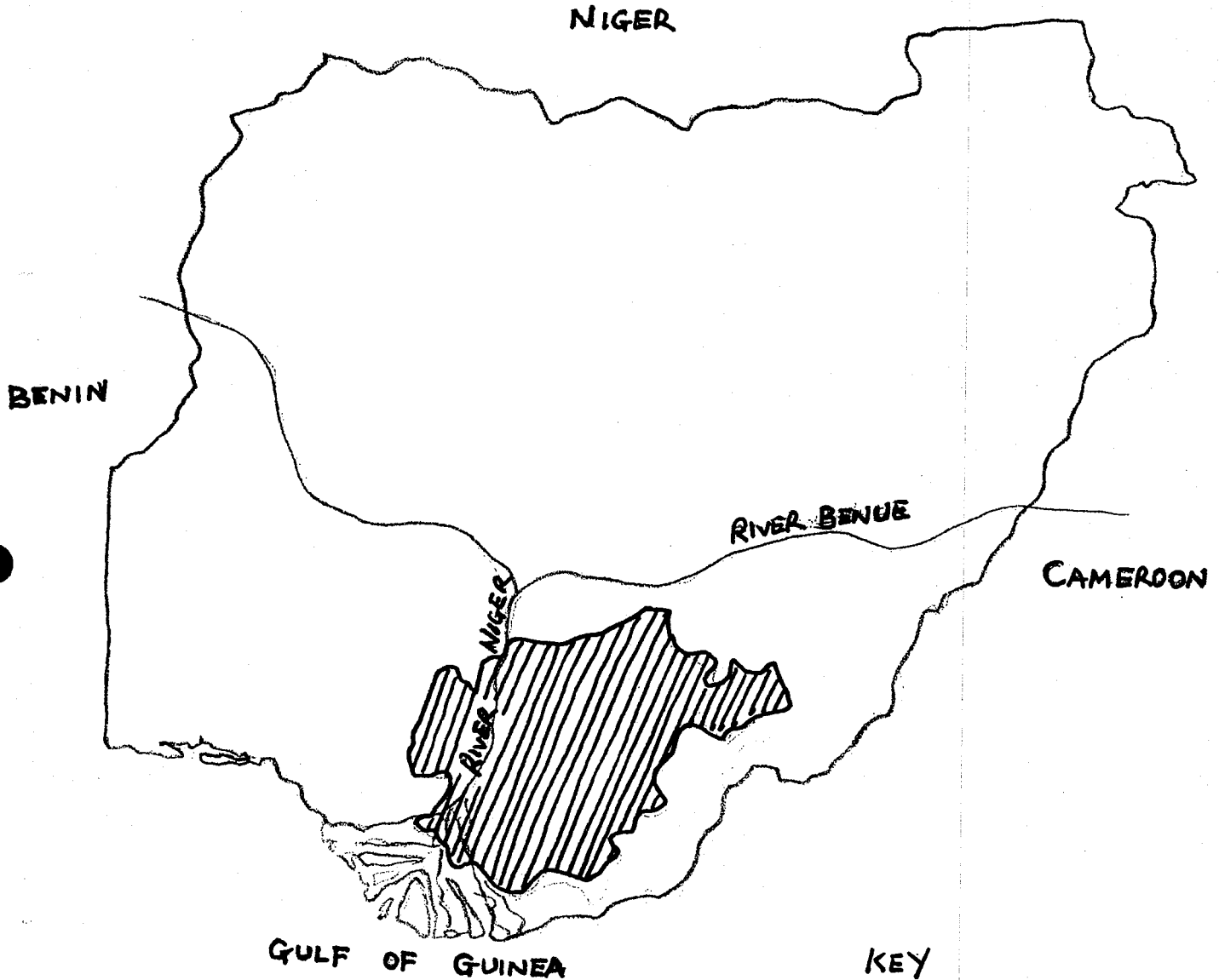
<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 1, 2.

<sup>4</sup>Nigeria, "One Hundred Facts About Nigeria" (Lagos: Ministry of Information, 1966), p. 1.

There are four main vegetation regions: lying in the coastal belt is the swamp forest, followed by the equatorial rain forest in the southern belt; the savanna grassland follows occupying the middle belt or central region, and finally in the far northern region the grassland diminishes giving way to the desert.

There are three distinctive seasons: a rainy season that begins in April, recesses in August (the August break) and ends in October. Severe rainfall takes place at this period giving rise to dense vegetation in the south, tall grass in the savanna region, and the rivers overflow their banks. Rainfall ranges between 100-140 inches in the south. The dry season starts in November and lasts up to April. The temperature ranges from 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit in the morning, and 90-100 degrees Fahrenheit in the afternoon. In the southern coast the temperature tends to moderate (about 90 degrees F.) due to the cool wind from the lagoon and Atlantic Ocean. The temperature drops to its lowest point during the Harmattan season; this is when the dusty, northeast wind from the Sahara Desert blows across the country with more severity in the northern region and less so as it goes south. Situated in the eastern section of Nigeria is the area inhabited mainly by the Igbo tribe as indicated on Map I as Igboland.

The eastern region of Nigeria is bordered on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, the north by the Benue River, the west by the Niger River and the east by the nation of Cameroon. The area of Igboland dominates most of this region, and to an appreciable extent the land area across the River Niger to the west.



KEY  
[shaded box] (IBOLAND)  
IBOLAND

<sup>5</sup>Nzimi, Ikenna, Studies in Ibo Political System (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), cover.

### Population

According to the 1963 Nigerian Census, the population of the eastern region is about 12.4 million.<sup>6</sup> This rose to about 14.5 million in 1968 when most Ibos returned home to defend Biafra, and sixty percent of the population is Ibo. Today, the population of the region (with the Ibos at about the same percentage) is 20 million as the population of Nigeria officially stands according to the 1973 Census at 73 million.<sup>7</sup> The population density in this part ranks among the highest in Africa, along with the lower Nile region of Egypt with about 450-600 persons per square mile.<sup>8</sup> Most of the Ibos live in major eastern cities like Enugu, Aba, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Calabar, and Awka to name a few. Nzimiro put the population of the Igbos at 7 million.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Barry Floyd, Eastern Nigeria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Black Enterprises, "Africa Today," Vol. 9, No. 9, April 1979, p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Barry Floyd, Eastern Nigeria, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> Ikenna Nzimiro, Studies in Ibo Political Systems, Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), p. 3.



## CHAPTER 2

### Historical Background

The Igbo, numbering about seven million, are people who speak a common language which belongs to the Kwa group of West African languages. They are considered a single people based on the fact that they speak a number of related dialects, occupy a continuous tract of territory and have many features of social structure and culture in common. It is important to note that there are marked dialectical and cultural differences among the various major groupings. These groupings can be aggregated into the following main regional divisions based on their general cultural similarity according to Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones. These consist of the

Northern or Onitsha Ibo who inhabit the western or Nri-Awka, Eastern or Enugu and Onitsha towns. The Southern or Owerri Ibo of the Isu-Ama, Oratta-Ikwerri, Ohuhu-Ngwa, and Isu-Item areas. The Western Ibo who occupy the Northern Ika, Southern Ika or Kwale, and the Riverain parts. Eastern or Cross River Ibo of the Ada (Edda), Abam-Ohaffia and Aro. Finally, the North-Eastern Ibo of Ogu Uku area.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the fact that the Igbo have no written records, general or elaborate traditions of origin or migration,

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<sup>1</sup>Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking Peoples of Southeastern Nigeria (London: Stone and Carr, Ltd., 1967), p. 10.

makes it difficult to ascertain their origins, comprehend their philosophy, understand the nature of their culture and analyze their culture. It is, therefore, well nigh impossible an undertaking to trace the history of the Ibo. This has been lost, probably in the circle of traditions. The Ibo migration to their present place in eastern Nigeria from some distant land must have taken place very many years ago. Since the Ibo domicile in eastern Nigeria, villages have begotten villages to the extent that the traditions of the offshoots have shrouded the original Ibo tradition and their beginning in mystery.

G. T. Basden, an Archdeacon of Onitsha, who spent thirty-five years working among the Ibo, wrote:

All my attempts to trace the origin of the "Ibo" have been unsuccessful. My most reliable informants have been able to offer no other alternative than that it is most probably an abbreviation of a longer name connected with an ancestor long since forgotten.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, as a seasoned elder from Mbaise in Igboland would say of the origin of the Igbo, "We did not come from anywhere, and anyone who tells you we came from anywhere is a liar. Write it down."<sup>3</sup> There have, however, been many speculations as to where the Igbos came from. I will cite some of these, but before I do, I must note that most

<sup>2</sup>G. T. Basden, Niger Ibos (London, 1921), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Isichei, Talks with an Igbo Elder of Mbaise in 1972 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 3.

of these speculations on the descendance of the Igbo to eastern Nigeria depend fundamentally on oral historical traditions, folk tales and legends, proverbs and observations. For instance, Barry Floyd wrote that:

. . . One Igbo-speaking group, the Nri, has been held in great respect through Igboland. In the light of this it has been suggested that the Ibo originated from the Nri or that their original ancestors founded Nri several centuries ago. The town itself remains the center of a cult connected with the installations of chiefs, purification and title-making. The priests and diviners of Nri are still widely traveled and sought after at important religious ceremonies and social functions in Iboland.<sup>4</sup>

Another of these beliefs states that, "the first human inhabitants of Igboland must have come from further north--possibly from the Niger confluence."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, there is a prevailing legend that the Igbos descended from the lost Jewish tribe of Judah, hence the reference to Igbos as "Jews of Africa." Some Igbos claim that the word Hebrew must have been mutilated to "ubru," then to "uburu" and later to "Igbo"--all these names are also names of Igbo town-states. This school also points to the light skin, the wavy hair, and blue eyes of some Igbos and their industriousness as signs of their Jewish descent.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Barry Floyd, Eastern Nigeria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1969), p. 29.

<sup>5</sup>Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Independent Nigeria, "The People of Nigeria," (Lagos: Government Printers, 1960), p. 13.

Finally, another hypothesis claimed that the Igbos were of Egyptian origin.<sup>7</sup>

### Igbo Political Culture

In order to make it easy to comprehend the role that the Igbos played in Nigerian politics, it is worth denoting some elements of their political culture. This will be followed by a brief examination of their political system, and a look into their sociology, what I view as the manifestations or actualization of Igboness.

The Igbo are generally held to be tolerant, ultra-democratic and highly individualistic.<sup>8</sup> They dislike and suspect any form of outside government and authority. They possess a highly seasoned commercial acumen and a practical unsentimental approach to life.

A very important attribute of the Igbo political culture is the concept of "Oha" or people in English translation. This is extended to embrace an assembly, a sovereign body, an authority, government, and the manner of life affecting the community. Oha (people or community) represents "community society" as Leopold Sedar Senghor, president of Senegal, once called it, or "communocracy," as Sekon Toure (Guinea's president) would prefer. The Ofo

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<sup>7</sup> Elechukwu Nnadibuagha Njaka, Igbo Political Culture (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Daryll Forde and G.I. Jones, The Ibo and Ibibio-Speaking Peoples of Southeastern Nigeria (London: Stone and Cox, Ltd., 1967), p. 24.

(religious symbol) is also an important part of Igbo political culture because the Igbo are primarily religious and have a tendency to exist in a world of actuality (men) and transcendence (spirit). Ofo portends achievement, kindness, protection and retaliation. Ofo allows each person to be his own priest; it confers upon its holder a great measure of individualism within the community, and yields to him a share of the community's collective authority. Ofoism is a religion of man for his welfare, hence its effectiveness in sustaining the Igbo political system.<sup>9</sup> Another important idea is orientation to change. This convenient adjustment of the Igbo to change has been a source of progress and strength because it disposes them to change and maneuverability. The Igbo also possess a strong sense and reliance on the principles of negotiation, especially in relation to political and commercial processes. In addition, they subscribe to self regulation, and checks and balances among institutional units and between individuals in order to control them--for instance, a wealthy man is made "holy" to keep him in check; in return, the society relies on the "holy, wealthy man," the chief, to maintain an ordered society.

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<sup>9</sup>E. Nnadibuagha Njaka, Igbo Political Culture (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p. 14.

### Igbo Political System

Traditionally, the highest form of political organization among the Ibos is the "village group."<sup>10</sup> Institutions of politics in Igboland are different in structure. To cite some of these: the kingship institution of Onitsha, and Nri; the native doctor fraternities, secret societies, oracles, title conferring societies, and age grade organizations are all traditional means of government. The role of each in the political processes of respective village-groups differ sharply. However, there emerges a general pattern of political process which is shared by all Igbos as explained by Uchendu,

There are two layers of political structure: the village and the village group. At the village level of government (this varies in size and population), the accepted practice is a direct democracy, a system which has survived the British contact. At the village group level, a representative system is adopted; equality among the associating villages is maintained through the principle of equal "sharing of kola" and equal contribution of material resources needed for the survival of the group. The varying internal segmentation of each village does not change the principle of equality among the village-group.<sup>11</sup>

Each village is, however, autonomous and "sovereign" in most matters concerning it. The political system is based on councils and competition. Leadership is democratic in

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<sup>10</sup>L. Franklin Blitz, The Politics and Administration of Nigerian Government (London: Sweet and Maxwell, Lagos: African University Press, 1965), p. 27.

<sup>11</sup>Victor C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), p. 39.

character, and the village government gives wide latitude to youth. "It is ability rather than age that qualifies for leadership."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, government in Igboland is to a large degree entrusted in the hands of village chiefs who are mostly elders. These chiefs preside over village meetings and ameliorate disputes. This system that combines popular participation with weighting for experience and ability was learned and perfected over centuries of exposure to change in the Igbo process of expansion, and intermingling with other peoples.

The structure of the Igbo political system belongs to the category of native African political systems classified by Potholm as Acephalous, autonomous village systems. He described this political system which is also exhibited by the Anyi, Bete, Baoule, Didia, and Bakwe of Ivory Coast, and the Swahili-speaking Zaramo, and Keveri groups of Tanzania coast as

. . . based on associations which may be joined by individuals whose positions of importance are based not primarily on kinship but on achievement. The affairs of the village are supervised by elected officers and village councils. Communal economic activities are widespread.<sup>13</sup>

In Igboland, there are divisions into towns which are subsequently subdivided into villages, and finally the extended family groups. The village political system is based on

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>13</sup>Christian P. Potholm, Four African Political Systems (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 85.

the meeting of representatives from respective family groups who assemble to discuss issues of importance to the village, and reach a binding decision as need be. Most representatives from families are usually elder heads of the represented families. Since it is based on experience and achievement, mostly elders qualify to be in this Village Council.

When a problem arises that encompasses the whole village, the respective villages elect representatives to represent them in these meetings known as the town council. Sometimes the town council will form committees to investigate special matters like the consultation of oracles, representation of the town in a special event in another town, or to investigate the cause of a specific problem. This is usually based on competence, expertise, and experience.

Finally, in intertown meetings, a kind of provincial council, town representatives are chosen from the members of the town councils, to represent the town in the province.

This forms, essentially, the basis of Igbo political system. There is no clear leader--Acephalous, except the eldest men or the prominent person that is sometimes picked to preside over the meetings. In the village level, the villages are autonomous. Hence the reference to it as a system of villages, and village groups presided over by elders. Like the U.S. democracy, which grew from the



New England town meeting, a more efficient democracy, to the less efficient democracy that it is today in terms of direct popular participation, the Igbos still retain the small village group type of democracy which places them among the best practicing democrats in the world. It is, therefore, remarkable the nature and the extent to which true democracy is practiced in Igboland. A French visitor commented that true liberty existed in Igboland, though its name was not inscribed on any monument.<sup>14</sup> Another early visitor to a Niger Igbo town said that he felt he was in a free land among a free people.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, on the process of change and contact that gave rise to the Igbo as a major political faction in Nigeria, Curtis and Bohannan wrote,

The Ibo of eastern Nigeria had a common culture and a language made up . . . of mutually intelligible dialects. But they had no sense of identity as Ibos until the nineteenth century--no common state, no common history. Igboland itself was divided into independent village groups . . . within a century, an identity first imposed from the outside as an identification became a reality and ended as a major force in Nigerian politics.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ferrier to Poirier, 26 Nov. 1906, in L'Echo des Missions Africains de Lyon (1907), p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Henry Johnson, The Mission on the Upper Niger, in Church Missionary Intelligencer (Sept. 1882), p. 547.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Bohannan and Philip Curtis, Africa and Africans (New York: The National Gardens Press, 1971), p. 348.

Sociology of the Igbo

At this point I aim to shed some light on the manner in which Igbo character manifests itself in their disposition. This will also help the reader to better comprehend why and how the Igbo played and play the role they do in Nigerian politics. Concerning the major tribes of Nigeria, Walter Schwarz wrote,

nothing endears Nigeria more to the foreigner than the subtle contrasts between its main ethnic groups. The dignified Hauser, God-fearing and conservative; the inscrutable Yoruba, lazy and devious, the clever Ibo, go-getting and adaptable. . . . The Ibo is quickest to learn; he is at home in an office, a factory, a Rotary club or a ballroom. Yet in the social and political arts of living with other peoples in a federation, without getting himself heartily disapproved of, he has failed totally and disastrously.<sup>17</sup>

If the Igbo are 'clever' it probably should be attributed to the fact that their overcrowded and agriculturally poor region has compelled them to seek their fortunes abroad in large numbers. Their individualistic culture offered no stumbling blocks to western modernization. A people from a largely fragmented society that had no empires or strong central leadership or even important chiefs, made for physical and social mobility. In fact among the Ibo, it is the aggressive and go-getter that is admired over the cool and calm. Thomas Hodgkin had this to say about the Igbo:

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<sup>17</sup>Walter Schwartz, Nigeria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968), pp. 252-253.

The Egboes [Ibo] are considered the most imitative and emulative people in the whole of West Africa . . . they always possess a desire of superiority, and make attempts to attain it, or excel in what is praiseworthy, without a desire of depressing others. . . . They cannot be driven to act; they are most stubborn and bullheaded; but with kindness they can be made to do anything.<sup>18</sup>

The characteristic attitude of the contemporary Ibo have also been summed up as that of extreme aggressiveness and enterprising individualism found in conjunction with an equally striking degree of tolerance and gregariousness.<sup>19</sup>

The Igbo are, furthermore, a people with great commercial bent. Their enthusiasms and success as traders have carried them to the four corners of Nigeria. Later this drive for accumulation would be readily adaptable to the cash nexus, making the Ibo a driving force in Nigerian business and politics.

Due to these qualities, the Ibo has managed to make many enemies for himself throughout Nigeria; an adversity that may be a byproduct of envy, jealousy and inferiority complex on the part of his fellow countrymen. Probably further reason why the other Nigerian peoples felt thus towards Ibos is because of the characteristic clannishness, flamboyant, and overt arrogance of the Ibos and the much talked about Ibo favoritism in getting jobs. The

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Hodgkin, Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 350. A contribution by J. Africanus Horton, Yoruba and Ibo.

<sup>19</sup> John E. Flint, Nigeria and Ghana (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1966) p. 64.

Ibos exhibited much pride, and viewed other Nigerians, especially Hausas, as backward, passive, and extremely stupid while reserving a place of omnipotence to themselves. The Ibo tended to dominate others even in their own tribe. A good sample of how the Ibo views himself is aptly captured in this statement by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe which was considered a tribalistic statement by many. He said:

It would appear that the God of Africa has created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Concerning this antipathy, Frederick Forsyth wrote,

Ironically it is their hard work and their success that have contributed to make the Biafran (Ibo) so unpopular in Nigeria, and notably in the North. Other characteristics are adduced to explain the antipathy they manage to generate; they are pushful, uppitty and aggressive say detractors; ambitious and energetic say defenders. They are money-loving and mercenary says one school; uncanny and thrifty says the other. Clannish and unscrupulous in grabbing advantages, say some; united and quick to realize the advantage of education, say others.<sup>21</sup>

The significance of writing a sociology of the Igbo is that it will make clear to the reader the character of the Igbo--his driving force. It is generally accepted that the different tribes in Nigeria possess distinguishing characteristics: these characteristics represent the bases of each tribe's contribution, and the nature of

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Crowder, A Short History of Nigeria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), p. 278.

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Forsyth, The Biafra Story (Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 106.

their political and social disposition in and towards other Nigerians. The Igbo is not an exception to this. For instance, the Igbos are known to be given to commercial migration, and they can be found in all parts of the country pursuing commercial engagements. Their ardent pursuit of education and tribal promotion lent itself to greater Igbo involvement in the civil service, and the placement of other Igbos in civil service positions when they happen to gain leadership--nepotism. This process contributed to their domination of the Nigerian Civil Service.

In summation, the role that the Igbo played and continues to play in the politics of Nigeria owes a great deal to their socialization.

## CHAPTER 3

### Colonial Period and European Influences

This section is intended to introduce the reader to the period of time when the Ibo came under British influence, which marked the beginning of their journey into being part of Nigeria.

The chiefs of Nigeria prevented the Europeans from penetrating into the interior so that they would not interfere with their position as middlemen in the trade between the interior and the Europeans who were restricted to the coast. The first Europeans to visit Nigeria were the Portuguese, and their aim was slave trade from which they raked exorbitant profits. Then came the French, Dutch, Swedes, Germans, Spaniards and the British. It was the British who colonized Nigeria.

With the declaration of the slave trade as illegal by the British in 1807, European traders were compelled to turn to legitimate trade in palm oil, spices, and ivory. The British policy at this time under Palmerson was to suppress the slave trade by diplomacy, or if needed, by force.<sup>1</sup> Then followed a period of some seventy years of

<sup>1</sup>Sir Geary M. Neville William, Nigeria Under British Rule (London: Methuens and Company, 1927), p. 25.

trade which was conducted by private European trading companies, and later (1886-1900) by the chartered Royal Niger Company, formed under Sir George Goldie as a result of his amalgamation of all rival companies. The Berlin Conference of 1885 submitted to the British claim to the Niger River Basin, and Britain gave the Royal Niger Company power to administer, conclude treaties, and levy customs. Anene wrote that, "The Berlin Conference of 1885 secured for Britain international recognition of her paramouncy of interest in the area."<sup>2</sup> The British government, in 1900, took over control from the Royal Niger Company, with Sir Frederick Lugard as High Commissioner of Nigeria. Britain proclaimed these coastal trading areas the Oil Rivers protectorate. It included most of the Delta and the swampy coast of Calabar. The 'oil' of the title was of course palm-oil.<sup>3</sup> Finally, in 1893 Britain extended the protectorate over the hinterland and renamed it the Niger Coast protectorate.<sup>4</sup> The British, of course, took a paternalistic view of this situation and projected it as a burden, and an attempt to protect the people of this area under discussion against the intent of other

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<sup>2</sup>J. C. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906, Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate (Cambridge: The University Press, 1966), p. 61.

<sup>3</sup>Sir Rex Niven, Nigeria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher, 1967), p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), p. 42.

colonial nations. Burns wrote, ". . . no nation has taken the interest in the welfare of the natives that we have . . . for many years there has been a British Consul appointed to reside among them."<sup>5</sup> But contrary to this quote is the prevailing view among Nigerians that all British policies--such as the appointment of resident consuls--were most likely promulgated to ensure a better overseeing of British interests, not that of the natives, as Britain claimed. That these policies sometimes promoted the well being of the natives is a fact, but the view of Nigerians is that the benefits were byproducts of policies designed to foster British goals. For instance, the construction of roads undertaken by the British was meant to improve communication links and movement which helped the movement of troops to hold the colony against native revolts, and facilitate trade with the interior. The same roads later benefited the natives as an improved infrastructure for commerce and a link between native peoples.

More than three decades earlier, in 1961, the British had annexed the settlement of Lagos as a colony, ostensibly for the purposes of stopping the trade in slaves. Lagos at this time was under the jurisdiction of Gold Coast Colony (now Ghana) and Sierra Leone, resident governor in 1874-1886 and 1866-1974 respectively. But Lagos was

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<sup>5</sup> Sir Alan Burns, History of Nigeria (London: George Allen and Marwin Ltd., 1964), p. 146.



made an independent colony. In 1900, the Niger Coast protectorate was merged with Lagos Colony to form the protectorate of Southern Nigeria, bringing the British squarely in Igboland. Aside from the protectorate and Colony of Southern Nigeria, there was also the protectorate and Colony of Northern Nigeria; its description is outside the scope of this study, but requires mention to enable the reader to understand a later section on amalgamation of Nigeria. This amalgamation automatically introduced the Igbo into the politics of Nigeria.

When the British came to Igboland, they encountered a remarkably different culture that lacked the elaborate kingdoms found in the north and west. This made administration by indirect rule\* difficult, so they set up chiefs from wealthy--mostly commercially successful Igbos. These chiefs became known as warrant chiefs, because of the fact that their chieftaincy was a result of British warrants, and did not have popular backing. They also set up courts that had no relation to Igbo culture and therefore, alienated them. The district officers and commissioners became their concocted route to indirect rule in Igboland,

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\*Indirect rule was the governmental system introduced by the British in the colonial territory of Nigeria. It entailed ruling the native people through the native kings or kingdoms.

In Igboland there were no kings, so warrant chiefs were set up to satisfy that role.

but these only led to disagreement with the Igbos during which the British sometimes employed excessive military force.

When Britain attempted to take over political control of Igboland, there were resistances and protests. A nativistic religious movement, the ekumeku, which sprang up, inspired feverish messianic enthusiasm. The rumor that Igbo women were being assessed for taxation sparked off the 1929 Aba riots, a massive revolt of women that was unprecedented in Igbo history.

The Igbo, who took part as middlemen in the palm produce and slave trade through the Arochukwu Oracle and cult, and were themselves enslaved, soon became harmonized with their politico-colonial faith. They then quickly took advantage of the economic opportunities presented by better roads, wider markets, and the chance to purchase mechanically produced goods through paid labor, and export produce--as the Igbo later took opportunity of a larger Nigeria after amalgamation to go to other parts of Nigeria to seek jobs and commerce. The Igbo also took advantage of the European introduced modern schools (missionary) to acquire an education which he values greatly. Furthermore, due to the fact that his culture provided no obstacle to change and reception of alien culture, the Igbo believes "that change is necessary for the realization

of long-term goals, and whatever improves the individual and community is acceptable to him."<sup>7</sup> He also took advantage of the Civil Service system introduced by the British. So when the time came to hand over Nigeria to Nigerians the Igbo was ready to provide the civil service, military, educational and social leadership of the country. This is manifest in the way the Igbo controlled the Nigerian civil service, military, had more than their fair share in government, and were commercially successful before the Nigerian Crisis of 1967 which will be discussed in a later section.

#### Amalgamation of 1914

Nigeria was before 1914 arbitrarily divided into two units, "Southern" and "Northern." The division was instituted by the British when they colonized the geographical area today united as Nigeria. But later, with their internal communication and administrative control rapidly extending, the division presented many drawbacks to the British. The British policies in these areas did not necessarily originate from home, but were formulated as needed by the administrative officers who represented the home government, and were changed frequently. Besides, the existence of two separate governments in a geographically united area, which represented a source of very lucrative internal trade for centuries, the employment of two different British personnel in one region divided into two,

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

with ideals in the two regions influenced by the idiosyncrasies of the administrative officers, tended to foster divergencies in the treatment of important administrative questions. It also promoted numerous difficulties, so the British decided that, "the time-honoured expedient of . . . a more effective occupation"<sup>8</sup> must be put into play. As one proponent of amalgamation, Morel, wrote,

The present day dual system of administration, with its artificial territorial boundaries, its different methods, and its inevitable rivalries, has served its term and should be brought to an end as speedily as possible. The situation . . . is incongruous-- in some respects absurd.<sup>9</sup>

At this time the respective administrations of Southern and Northern Nigeria worked and functioned for themselves. So since Nigeria was a single geographical unit, British imperial policies suffered from a treatment which regarded the interests of one section as not only distinct from but in certain cases antagonistic to the interest of the other. A further controlling factor in the British aim to amalgamate Nigeria was the landlocked position of Northern Nigeria. The North was a vast protectorate totally shut off from the seaboard by Southern protectorate which was less than four times its size, had no coastline, and the custom dues from its trade were being collected by the South. This meant that Southern Nigeria enjoyed a richer

<sup>8</sup>John E. Flint, Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup>E. D. Morel, Nigeria, Its Peoples and Its Problems (London: Frank Case and Co., Ltd., 1968), p. 187.

revenue than the North. So the British decided on amalgamation, most likely, as a means of dividing or using the revenues of the territory for the benefit of the protectorate at large, and instituted a common administration with a unified chain of command. The most notable proponent, who was also the main architect under whom the amalgamation was accomplished, was Lord Lugard. He stated that, "The whole system and policy on which this country has been run, not only in the old days but right up to now, seems to me wrong . . . and my objective was the creation of a dependent state, guided and controlled by British officers."<sup>10</sup> The Lugard's Scheme of Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria concluded the process of bringing the whole of Nigeria under one administration for the first time.

One point that is necessary to mention here is the fact that this amalgamation was economically motivated. Arthur Nwankwo and Samuel Ifejika in considering British aims in amalgamating Nigeria, stated that:

Britain's overriding interest in Nigeria was economic, and the step to amalgamate was aimed at assuring profits and exploitation of local resources.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Professor Ajayi held that,

The British were not seeking to unify Nigeria. They were not religious or political reformers

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<sup>10</sup>I. F. Nicolson, The Administration of Nigeria 1900-1960, Men, Methods, and Myths (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 180 and 212.

<sup>11</sup>Arthur Nwankwo and Samuel Ifejika, Biafra: The Making of a Nation (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 32.

seeking an empire where new religious or political principles could be enforced. They were essentially traders from abroad anxious to establish a situation favourable for the growth and development of their trade. They had naval power and military power and technical ability far above anything in the country, and when time came they were willing to use these to secure the conditions necessary for making their trade flourish.<sup>12</sup>

The official "birth" of Nigeria can be dated back to January 1, 1900 when the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were created,<sup>13</sup> but it was on January 1, 1914, that the process began when George Taubman Goldie consolidated the British companies on the Niger and bought out their French rivals, ultimately ending in the forming of a united political entity called Nigeria--a nation inhabited by a medley of formerly warring tribes with no common culture. Thus for the first time, the political and social faith of the Igbo became inextricably tied to that of other Nigerians. Hence the role of the Igbo in Nigerian politics commended.

#### Independence 1960

With the amalgamation of 1914 the Igbo became part of Nigeria under British rule, and from 1914-1950 the nation still remained an aggregation of diverse peoples bound together by alien rule. The British established a

<sup>12</sup> Ade J. F. Ajayi, Milestone in Nigerian History (London: Longman Group Limited, 1980), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Robert O. Tilman and Taylor Cole, The Nigerian Political Scene (Durham: Duke University Press, 1962), p. 46.

legislative council during this period in which 12 of the 45 members were Nigerians drawn from the east, west and north.

In 1945, Sir Arthur Richards who governed Nigeria at the time, proposed a constitution which called for a unitary form of government in which administration would be divided between the three regions, each with its own legislative house, but took direction from the capital in Lagos. This was the Richards Constitution and it met with rejection from the three regions as it precipitated coal miners strike at Enugu, riots in Aba and Onitsha, and resulted in the death of 21 miners in Igboland-Enugu.

The Macpherson Constitution was, therefore, introduced and convened at Ibadan to decide whether Nigeria should be a federal state. The Conference agreed on a federal system with a bicameral legislature to take effect in the north and west, and a unicameral system to be instituted in the east (Igboland). According to the Constitution, each region was to delegate four ministers to the federal legislature. A major bone of contention here was "whether regionalism and federalism might aggravate centrifugal and communal tendencies."<sup>14</sup> The Mcpherson Constitution of 1951 provided no room for opposition leaders in all the houses and there was no provision for separate dissolution of a regional

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<sup>14</sup>John Hatch, Nigeria: The Seeds of Disaster (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1970), p. 254.

legislature. This represented a departure from the normal parliamentary system, and made the constitution a ground for problems. Hence it was rejected.

In 1953, another Constitutional Conference was called in London to rectify the contentions that emerged with the 1951 constitution. Coleman wrote that the following issues had to be resolved:

- 1) . . . whether Nigeria would be a federal state with limited and specific powers allocated to the central government and leave others to the regions;
- 2) that each of the regional governments would be controlled by Nigerian ministers having effective authority over personal affairs of their departments, with a Nigerian "premier" at their head;
- 3) that full internal self government would be granted to those regions desiring it in 1956; and that within three years (i.e., not later than August 31, 1956) another conference would be held for the purpose of examining further questions on self government.<sup>15</sup>

Disagreement occurred regarding the structure of the federal government. The East (Igbo) and the West agreed on a federal structure, but the North argued for a confederacy that would allot more power to the regions leaving the center with the power over customs and defense, but the federal structure was adopted. There was a rivalry between the East (Igbo) and the West over the status of Lagos. The Easterners wanted to be a federal territory while the

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<sup>15</sup> James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism (Los Angeles: University of California Press, Berkeley, 1958), p. 371.



Westerners wanted it to be part of western Nigeria region and Awolowo; the speaker for the west threatened secession if this was not done, but apparently he was bluffing because the Lagos question was settled as a federal territory in favor of the Eastern region (Igbo). The East decided to have self government in 1956.

Again in 1957, a Nigerian Constitutional Conference was called to decide on full regional government. The Nigerians agreed to present the following issues in London, the site of the conference: (1) regional self government, (2) independence by 1959, (3) interim changes in the central government leading to transfer of power, and (4) a unity insuring constitution.<sup>16</sup> These proposals were admitted by Britain with very minor modification. The Conference produced a bicameral system of parliament to set up a Senate with eight members from each region, and a House of 320 members drawn according to population. Election in the East (Igbo) and the West was to be based on universal suffrage, while the north was on universal male suffrage.

Then there was the independence constitution conference which was called to adopt a series of decisions that were taken from past conferences. The Nigerian leaders chose the Westminster model. This meant that the

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<sup>16</sup>Marguerite Cartwright, The Negro History Bulletin, 21 (May 1958), 71.

constitution and form of government was federal with regions having residual powers, and both central and regional governments operated bicameral legislatures and the Westminster form of parliament. It further provided for (1) multi-party system; (2) ministers that were individually and collectively responsible to parliament; (3) frequently convening houses; and (4) frequent elections.

The constitution also provided for fundamental human rights, an electoral commission, legislative power, as well as the offices of Prime Minister and Governor General. In case of constitutional disputes, a Supreme Court was provided to settle it.<sup>17</sup> The Queen was the head of state but the Governor General represented her. Under this Constitution Nigeria was granted full independence in 1960. In the constitutional and preindependence politics of Nigeria, the Igbos were represented under the NCNC political party (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons) whose Igbo leader was Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe who was also the first Nigerian Governor General and president. The NCNC was basically an Igbo party, even though it was founded as a national one. It totally controlled the politics of the Eastern region (Igboland).

The NCNC will be discussed in more detail in a later section.

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<sup>17</sup> John P. MacIntosh, Nigerian Government and Politics (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 29.

## CHAPTER 4

### Igbo Political Organizations

#### The Igbo State Union

The Igbo played his politics in Nigeria through an almost total mobilization behind the major Igbo political party--NCNC, which will be discussed in detail later. At this point I will review the Igbo state union. In the 1930s, all-Igbo unions were organized by members of the Igbo clans in most major cities in Nigeria, especially Lagos and Port-Harcourt. The Igbo Union of Lagos, organized in 1934, was a "pillar of strength" for the NCNC. During the NCNC's inauguration in 1944, the leaders of the Igbo Union of Lagos organized an Igbo Federal Union, encompassing all the respective Igbo unions throughout Nigeria. In December 1948, a Pan-Igbo Conference was held at Port Harcourt "to organize the Igbo linguistic group into a political unit in accordance with the NCNC freedom charter."<sup>1</sup> The freedom charter provided for the organization of Nigeria into states based on cultural and linguistic affinity, and the founders of the Igbo state union

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<sup>1</sup>West African Pilot, January 4, 1949.

did anticipate the future organization of the Igbo country as a member state of the Commonwealth of Nigeria. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who was later to be the President of the NCNC, was elected its first president. Theoretically the Igbo State Union consisted of all branches of Igbo village, clan, divisional and provincial unions. It was a self-proclaimed spokesman, protector, and arbiter of the Igbo people and claimed wide powers. Opponents of the NCNC--the dominant political party in Eastern Nigeria, described the Igbo State Union as, "the all powerful, directing agent of a monolithic, organized Ibo people. . . . An Ibo organization, intent on gaining Ibo hegemony in Nigeria."<sup>2</sup> The Igbo State Union formed the base of Igbo grass roots political participation in Nigeria and the backbone of the more national NCNC. It promoted the Igbo Day to commemorate Igbo accomplishments, and foster a sense of Iboness. All the political engagements of the Union cannot be contained here but it played a very active part in the rejection of the 1963 census results which made it a target of Northern attack. They claimed, among other things, that they had a well orchestrated plan to control the country, as could be seen in the Igbo control of most federal posts, and as the federation began to disintegrate

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<sup>2</sup>Audrey C. Smock, Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 17.

around 1966 the Igbo identity became more salient. The Union also testified to the British government in 1957 in the inquiry into the fears of minorities in Nigeria in relation to the rights of minorities.

#### The Zikist Movement

The Igbo political organization was very radical in outlook and called itself the Zikist movement. This movement is only being considered here because it was originated by the Igbos. Its outlook was general, because it was an ideological organization "made up of impatient young men who wished to push the British out fast and introduce a Left Wing Socialist order."<sup>3</sup> The Zikist movement which flourished from 1946-1950, was an organization inspired by a patriotic idealism that could not be reconciled with the tribalistic and selfish tendencies of the nationalists who led Nigeria. Their program became a militant, positive action. According to a Zikist president from the North, Mallams H. R. Adballah, "This is the age of action, plain blunt and positive action."<sup>4</sup>

Zikism was the conception of A. A. Nwafor Orizu (Ibo), a Nigerian student in the United States during World

<sup>3</sup>Franklin L. Blitz, The Politics and Administration of Nigerian Government (London: Sweet and Maxwell, Lagos: African Universities Press, 1965), p. 146.

<sup>4</sup>Frederick A. O. Schwartz, Nigeria: The Tribe, the Nation, or the Race (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 64.

War II. In his book, Without Bitterness, he wrote that, "Zikism is the redemption of Africa from social wreckage, political servitude, and economic impotency, it must also mean extricating Africa from ideological confusion, psychological immaturity, spiritual complacency, and mental stagnation."<sup>5</sup> The name "Zikist" was not chosen to make a personality cult of Dr. Azikiwe (an Igbo) who is an embodiment of a new thought, a self-made man who put himself through school in the United States, first President, and Governor General of Nigeria, and the President of the Igbo State Union and NCNC. The Zikist movement was inaugurated in Lagos in February, 1946.<sup>6</sup> The Zikists called for revolution, and later led and stirred riots in the east, after some coal miners were shot and killed by policemen. They damaged property and caused much social disorder against the British.

As the revolutionary call of the Zikists in Nigeria championed by Nduka Eze and Mokwugo Okoye (both Igbos) spread, "A twenty-four-year-old Igboman, Chukuwonka Ugokwu, attempted to assassinate British Chief Secretary to the government, Sir Hugh Foot. The government reacted swiftly, jailing many Zikists and banned the movement on April 13, 1950."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard L. Sklar, Nigerian Political Parties (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC)

The NCNC was the main organ of the Igbo political organization and participation in Nigerian national politics. Its leader was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, better known as "Zik." On the support for NCNC, Blitz wrote: "It was, in fact, the Ibo who were the chief support of the NCNC, which was thus strongest outside Lagos in the Eastern region."<sup>8</sup> Dr. Azikiwe was president of the Ibo State Union. The idolization of "Zik," the self-made man, by a people who valued education above almost anything else, coupled with the natural susceptibility of the many Ibos who, forced to emigrate from their villages by population pressure, had been brought abruptly into contact with modern economic forces, made them his most fervent followers.

The NCNC was formed when students of Kings College, Lagos, struck against the use of their dormitories by soldiers in the rainy season of 1944 (spring). Seventy-five students were expelled, and eight were drafted into the Army by the British. Thereupon, the Nigerian Students Union, which was frustrated about the lack of a central political organization to coordinate the activities of the existing groups, convened a meeting at Glover Hall in Lagos. At the meeting on August 26, 1944, the Nigerian

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<sup>8</sup>Franklin L. Blitz, The Politics and Administration of Nigerian Government (London: Sweet and Maxwell, Lagos: African University Press, 1965), p. 145.

National Council, which soon changed its name to the National Council of Nigerians and the Cameroons, was formed.<sup>9</sup> When Cameroon was detached from Nigeria, its name changed to the National Council of Nigerian Citizens. Herbert Macaulay was elected its president and Dr. Azikive was General Secretary. Apart from the Nigerian Union of Teachers and the Nigerian Youth Movement, other organizations like the literary societies, social clubs, professional organizations, labor unions, and more than one hundred tribal, village, or clan, including the Igbo State Union, became members. The founders claimed that, "believing our country is rightfully entitled to liberty and prosperous life, . . . resolved to . . . work in unity for realization of our ultimate goal of self-government within the British Empire."<sup>10</sup>

The NCNC, therefore, was the only national party which, according to Dr. Azikiwe (Igbo) who later became its president on the death of Herbert Macaulay,

was founded in order to unify the various elements of our communities, to crystallize the natural aspirations of our people, to express in concrete form the trend of public opinion, and to emancipate our nation from the manacles of political bondage.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>F.A.O. Schwartz, *Nigeria: The Tribes, the Nation, or the Race--The Politics of Independence* (Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1965), p. 60.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>11</sup>Nnamdi Azikive, *Zik: A Selection From Speeches* (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 163.



By 1950 the basic outline of the new constitution, to be introduced in 1951, was widely known--it provided mainly for strong regional government--and the anti-Azikiwe group among the Yoruba elite saw a depressing possibility that the NCNC, which had a secure domination of the Eastern region (Igboland), might win and come to power in the west (Yorubaland). The old Yoruba party, the Nigerian Youth Movement, which Azikiwe broke away from and caused to decline, was totally an ineffective instrument; in Lagos it could not even match the popularity of the Nigerian National Democratic party (NNDP), an NCNC affiliate. Hence, the Yoruba Cultural Society Egbe Omo Oduduwa was quickly fashioned into a political party (Action Group--AG) under Mr. Obafemi Awolowo. "It was this kind of rivalry between the Ibo and the Yoruba that increasingly turned the NCNC into an Ibo instrument."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, due to its Ibo leadership, the roots of the NCNC narrowed into Iboland where it became the chief instrument of Ibo political role in Nigeria until its ban in 1966 by the military government of General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi (Ibo), in an attempt to remove the causes of differences and unify Nigeria. The NCNC was never strong in the North where the N.P.C. (Northern Peoples Congress) dominated.

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<sup>12</sup> John E. Flint, Nigeria and Ghana (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), p. 163.

## CHAPTER 5

### Igbos in National Politics

The emergence of the NCNC as an Igbo political party marked the beginning of a political organization that represented the Igbo in Nigerian national politics, especially starting from the general election of 1959.

### General Election of 1959

One of the most important political events in the emerging nation (from colonialism) was the general election of 1959. The election was to decide who would head the independent government from 1960. On the basis of the 1959 Nigerian general election, the NCNC (Igbo) emerged second to the NPC (North). Dr. Azikiwe (Igbo) became president and Balewa was elected Prime Minister. The NPC and NCNC/NEPU (Northern Elements Progressive Union), an NCNC ally, formed the government. "The official numbers of the major parties in the new House of Representatives were NPC 148, NCNC 89, and Action Group 75."<sup>1</sup>

The remarkable part of the 1959 general election was how well the NCNC and its Alliance Party, NEPU, did in other regions besides the East, which they won in a

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<sup>1</sup>K. W. J. Post, The Nigerian Federal Election of 1959 (Oxford: The University Press, 1963), p. 349.

landslide. While other major parties tended to lose support in regions outside their own, the NCNC did quite well outside its regions while defeating other parties like NPC (North) and the Action group (West) in the East (NCNC-Igbo).

To give some insight into the outcome of this election regarding the performance of NCNC in comparison with other parties in the regional election, reference is made to the following table.<sup>2</sup>

<u>Geography</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>% Vote</u>	<u>Seats</u>
Totals	NPC	28.2%	134
	NCNC/NEPU*	36.1%	89
	Action Group	27.6%	73
	Others	8.1%	16
East	NCNC/NEPU*	64.6%	58
	Action Group	23.1%	14
	Others	12.3%	1
West	Action Group	49.5%	33
	NCNC/NEPU*	40.2%	21
	NPC	1.7%	0
	Others	8.6%	-
North	NPC	61.2%	134
	Action Group	17.2%	25
	NCNC/NEPU	16.1%	8
Lagos	NCNC/NEPU	55.9%	2
	Action Group	43.8%	1
	NPC	0.2%	-

\*The party that is asterisked is the NCNC (Igbo) Eastern Region.

<sup>2</sup>Richard L. Sklar, Nigerian Political Parties: Power In An Emergent African Nation (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 36, 37.

The National Census Controversy and the Igbo

The schism in Nigeria, caused by strong tribal differences, seriously undermined its national unity. Adding to the disunity was the controversy over the new census. Nigeria is a country that is divided into strong tribal units, and the result of the census was to have a decisive effect on who was going to run the country. The British, in 1952-53, took a census that had Nigeria's population at about thirty-one million. Specifically the outcome was as follows:<sup>3</sup>

Northern Region	17,573,000
Western Region	6,408,000
Eastern Region	7,497,000
Federal Territory of Lagos	272,000

The political significance of the census to the Igbo was that it assured the dominance of the North in the federal government, since seats in the federal House of Parliament are based on population of the regions. "Out of the 312 seats in the House, the north received 174,"<sup>4</sup> thus making it an absolute majority, and since Nigeria was regionalized, it appeared that under the census, the Northern Peoples Congress (Northern political party) was to rule in perpetuity.

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<sup>3</sup>Nwankwo and Ifejika, Biafra: The Making of a Nation (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

The Igbos came to view this possible situation as unacceptable; to them it seemed equivalent to colonial domination, except this was internal. The Igbos could not bring themselves to accept the British census, probably due to the fact that they felt that the British wanted to hand power in Nigeria to the northerners whom they trusted, and got along with. This notion held by the Igbos was reinforced when the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Information, Alhaji M. Kokori Abdul, declared in the house: "I have no doubt whatever and without fear that the Northern Peoples Congress has come to stay and is going to rule the Federation of Nigeria forever, as said by the Honourable Premier."<sup>5</sup> As a result of this statement, members of the NCNC (Igbo) walked out of the House and demanded the resignation of Mr. Warren, a Briton, who under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Economic Development headed by a northerner, Waziri Ibrahim, conducted the census. The uproar was such that the Prime Minister, Sir Balewa, ordered a check, and later decided that a new census would be conducted under his supervision. The Prime Minister kept his word to conduct a new census in order to quell the disagreements in the nation that posed a potential danger to the nation's unity. So on the 24th day of February 1964, the census

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

board published the result of the new census of 1963, and the Daily Times of Nigeria reported it as follows:<sup>6</sup>

North	29,777,986
East	12,388,646
West	10,278,500
Mid-West	2,533,337
Lagos	675,352
Total	55,653,821

When the census figures came out, the Igbo continued to assert their distrust for the goals of the North, and still entertained the belief that the North wanted to use the inflation of their population to gain power in Nigeria. It did not seem that any result would satisfy the Igbos as long as it kept them in the minority in the federal Parliament. No sooner had this figure been published than the premier of Eastern Region (Igbo), Dr. Michael Okpara, rejected it. In a statement to that effect, he said:

I have said that we would check the figures and if accurate, would accept them, but if inflated, would reject them. I regret that the inflations disclosed are of such astronomical proportions that the figures obtained, taken as a whole, are worse than useless.<sup>7</sup>

The Igbos seemed to claim that the North inflated their figures a second time (1953 and 1964). Leaders of the

<sup>6</sup>Daily Times, "The Census," Feb. 24, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Census Controversy: One North or One Nigeria? (Emigu: Government Printers, 1964), p. 3.

NCNC also challenged the exactness of the figures. Igbo students at the University of Nsukka (Igbo) joined in the protest. The quarrel over the figures cut a "deep wound" in the Nigerian body politic, and almost disintegrated the country; the coalition government of the NCNC and NPC (North) led by Sir Balewa was severely weakened as a result. It did not seem as if the Igbos, apart from their distrust for the Hausas-North, and the census figures they presented, did have any strong ground to buttress the questions they raised, beside the desire to stop the North from dominating them.

#### General Election of 1964

Earlier, at about the time of self-government in 1956, it was the Northern fear of infinite Southern domination that led to a crisis that culminated in a decision to decentralize Nigeria through federalism. By 1964, the North became strong enough in the national government to arouse Southern fear of a possible Northern domination. It was this Southern fear of Northern domination that led to the election-year crisis that led to a boycott of the elections for the House of Representatives, a freeze on elections in the east (Igbo) and a threat by the east to secede.

The elections commenced with the parties forming alliances. The NCNC (Igbo) allied itself with the dominant Yoruba party in the southwest (Action Group) to form

the United Progressive Alliance (UPGA). To offer opposition to the South the major Northern parties, Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and a western party, NNDP, formed by the western region premier, joined together to form the Nigeria National Alliance (NNA). Dr. Michael Okpara (Premier of Eastern Region-Igbo) was the head of UPGA, while Sadurana of Sokoto (Premier of Northern Region) became the leader of NNA. Other parties like Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and United Middle Belt Congress joined to form the Northern Progressive Front (NPF). The sides then engaged in what probably was the most frenzied election campaign that entailed every kind of imaginable mud slinging and tribalism. The western NNDP claimed that the NCNC (Igbo) and the Action group alliance that formed the UPGA was a sell-out of the political faith of the Yorubas and a scheme aimed towards an eventual Igbo domination. During the election period, the Igbo led UPGA, whose slogan was "pragmatic socialism,"<sup>8</sup> boycotted the elections claiming that there were riggings in the north, destruction of polling booths in Lagos and the refusal of returning candidates to go through the normal nominating procedure in the north. In the East (Igbo) elections were not held, and in Lagos, only a few were held, because the East and Lagos were dissatisfied with

<sup>8</sup>"UPGA List Plan for Niberia," Daily Express, October 1, 1964, p. 1.



Northern conduct.

In the North, however, elections were normal, the NNA had secured 71 seats out of the possible 320 in the federal House before the polling day, and were on their way to clinching a majority. Due to these factors, "the President (Igbo) urged the Prime Minister (Hausa-North) to postpone the election, but the latter declined."<sup>9</sup> This period, the 1964 election, had the same atmosphere as the earlier period of the census in 1963. It was a period of distrust between the Igbos and the Northerners. The Igbos felt that the Hausa-North was trying to gain political dominance in Nigeria, and the Igbos would rather be in power. There seemed to be a certain sense of paranoia among the Igbos, reinforcing the belief that once the north gained power under a federal structure that assured them all the votes they needed from their region, the North, the Igbos, along with the other peoples of Nigeria, would never be able to gain leadership of the country. This, they envisaged, would place them under a system not too different from colonial rule. This scenario was, in my assessment, what the Igbo were trying to keep from taking place. Besides, the Igbos may have been working for a leadership position of their own.

The Dr. Azikiwe (President-Igbo)/Balewa (Prime Minister-North) controversy was born out of the perceived

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<sup>9</sup>"Zik, Balewa Clash," Daily Express, December 29, 1964.

Northern domination as well as the dissatisfaction of the Igbos over the election's conduct.

Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Hausa-North) waited for the president Dr. Azikiwe (Igbo-East) to invite him to form another government, but it soon became evident that Azikiwe was opposed to the election procedure. Post and Vickers wrote, "immediately after the election, President Azikiwe expressed his determination to prevent Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa from forming a new government."<sup>10</sup> Azikiwe said he would resign rather than give his assent to Tafawa Balewa. Intermediaries, however, went quickly to work, seeking a plan whereby the President and Prime Minister might be reconciled. On 4 January 1964, President Azikiwe announced that agreement had now been reached between himself and the Prime Minister; by the 16th the parties making up U.P.G.A. (NCNC-Igbo/Action Group-Yoruba) had given their somewhat grudging assent to the 'Zik-Balewa pact,' as it was popularly known.

One of the persons that quelled this disagreement was Justice Mbanefo (Igbo); with his effort and that of other prominent Nigerians, the major crises that threatened to disintegrate the Federation came to an end. Elections were then held in the East, and the NCNC emerged victorious

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Post and Michael Vickers, Structure and Conflict in Nigeria 1960-1966 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 190.

in a landslide, winning some "75.4% of the votes and 91.0% of the seats with 41% polling."<sup>11</sup>

Due to the Igbo suspicion of the north, the Prime Minister, Balewa, promised to form a broad-based national government so as to appease the suspicious Igbos and other southerners. But when the government was formed, Balewa invited only the Igbos (NCNC), and the Action group, the Southwestern party that allied with the Igbos to form the UPGA was left out. The fact that the Igbos accepted to form a government with the North, leaving their former allies, AG, came to lend credibility to the NNDP (West) claims that an alliance with Igbos would be to the political detriment of the Yorubas. Since the Igbos were only self-seeking, and that their alliance with Action Group (AG) was a design to gain power. In the government, however, the Igbos gained power as part of the national leadership, and the Action Group was seen as the party that brought up the rear.

The Igbos used their new position to place themselves squarely in important positions in the civil services and armed forces. In effect, most of the civil servants and army officers were Igbos. So, besides holding the very helm of the Nigerian leadership--Prime Minister--the Igbos essentially led the nation by manning its

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<sup>11</sup>John P. Mackintosh, Nigerian Government and Politics: Prelude to the Revolution (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 527.

middle manpower administrative and service needs. But at the same period, divisions were beginning to evince themselves in the country's politics. West Africa Magazine wrote, "Nigeria has suffered so many political shocks . . . the split in the western government that led to federal rule in that region . . . the bitter census controversy, . . . the break between the President and Prime Minister after the 1964 federal elections."<sup>12</sup> The divisions in Nigeria, caused by the problems stated by West Africa Magazine, were exacerbated by the great imbalance that existed between the regions. The North overshadowed the East (Igbo) and the West put together, in both area and population. Furthermore, the Northern leader, largely ignoring the views of Eastern (Igbo) political leaders, was calling federal policies from the Northern city of Kaduna.

This was the situation in the country when the Igbo army officers planned, and executed a coup which toppled the government of Sir Balewa, and ultimately led to the coming to power of Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi (Igbo). This coup and the subsequent change of government to the military, whether designed or not, for the first time put the Igbos in the pinnacle of power in Nigeria. From then, Ironsi (Igbo) began to dictate the nation's policies and held sole power.

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<sup>12</sup>West Africa, "Nigeria: Next Ten Years," No. 2781, Saturday, September 26, 1970, p. 1107.

## CHAPTER 6

### The Military in Politics

When Nigeria attained independence in 1960, the general population entertained the hope that the political and economic future of the country would be bright, especially considering the fact that the country's total exports increased between 1958 and 1966. "Government oil revenues from rents, royalties, premium, profit taxes and customs duties soared from \$14 million in 1963 to \$76 million in 1967."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Nigeria seemed very promising due to the availability of a large intellectual pool, agricultural land, and manpower that it had. It had a good chance of transforming itself into an industrial nation, at least, better than any other Black African country. But there were many who thought that the country had problems. Among them was Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, who later was to lead the Igbo secession from Nigeria. He observed that,

Nigeria never was and can never be a united country. The very nature of Nigeria inevitably gave rise to political power groups, goaded by sectional rather than national interests. . . . The veneer of unity generated and maintained

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<sup>1</sup>Sayre P. Schatz, Africa Report, "A Look at the Balance Sheet," 15 January 1970, p. 18.

by the veiled threat implicit in an imperial presence became exposed with the coming of independence, and left Nigeria a disjointed mass.<sup>2</sup>

What Ojukwu and other groups of Nigerian skeptics held was essentially that the country's claim to unity was founded on the institution of colonialism which Nigerians rallied to fight. Once independence was won, sectionalism and tribalism set in and with it, rampant corruption, suspicion, the different forms of injustices, rivalry, discrimination and hate. It was these kinds of problems that caused the Igbo Army officers to hatch a coup to change the leadership of the country, as they claimed.

In January 1966, a handful of young officers, mostly Ibo,<sup>3</sup> under the leadership of major Chukwuma Nzeogwu, frustrated with the problems in the country which the politicians could not seem to cure, and sometimes added to, took it upon themselves to change things. Their goal was to liquidate the prominent political leaders of the major political parties and they largely succeeded, but due to the fact that most of the coup leaders were Igbo, no other tribe but Igbo viewed the coup as an act of goodwill. Others interpreted it as an Igbo plot to dominate the leadership of the country. As one might imagine, the coming to power of Ironsi (Igbo) as a result of the

<sup>2</sup>C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Basil Davidson, Can Africa Survive? (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1974), p. 67.

coup, tended to foster that line of thought; to avert this feeling, Nzeogwu, in a radio broadcast on 15 January, said,

Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that seek to keep the country permanently divided so that they can remain in office as ministers and V.I.P.'s. . . . Our purpose was to change our country and make it a place we could be proud to call our home, not to wage war. . . . Tribal considerations were completely out of our minds.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Backdrop of the Coup

The military coup, which was executed in three venues, cost many lives. In the north, Major Nzeogwu, an Igbo of midwest origin, took a small detachment of men under his command to the palace of the Saduana of Sokoto, the Premier and religious leader of the northern region. They killed him, along with three of his guards who tried to defend him. In two other parts of Kaduna in the north, other groups in the coup killed two Yoruba officers, Brigadier Ademolegun, along with his wife, and Colonel Shodeinde.

At the second venue--Lagos--Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, an Igbo, with lorry-loads of troops from Abeokuta barracks, sought out their objectives. Three officers of northern origin were killed; they were Brigadier Maimalari, Lieutenant-Colonel Pam, and Lieutenant-Colonel Largema. Ifeajuna

<sup>4</sup>Frederick Forsyth, The Biafra Story (Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 35.

himself went after, and killed, the Prime Minister, Sir Balewa, a Northerner. Chief Festus Obotie-Eboh (non-Ibo), midwesterner, was also killed. The only Igbo killed in Lagos was Major Arthur Unegbu for refusing to hand over the key to the Lagos Armory to the coup plotters.

In the western regional capital of Ibadan, the soldiers moved against the Yoruba Premier, Akintola, who resisted with volleys of shots, killing three soldiers before getting killed. The Deputy Prime Minister, Fani Kayode, was arrested but later released.

The plot for the Eastern (Igbo) region failed because the coup planners were stopped by Ironsi (Igbo) who later emerged as the leader of the country. He put together a small detachment, and with a brisk action took over in Lagos.

Furthermore, the other tribes in the nation did not agree with the Igbo reasons for the coup, and their subsequent takeover of power. Due to the fact that many Army officers from other tribes were killed, who, they emphasized, were not politicians that Nzeogwu (Igbo) claimed to be against, it made it seem as if the Igbos simply wanted to eliminate any person that stood between them and power in Nigeria. No matter what the Igbos claimed was their motivation, these acts contradicted them, and they were too wanton for other tribes, especially the Hausa's-North, to ignore.



Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi in Power

In the North, Major Nzeogwu was in total charge. He declared a state of martial law, and set up a provisional government proclaiming himself the military head of the North. But in Lagos, Ironsi had foiled the coup by neutralizing the junior officers and taking command. He released the Deputy Premier of the West, Fani Kayode, and dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Ejoor, a midwesterner, to fly to Enugu (capital of the Eastern region-Igbo) to seize control and secure the Premier's residence before the coup could take effect there. Ejoor succeeded hence Dr. Okpara (Igbo), Premier of the East, was not killed. As soon as Ironsi calmed the situation in the South, the Cabinet met under the chairmanship of Alhaji Dipcharima in order to appoint a Deputy Prime Minister from whom the Army would take orders. The Cabinet was divided as to who should be appointed. The Northerners (NPC) wanted a Northerner appointed to replace Balewa (NPC) who was killed in the coup, but Dr. Orizu (Igbo), who was acting as President of the Republic for Dr. Azikiwe (Igbo) who was out of the country, wanted Dr. Mbadiwe (Igbo), Federal Minister of Trade, to be appointed. However, Ironsi (Igbo) told the Cabinet that he could not guarantee the loyalty of his officers unless the government was handed over to him. The Cabinet conceded, and "Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi and the Army came to power in Nigeria

on the crest of a wave of unprecedented popular support in the South and with the more muted but cautiously optimistic acceptance of the North."<sup>5</sup>

The first major problem of the new government was how to reconcile the fact that Major Nzeogwu had already set up a revolutionary government in the north. Nzeogwu agreed to surrender to the Supreme Commander on two conditions:

- 1) that he be guaranteed immunity from trial.
- 2) that a safe conduct be accorded all those connected with the death of the Saduana of Sokoto.<sup>6</sup>

The Supreme Commander agreed to these terms, but when Major Nzeogwu showed up in Lagos, he was promptly arrested, and detained along with other coup planners. Ironsi, therefore, held sole power as the head of the military government. He then appointed a military government in each region. The military governors were responsible to the Federal Military Government. Ironsi's government started well, but most of the General's actions were idealistic and devoid of objective consideration of the political forces that were at work in Nigeria at the time. His first mistake was the appointment of Sir Francis Nwokedi, an Igbo civil servant, as the leading

<sup>5</sup> John de St. Jorre, The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Rex Niven, Nigeria (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967), p. 117.

commissioner in charge of the unification of the public services. This was a threat to the power of the Northerners who exploited the unity of the Northern regional bloc to keep their leadership over the country. They also claimed that such an important matter as amalgamation of public services ought not to be entrusted unto one man, especially an Igbo. As a result of this Northern uproar, a mid-westerner was added to the commission.

Ironsi (Igbo), who had promised a thorough study of the basic causes of Nigeria's problems formed a group made up of Dr. T. O. Elias--Attorney General--and Chief Rotimi Williams (both westerners) to draw up a foundation for a new constitution. Another commission for economic planning was formed, and entrusted to Chief Simeon Adebbo (West) and Dr. Pius Okigbo (Igbo). The Commission's report arrived at a decision to unite the public services. At the same time in January 1966, Lieutenant Colonel David Efor (Midwest) called for a unitary form of government.

Ironsi was to say in support of centralization that,

. . . the evils of the last regime . . . and the root causes of Nigeria's troubles were corruption, nepotism, inefficiency, and 'regionalism.' 'All Nigerians,' he declared, 'want an end to regionalism. Tribal loyalties and activities which promote tribal consciousness and sectional interests must give way to the urgent task of national reconstruction. The Federal Military Government will preserve Nigeria as one strong nation.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>S. K. Panter-Brick, Nigerian Politics and Military Rule: Prelude to Civil War (London: The Athlone Press, 1971), p. 16.

Ironsi was full of hope for a better Nigeria when he made this statement, but the Northerners felt this centralization would rob them of their main grip over the better educated Igbos and other Southerners. The Igbos, however, were very jubilant with the idea of unification as they (Igbos) were settled in all parts of Nigeria; it also opened avenues for jobs and commerce for them. At this time, the suspicion of the Igbos by other Nigerians was at its height. It was evident that the Igbo leadership was fashioning Nigeria in such a way that it would lessen Northern power and open national life to competition that the most educated and outgoing would win, and the Igbos had a better chance regarding these traits than their fellow countrymen. Furthermore, this period represented the highest stage of Igbo power in Nigeria.

In the North, the commission working on the unification met with hostility. This was especially because the Igbo officers who carried out the coup were not punished. Ironsi put his "strong central government in a federation with a unitary system into effect with decrees numbers 33 and 34."<sup>8</sup> Decree 33 dissolved a large number of organizations, mainly political parties and tribal associations, and banned the formation of any new associations of a

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<sup>8</sup>Bulletin of the African Institute and South Africa,  
"Nigeria: End of a Tragedy," 8 (April 1970): 83.

political nature until January 1969, but he said that the ban might be lifted earlier if the military government accomplished its aims before then. Decree 34 renamed the Federal Military Government the National Military Government, redesigned the regions as groups of provinces, and incorporated all civil servants, federal and regional, into a single public service.

At this stage of events, the North went out of "joint." What commenced as a student demonstration in Kano City against the new changes soon turned into very serious acts of hostility towards Igbos in the North. The section of Kano City called Sabon Gari (Visitors Quarters) where Igbos lived, was stormed by Northern mobs, raping, pillaging, burning, killing, looting and destroying without restraint. This tragedy soon spread to other Northern cities where similar events took place.

Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Usman Katsina, the Military Governor of the North, tried to diffuse the problem by inviting the Emirs (religious leaders) who were the only people that could stop the riots and killing to an emergency meeting to control the situation. However, the Emirs came out demanding that Ironsi revoke decrees 33 and 34 or face a Northern secession. But Ironsi explained to the Emirs that the decrees made no real significant difference in the nature of the Federation or the power, especially in terms of boundaries; that it

only made for an easier and more efficient administration by the newly appointed military governors. The military governors that Ironsi appointed to the regions were appointed pragmatically. Army seniority mattered less than ethnic and administrative compatibility, and he appointed the former civilian governors to act as advisers to the new military men, thus ensuring a degree of continuity.

While all the Ironsi policies were being passed and executed, it was obvious that the Northerners did not like the new changes. They had always seen the military coup and the Ironsi (Igbo) government as well as the new policies as Igbo schemes to gain power. It was this impression that compelled the Northerners to stage a retaliation and counter coup to take over from the Igbos led by Ironsi.

#### The Counter Coup

The counter coup came as swiftly as the first one led by Igbos. This time, it was led by Northerners and directed against Igbos and their national leadership with whom the Northerners disagreed. Furthermore, it was clear that the Northerners would not accept any other solution but to place themselves back at the helm of government in Nigeria. This was substantiated by their refusal to allow Ironsi's second in command to take over when Ironsi was killed. The second in command was Brigadier Ogundipe, a Yoruba, who, at gun point, was forced to

resign by Northern soldiers as he attempted to take over in Lagos. He was replaced by a Northerner Lieutenant Colonel Yakuba Gowon.

The plot to overthrow General Ironsi's government was slow, deliberate and systematic. . . . Conceived at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, it was worked out in details by Northern Nigerian civil servants and politicians and executed by the entire Northern civilians and their military counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

The coup started at Abeokuta barracks in July, 1966, while Ironsi was still on tour of the Federation. A group of Northern soldiers strode into the officers' mess in the Abeokuta barracks and shot their garrison commander and two other senior Igbo officers dead. What had been referred to as the "return match" for the January coup half-jokingly had begun in earnest. The Northern officers seized control of the garrison, and armed the non-commissioned officers of Northern origin who began searching out and killing soldiers of eastern (Igbo) origin. Word was sent to other Northern conspirators at Ikeja barracks where the same carnage took place. Mutinous soldiers of the North took over the International Airport. A call to the west set off the coup there. A cordon of Northern troops was thrown around the government lodge where General Ironsi had been staying as a guest of the western state governor, Lieutenant-Colonel Fajuyi. The Supreme Commander was kidnapped and murdered under Major

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<sup>9</sup> Major-General Alexander A. Madiebo, Retired. The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, Ltd., 1980), p. 29.

Danjuma (North). The Northern soldiers then kept killing Igbo soldiers wherever they could find them, even in the suburbs of Lagos. Nigeria again was left without a head of state. Ogundipe, who was next in line to Ironsi and a Yoruba, was urged by Ojukwu (Igbo), Military Governor of the East, to take power as the Supreme Commander, but the junior officers would not cooperate. Gowon (North), the chief of staff, was then asked to negotiate with the rebels. As de St. Jorre later noted, "A complicated series of negotiations, involving Northern civil servants and politicians as well as soldiers, began in Ikeja barracks. Lieutenant Colonel Murtala Mohammed, a strong-willed but rather unstable Hausa, had emerged as the most powerful spokesman of the mutineers whose initial demands for renunciation of the unity decree and a total separation of Eastern and Northern soldiers in the Army quickly changed into an outright demand for secession and establishment of a republic of the north."<sup>10</sup>

When Ogundipe was forced to resign at gunpoint, Lieutenant Colonel Gowon who, as the only person that could negotiate with the Hausa mutineers, finally emerged as the Supreme Commander. Under Gowon, Nigeria once again headed in no particular direction. The Igbos headed by Ojukwu did not like Gowon for a head, and argued for

<sup>10</sup> John de St. Jorre, The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1972), p. 69.



a Nigeria where the nation would be a loose confederation of states where more power would be given to the regions. The west and midwest favored the creation of more states so that the minority tribes would have more say in the events that affected them, but the north opposed the creation of more states, and wanted to maintain the status quo with them at the top of it.

A conference was called in Lagos that involved many prominent Nigerians to discuss what course the nation should ply to satisfy the Nigerian peoples. Four major proposals were brought forward:

1. A federal system with a strong central government.
2. A federal system with a weak central government.
3. A confederation.
4. A new arrangement peculiar to Nigeria which had not found its way into any dictionary.<sup>11</sup>

But as the Conference proceeded in Lagos, a new round of massacres of Igbos resumed in the northern regions and what happened a second time was unprecedented in Nigeria's history. The story of the massacre was well described by Time, Newsweek magazine, and Sir Rex Niven. Sir Niven wrote that, "The northern people in places like Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, and Jos, fell on the Igbos--and killed considerable numbers. . . . Biafra radio reported 30,000

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<sup>11</sup>Ntieyong V. Akpan, The Struggle for Secession, 1966-1970 (London: Frank Cass, 1972), p. 46.

people as having been killed."<sup>12</sup> Time magazine reported that,

The massacre started at the airport near the 5th Battalion home city of Kano. . . . There were Igbos among the customs officials, and they dropped their chinks and fled, only to be shot down in the terminal. . . . Hausa troops . . . bayonetting Ibo workers in the bar, gunning them down in the corridors, and hauling Ibo passengers off the plane to be lined up and shot. . . . From the airport troops fanned out through downtown Kano, hunting down Igbos in bars, hotels, and on the streets . . . at the railroad station, more than 100 Ibos waiting for the train were cut down. Hausa civilians with machetes, cutlasses, and homemade weapons ransacked, burnt and looted Ibo homes and stores, killing their owners.<sup>13</sup>

In the same issue, Newsweek filed this story:

. . . angry Hausa tribesmen invaded homes and offices where Ibos were likely to be found. With guns, machetes, bottles and iron rods, the northerners beat or murdered any Ibo (or suspected to be Ibo) who fell into their hands.<sup>14</sup>

These reports represent the stark realities of what the average Igbo in the north, far removed from the decisions that precipitated it, had to contend with. Due to this phase of the massacre the hopes of keeping the country together were severely set back; the Igbos became insecure and nervous among other Nigerians, and increasingly sought

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<sup>12</sup>Sir Rex Niven, The War of Nigerian Unity 1967-1970, (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1971), p. 93.

<sup>13</sup>Time, "Nigeria: Massacre in Kano," October 17, 1966, pp. 46-47.

<sup>14</sup>Newsweek, "Africa: Drama in Two Acts," October 17, 1966, p. 54.

collective security among their own people in the Eastern region. Oyediran was to write,

The Ibo killings of May and September 1966 in the North, which were probably the point of no return in the march towards the civil war, were in fact merely a culmination of a series of events starting from the coup on 15 January 1966.<sup>15</sup>

At this point, the military governor of the Eastern region, Colonel Ojukwu, asked all members of non-Eastern origin to leave the east, saying, "I have lost confidence in my ability to continue restraining the violently injured feelings of the people of this region. . . . I have said before that the East would not secede unless she is forced to."<sup>16</sup>

Ojukwu (Igbo), henceforth decided to keep from attending any further meetings in the capital city of Lagos until such a time as his personal safety was assured. In the same period, the cry for secession began to come from the East, mainly among the Igbo. The situation deteriorated further when Ojukwu refused to accept the leadership of Gowon. As the problem grew, General Ankrah, head of Ghana's military government, asked Nigeria's leaders to meet at Aburi, Ghana, in January 1967 to iron out their differences. Ojukwu agreed, and attended the meeting,

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<sup>15</sup>Oyeleye Oyediran, Nigerian Government and Politics Under Military Rule, 1966-79 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), p. 27.

<sup>16</sup>Time Magazine, October 14, 1966, p. 47.

as did other Nigerian leaders, but no agreement materialized regarding how Nigeria should be constituted. Due to this disagreement in Ghana, the gap between the Igbo (East) and the rest of Nigeria widened further. Ojukwu refused to send federal revenues collected in eastern Nigeria to the federal government in Lagos. Gowon, in retaliation, declared a postal blockade against the East. Ojukwu responded by seizing over 200,000 worth of produce belonging to the Northern Nigeria Marketing Board awaiting shipping in Port Harcourt. He also seized an entire rolling stock of the Nigerian railway then passing through the eastern region. The oil from the refinery was disrupted, and a revenue edict was published by Ojukwu to have all eastern revenues paid into the Eastern Nigeria treasury. Furthermore, federal institutions like the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, the harbors, post and telegraph and the coal corporation were seized. A Nigerian Airways F-27 was hijacked and taken to the East. An edict in April 1967 set up the court of appeals in the east as the highest court recognized by the East which declined to have anything more to do with the Federal Supreme Court.

At this stage, the east was virtually a separate country. The general cry from the Igbos at this time was to secede. When Ojukwu, on May 26, 1967, met with the Consultative Assembly, he was officially urged to declare the eastern region (Igbo) a sovereign state, and

the pressure to do this was very strong from the intelligentsia and chiefs. In response, Gowon proclaimed a decree on the 27th of May, 1967, and announced that the country was to be split into twelve states.<sup>17</sup> The move towards practical and final Igbo secession from Nigeria at this time became a fait accompli.

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<sup>17</sup> Sir Rex Niven, The War of Nigeria Unity, 1967-1970 (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1970), p. 103.

## CHAPTER 7

### The Igbo Secession

Following the toppling of the power of the Igbos, represented by the Ironsi regime, the massacre in the north, and the inability of the Igbos to arrive at a solution with other Nigerians on how Nigeria should be structured and governed, the Igbos viewed secession as the only means guaranteeing their safety. Ojukwu, the military governor of the East, then consolidated the predominantly Igbo region as a self-contained state, by keeping for the Eastern region its revenues and also formerly Nigerian institutions and infrastructures. Gowon, in response, divided the nation into twelve states. The twelve state decree divided the Eastern region (Igbo) into three states-- East Central State, Cross River State, and River State. This decree was designed at the time mainly to break the power of the Igbos by removing from their ranks the support of the major coastal tribes like Ibibio, Efik, Ijaw, and many other minor tribes that constitutes a fairly large portion of the Eastern region.

Because of this division of states by Gowon, Ojukwu, in response, on the 30th of May, 1967, made this

announcement to the people of the Eastern region declaring the region a sovereign state, and the Republic of Biafra came to be:

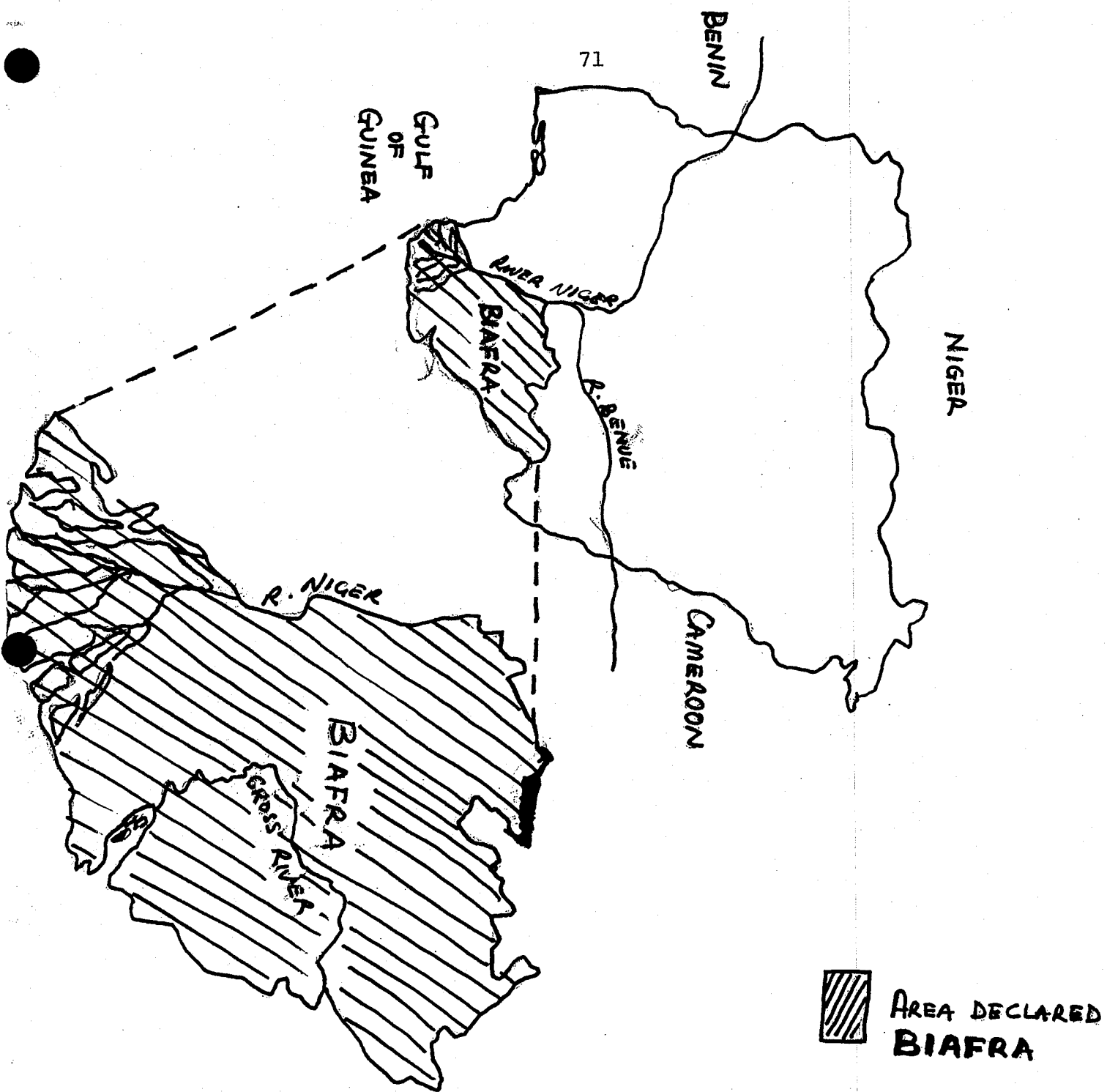
. . . You, the people of Eastern Nigeria, conscious of your duty to yourselves and posterity, aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria . . . . Determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Federal Republic of Nigeria. . . . Having mandated me to proclaim on your behalf . . . that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of 'The Republic of Biafra.'<sup>1</sup>

At this point it was clear that the Igbos would not accept any arrangement in Nigeria that would offer them only a little chance of leadership, nor would they succumb to any national structure they could not control. They, therefore, found it better to form their own state, and it was incontrovertibly clear that they would not be persuaded to return to the Federation of Nigeria without a fight.

Following is a map of Nigeria depicting the area that was declared the Republic of Biafra.

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<sup>1</sup>A. H. M. Kirk-Green, Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook, 1966-1969 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 451-52.



<sup>2</sup>Michael Mok, Biafra Journal (New York: Time-Life Books, 1969), p. 11.



Biafra-Nigeria War, 1967-1970

Gowon soon listed conditions under which the former Eastern region could rejoin the Federation of Nigeria. When the Igbos did not heed, he published a Code of Conduct for war to guide the federal troops. On July 6, 1967, the Nigerian troops attacked Biafra on two fronts. The Nigerian-Biafra war began in earnest. The war dragged on for two and a half years, and both sides fought a very bloody war. Okpaku wrote of the war, "The Nigerian-Biafra Crisis represents the most serious and intense of all inter-African conflicts. In terms of the toll in human resources, it is unparalleled in the history of Africa."<sup>3</sup> As the war developed further, the Federal troops succeeded in pushing Biafrans into a shrinking enclave. By 1970, Biafra was landlocked into an area of about sixty square miles, and the only link with the outside world was the Uli Airport. The massive starvation and disease wakened the consciousness of the world. Public sympathy for the Biafrans was aroused, mainly by the public relations work of Biafran offices in Geneva. The International Red Cross, Caritas International, and the World Council of Churches came to the aid of Biafra with a massive food relief program that formed a major source of nutritious food for millions of starving Biafrans. The French also helped

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Okpaku, Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood, (Westpark, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishers Company, 1972), p. 118.

Biafra by supplying her with arms and ammunitions--through the African country of Gabon.

Biafrans tried to manufacture and equip themselves with locally made weapons from their research and production facilities, but this source could not meet the needs. The actual military analysis of the war is outside the scope of this study.

#### Biafra and African International Politics

As the war raged on in Biafra, the United States had her hands full with Vietnam, Britain and the Soviet Union supported Nigeria in her war to bring back the Igbos into the federal fold, France sympathized with Biafra, Egypt flew Nigerian aircrafts and the foreign countries outside Africa were engaged in gunrunning in the war for profit. In general, a small cold war was taking shape, a kind reminiscent of the Congo earlier in the same decade. Meanwhile, African countries were getting increasingly nervous. It is unrealistic to consider the Nigerian-Biafra war outside the context of the general problems of Africa. In fact, in many ways Nigeria is Africa "writ small." Her problems were representative of many such conflicts and potential upheavals in Africa. There were ethnic and minority problems across the continent, be it in Ghana, in the Uganda, in the Sierra-Leone, in the Seychelles, Madagascar or in the Congo. This fact explains to a large

extent, the caution with which many African leaders approached the problem. Many of them adequately manifested their desire to see the war settled equitably and quickly, but they at the same time showed their sincere concern for the consequences which any particular form of settlement could precipitate elsewhere in Africa. They, therefore, tended to indicate the necessity for a settlement which would guarantee the Igbos their security, but which at the same time would not encourage secessionist tendencies elsewhere on the continent.

The organization of African unity (O.A.U.), which is prevented by its charter to intervene in the internal affairs of nations, could not do anything to stop the conflict. However, in Algiers, Algeria in September 1968, the O.A.U. Conference passed a resolution saying that,

. . . having taken note of the report of the Consultative Committee on Algeria, (The OAU) . launches an appeal to the secessionist leaders to cooperate with the Federal Authorities in order to restore peace and unity in Nigeria; recommends to the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, if the above conditions are fulfilled, to proclaim the personal security of all Nigerians without distinction until such a time as mutual confidence is restored; launches a fresh appeal to all the parties concerned to cooperate in order to ensure quick transit of humanitarian aid to all those who are in need of it; requests all the member states of the U.N.O. to abstain from every action likely to affect the unity, the territorial integrity and peace of Nigeria.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Raph Uwechue, Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), pp. 85-86.

The most important response that Biafra received from some African countries was international recognition. The Biafrans were recognized by the countries that did, mainly as a result of a deep disappointment and frustration at the failure of the Nigerian government to respond to appeals to try to settle the conflict otherwise than by the force of arms.<sup>5</sup> It was definitely not an endorsement of the right of the Igbo to secede. It was the magnitude of the war, and enormity of the suffering it engendered that made the people and leaders in those countries revolt against the method adopted by the Federal Military Government to solve the problem. So, like the secession itself, it was a reaction against, rather than a decision for.

Expressing his reasons for extending recognition to Biafra, President Felix Houphouet-Boigny of Ivory Coast essentially reflected the reasons articulated earlier. Boigny said that:

. . . proclaiming my indignation in the face of the inexplicable indifference, the culpable indifference of the whole world towards the massacres that have taken place in Biafra. . . . I am distressed, outrated, upset and revolting [sic] against the prolongation of this atrocious war. Is it known that there have been more deaths in Biafra within ten months than in Vietnam in three years? This being the case, the problem between the Federation of Nigeria and Biafra must be seen in its

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88. Biafra was recognized by Tanzania (13 April 1968), Gabon (8 May 1968), Ivory Coast (14 May 1968), Zambia (20 May 1968) and Haiti.

true perspective. It is a human problem and a human solution must be found to it. Considerations of peace should take precedence over anything else. If our brothers involved in this conflict cannot live together in a federation, then let them accept to live in peace as neighbors.<sup>6</sup>

#### Biafra's Capitulation

After almost three years of civil war, the economic and military blockade imposed on Biafra by Nigeria began to take effect. Biafran fighting men were outmanned, outgunned, and were substantially less well equipped than their Nigerian counterparts. The widespread starvation and disease among the Igbo soldiers and civilians made it impractical for the war to proceed much further, as federal troops pressed the Igbo enclave.

Ojukwu's last-ditch effort to save the Igbo Republic of Biafra, by going to a peace talk at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in order to secure a peace acceptable to the Igbos who were on the brink of defeat was a failure. Nigerians would negotiate only if Haile Salessie, who was to chair the talks, spoke in his capacity as the O.A.U. chairman rather than as a head of state, as Ojukwu asked, so that he could obtain a condition of non-unification with Nigeria after the war. Due to this situation, the Nigerian delegation declined to attend the talks, especially since victory was imminent for them--a pyrrhic one at that.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

On 9 January 1970, Ojukwu, realizing that there was no further hope to save the Igbo Republic, handed over power to Major-General Phillip Effiong, and told the disillusioned Igbos, "I shall go out in search of peace. I have decided that the political adviser and the Chief Secretary will accompany me."<sup>7</sup> He left the Republic of Biafra with his top aides, and on the 15th of January, 1970, General Effiong, ". . . was to reach an agreement with the then head of state of Nigeria, General Yakuba Gowon, culminating in the famous maxim, 'no victor, no vanquished.'"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Ntieyong U. Akpan, The Struggle for Secession, 1966-1970 (London: Frank Coss, 1976), p. 165.

<sup>8</sup>Satellite, "Biafra Did Not Surrender," Friday, April 16, 1982, Vol. 1, No. 62, p. 1.

## CHAPTER 8

### Cessation of Hostilities and the Igbo

The termination of the Civil War brought with it an event of historical importance, the first completely negotiated surrender and an end of hostilities in the history of modern warfare that was without punitive reprisals against or physical humiliation of the militarily defeated parties. It was a humane finish to a war bitterly engaged in by equally determined sides. It was humane, that is, to the extent that one can apply that word when discussing wars. In the conflict, Biafra and Nigeria set an example of common sense and judgment in negotiating an end to the war at a point when it became clearly unnecessary to keep fighting and wasting lives.

With the termination of hostilities, the Igbos began the gradual termination of all psychological hostilities that they cultivated during the three years of war. They began to renew former friendships, rebuilt war-ravaged homes and institutions, rehabilitate and reconstruct, and re-enter into the mainstream of Nigerian society with very minimum distinction between one Nigerian and another. So, with astonishing resilience, the Igbos applied themselves to the task of becoming Nigerians again and reconstructing their war-torn homeland.

The Nigerian Rehabilitation Commission helped immensely to repair public buildings and infrastructures damaged during the war. ". . . the rehabilitation of damaged stalls in Ogbete was a priority, and the Rehabilitation Commission put out a monthly price index for Enugu and Abakaliki. . . ." <sup>1</sup> The said commission was accountable to the Nigerian Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction.

On the educational front, Igbo students were recalled to their old universities, and the University of Nsukka, which was in Biafra and its minor campus at Enugu were reconstructed and put back into operation.

Ibadan University announced that it would readmit all staff and students who left the university in the crisis; . . . the university said it was prepared to consider admitting students from Nsukka University as this was not functioning. <sup>2</sup>

To help the Igbos as part of this rehabilitation effort, the Nigerian government decided to recall the old Nigerian currencies in the hands of Biafrans, as well as exchanging Biafran currencies for its worth in Nigerian currency. The Central Bank of Nigeria said that about "16.5 million worth of Biafran and 2.5 million of old Nigerian notes were collected, and that about 135 million was in circulation in the enclave shortly before the end of the war." <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Ibos Come Out of France," West Africa, February 7, 1970, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>"How Much Biafran Money," West Africa, April 18, 1970, p. 445.



Apart from the after-the-war socio-psychological reorientation and reconstruction, the Igbos who deserted their military and police posts to join the Secessionist Biafra were mostly recalled into the Nigerian Armed Forces and police. According to a West Africa Magazine report,

Soldiers who took an "active part" in the January 1966 coup, as well as those who took an active part in the rebellion which led to the civil war, are to be dismissed from the army.<sup>4</sup>

Those who did not take part in the coup and most lower officers from the rank of captain and down were recalled. "Airforce personnel who left their posts and joined the rebel airforce will be reabsorbed in their former positions. . . ."<sup>5</sup> The Nigerian police force is also re-establishing, "An all-Ibo force in the state, and Mr. Asikas'\* administration for the state, again all-Ibo, is being expanded and is recruiting officials of the former Secessionist regime."<sup>6</sup>

The Igbos, after the war, did a remarkable job in reintroducing themselves into Nigeria. By 1973, three years later, most of the infrastructural reconstructions were completed. Apart from the emotional, psychological

<sup>4</sup>"What Happens to Rebel Officers," West Africa, August 1, 1970, p. 885.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 885.

<sup>6</sup>"Reconciliation in Nigeria," West Africa, January 31, 1970, No. 27-48.

\*Mr. Askika is an American trained Igbo from Onitsha who left his graduate studies at U.C.L.A. to join the Nigerian war effort against Biafra. He was appointed Administrator of the East Central State (Iboland) by General Gowon, when he divided Nigeria into twelve states in 1967.

scars, and bullet riddled houses in the former sectors of battle, the former Biafra was virtually back to normal. Three years also saw the re-establishment of every major industry destroyed by the war and the re-integration of many Igbos but not all, by any means, into society in many parts of the country; as a New York Times observer wrote in 1973:

Almost all 8,000 Ibo civil servants and policemen who joined the Secessionists have been reinstated. Some 1,250 of 1,400 Ibo employees of the Nigerian Railway have returned to their jobs, and more than 60 Army officers, mostly in junior grades, have rejoined the federal Army. The University of Nsukka, devastated by the war, has been restored and is operating with a student body and faculty reflecting most of the nation. All the 4,000 war orphans airlifted to Gabon and the Ivory Coast during the war have returned and nearly all have been reunited with their relatives.<sup>7</sup>

#### Under Military Rule 1970-1979

When the war ended in 1970, the Igbos came under military rule which the rest of Nigeria had been under since General Ironsi was assassinated and Gowon took power. This meant that the former Biafra was to be made up of four states--Anambra, Imo, Cross River and River states, in accordance with the Gowon decree of 1966. The Igbos continued to adjust to a nation where they are mostly viewed as mavericks and to some extent a defeated people.

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<sup>7</sup>New York Times, January 29, 1973, Article 1, p. 8.

From 1970-1979, the Igbos concentrated on normalizing their relations with Nigerians as well as strengthening it. By 1979 the war had become history and the Igbos were once more settled all over Nigeria, and making advances in commerce, education and social acceptance. The year 1979 saw the end of the military government that had ruled Nigeria since 1966 under Ironsi, Gowon, Mohammed and Obasanjo who finally lifted the moratorium on politics. According to Africa magazine, "It is the 13 year journey towards achieving the goals of a fully united Nigeria that ended on October 1, 1979, a day seen in many quarters as the beginning of Nigeria's 'Second Republic.'"<sup>8</sup>

At this juncture, it was difficult to determine how, and whether, the Igbos would participate in Nigerian politics again. This will be the subject of the next section.

#### The Igbo in the Second Republic 1979

Before discussing the role of the Igbo in the Second Republic, it is important to note the political

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<sup>8</sup>"An Historic Transition," Africa, No. 98, October 1979, p. 15.

backdrop of the Second Republic (the second civilian government since independence).

Under the Constitution of the First Republic, it sufficed for the Prime Minister to win the seat in his constituency and for his party to win a simple majority of all the seats in the legislature for him to be called upon to form a government. It did not matter that he led an avowedly geocentric or regional party that secured all its votes from only a section of the Nigerian community or that his party enjoyed a minority support in the country, that is, if the total number of votes scored by the parties in the opposition exceeded those cast for the party in government.

Under the new system (Second Republic), the whole country had to be regarded as one country for the purpose of presidential elections, and the successful candidate will have obtained not only a majority 'yes' vote cast at the election, but also one-quarter of the votes cast at the election in at least two-thirds of the states in the Federation. This is a very stringent condition that will make the president truly Nigerian and not merely a sectional leader. His authority is predicated upon acceptance by the generality of Nigerians.

Because of this reality, no presidential and vice-presidential candidate are from the same region or ethnic group. Where the presidential candidate is a northerner, his vice-presidential running mate will, most likely, be

a southerner, and vice-versa. This was the political milieu which the Igbo faced, and because of political and social ground that they lost due to the war, coupled with their own general sense of alienation in Nigeria, it was evident that the Igbos would play "second fiddle" for some time. The Igbos who could run for the presidency did not command any substantial national support to possibly win.

The situation was such that, when the time came to organize political parties for the first election in the Second Republic, no Igbo party comparable to the defunct N.C.N.C. of the First Republic was formed. The Igbos demonstrated only a willingness to lend their support to any person that would most likely further their cause. Though a political party that was Igbo led by Dr. Azikiwe, the former leader of the N.C.N.C., to which most Igbos threw their support was to emerge, it did not come as any deliberate effort to form one. The party, Nigerian Peoples' Party (NPP), came as a result of a disagreement between the northerner, Waziri Ibrahim, to whom Azikiwe threw his support and other members of the party. Waziri left the N.P.P. to form another party, Greater Nigeria Peoples Party, as a result of the quarrel.

When the military government announced that political parties could once more be organized for the 1979 election, political parties mushroomed. Africa Magazine wrote,

. . . barely four weeks after the military authorities released the politicians from their 12-year confinement in political cold room, more than 50 political parties have been formed in all corners of the country.<sup>9</sup>

To further illustrate the fact that the Igbos took a "backseat" in the running to form political parties, only two out of more than fifty formed were by persons of Igbo origin. The rest were organized mainly by Hausa/Fulani-North, Yorubas-West, and persons from minority tribes. Of the parties formed by the two Igbos, chief A. A. O. Ezenwa (Peoples Progressive Party), and Reverend R. T. U. Amadi (Nigerian Republican Peoples Party), both men have no kind of clout as Igbo political leaders compared to Azikiwe and a host of others. They also did not even enjoy Igbo support. They both also did not enjoy any semblance of national following; they were, at best, interest groups. After all the parties were formed, it was clear that most were simply results of euphoric reaction to the long political dormancy. Their founders were not facing the realities of the political nature of the Second Republic. Most were to evaporate for lack of support; among these, the two parties formed by Ezenwa and Amadi (Igbos), many others were not going to pull through the screening of the

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<sup>9</sup>"It's Party Time," Africa, No. 87, November, 1978, p. 20.

Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) once they tendered their registration.

Only political associations that meet the requirements of FEDECO could be registered as political parties, and FEDECO is the interpreter of the federal electoral decree which aims to assure that the parties are national in scope.

Section 78 of the Electoral Decree makes it clear that no association, whatever its name, shall function as a political party unless it is so registered by FEDECO and the names and addresses of its national officers are registered with the Commission. Some of the parties are most likely to be disqualified because their national executive bodies may not adequately reflect the 'federal' character of the Federation.<sup>10</sup>

Yet another factor that was to militate against the effectiveness of most parties was the lack of sufficient funds necessary to sustain a national electioneering campaign that needed to be carried out on a scale unprecedented in Nigeria, as a result of the new political order. The Igbos who were still working towards re-establishing themselves financially might not have the kind of funds needed, nor could they raise them. It was also questionable whether Igbo politicians could gain attention in other regions of the Federation--the north and west--at campaign/election time. It might be a long time before the Igbo political leaders could be accepted outside the two Igbo states of Anambra and Imo in national elections, without riding on other peoples' coattails.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

After the applications were made to FEDECO, only four of the numerous parties were acceptable as truly national political parties; none of them was Igbo formed or led until a split developed in the ranks of one of them (NPP) and Dr. Azikiwe (Igbo) was invited to lead a faction (NPP), while Waziri led the GNPP.

The next major party . . . the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) whose disputed choice of Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim as party chairman and presidential nominee led to a bitter split in its ranks and subsequent renaming of his faction to Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP). . . . Azikiwe held that . . . he has decided, . . . to accept the invitation of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) urging me to associate myself with its members in the herculean task of salvaging Nigeria from the wreck of our own making.<sup>11</sup>

When Azikiwe was invited to lead the NPP as a presidential candidate, the majority of Igbos rallied to his support, but it was clear that the party did not have any chance of winning the election. NPP was seen immediately as an Igbo party due to "Ziks" association with it, since "Zik" was the leading Igbo politician and enjoys great support among them. His vice presidential candidate was a northerner. The vice-presidential race was where the Igbos figured dominantly due to the realities of the new constitutional structure discussed earlier. Besides the Igbo led NPP, all the other parties, three from the north and one from the west, had Igbo vice-presidential

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<sup>11</sup>Africa, "Presidential Battle Begins," January 1979, p. 27.



candidates. The aim was ostensibly to get the Igbo vote. The other parties were Peoples Redemption Party (PRP) led by Aminu Kano-North, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led by Shehu Shagari-North, Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) led by Waziri Ibrahim-North, and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), led by Obafemi Awolowo-West.

So the Igbo, in effect, became the needed link to win, and this made them unexpectedly powerful, but they remained "second fiddlers." This is reflected in the role they play today in the leading party (NPN). The editorial in the Igbo spokesperson, Satellite, read

I wonder how many people sit down to think over the activities of Igbo elements in the NPN: the brand of politics they play, their educational qualifications and position in that party's structure. . . . Since it is now obvious that they do not belong to the power-broker group, the requisite qualification is a doctorate degree, no matter the source of the degree. Hence we have Dr. Okadigbo, Dr. Ikedife, Dr. Nwodo, Dr. Mbadunuju, Dr. Odenigwe, Dr. Mbadiwe, Dr. Anyanwu, Dr. Ugo and Dr. Ekwueme, all recruited as either special assistants or advisers to one "Mallam" or "Alhaji." I understand "Alhaji" or "Alhaja" means stranger in Arabic language.<sup>12</sup>

The only areas where the Igbo led NPP gained total control were in the two Igbo states and one central Nigerian state (plateau state) that they won in the election. The NPN was the only party that satisfied the constitutional requirement in the election and won more states than any other party--it won twelve states. The NPN, therefore,

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<sup>12</sup>"Igbo Factor in NPN," Satellite, Saturday, June 5, 1982, p. 13.

formed a coalition government with NPP (Igbo) which won three states. It is interesting that the NPN, Hausa led, opted to form a coalition with NPP (Igbo), instead of the UPN, Yoruba led, that won the six western states. In the coalition Shehu Shagari became president, while Dr. Alex. Ekwueme (Igbo) became his vice-president. The northerners must prefer the Igbo as a better political ally than the westerners, while the Yorubas think also that the Igbos are better allies than Northerners; so the Igbo vote is the vote to woo. How long this situation will persist, one cannot predict, but it does seem as if the country is not ready for an Igbo leader, but does need Igbo coalition. If the election results showed anything, it is that what has been called "regional and tribal correlation" in voting behavior continues to play a great part in Nigerian politics. Despite the fact that the states were created, and the new political parties asked to reflect a national character, looking at the states won by the respective parties will evince that tribal fellowship in voting has not changed.

This analysis demonstrates that tribal voting persists in Nigeria. The NPP (Igbo) won only the two Igbo states and one Central Nigerian state--Plateau probably. As a result of its former association with Waziri who was from the plateau state area, the Yoruba led UPN won

all the western states. The other northern states except plateau state were won by the northern parties of NPN, PRP, and GNPP. The minority tribes of Rivers and Cross River states, which were former Igbo enclaves (for the old NCNC), but alienated because of the Igbo led war, threw their support to the northern NPN. (See Table 1)

What does the Igbo expect to gain from this new political alliance--NPN/NPP? This is open to diverse viewpoints, but to say the least, the Igbos are beginning to reassert themselves in the federal political process. As a result, though, only through political incident they won the office of vice-president, and remained a part of the leading coalition in both houses of Senate and Representatives. This new political position has enabled them to regain respectability.

The greatest social achievement so far attained by the Igbo is the persuasion of President Shagari to pardon the former Igbo Secessionist leader Ojukwu, as a means of erasing the legacies of the civil war. Ojukwu's pardon and his return to Nigeria in 1982 marked the true end of the war for the Igbo. According to Africa magazine:

The pardon granted to the exiled former Biafran leader, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, by Shagari is undoubtedly the last word in the chronicle of the trials of the young nation which almost destroyed itself in a brutal fratricidal

TABLE I  
 NIGERIAN GENERAL ELECTION 1979 SHOWING  
 WINNING PARTIES BY STATES

State	House of Representatives	Senate	State Assembly	State Governor
Anambra*	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
Bauchi	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Bendel	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
Benue	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Borno	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP
Cross River	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Gongola	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP	GNPP
Imo*	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
Kaduna	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Kano	PRP	PRP	PRP	PRP
Kwara	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Lagos	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
Niger	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Ogun	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
Ondo	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
Oyo	UPN	UPN	UPN	UPN
Plateau*	NPP	NPP	NPP	NPP
Rivers	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN
Sokoto	NPN	NPN	NPN	NPN

\*These are the three states the Igbo led NPP won. Imo and Anambra states are all Igbo except Plateau which is a Central Nigeria Minority State (state populated by minority tribes).

<sup>5</sup>Anthony Kirk-Green and Douglas Rimmer, Nigeria Since 1970: A Political and Economic Outline (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1981), p. 42.

conflict . . . Shagari . . . announcing the Ojukwu pardon, said, "that by taking this action I believe that we can claim to have closed the saddest chapter of our national history."<sup>6</sup>

One could only conclude that with the position of the Igbo in Nigerian political life, and the pardon of their beloved leader, Ojukwu, that they have now fully been re-absorbed into Nigeria and accepted.

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<sup>6</sup>"End of an Era," Africa, June 1982, p. 11.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Igbos, in their part as Nigerians, seem to have gone full circle, from being Nigerians to Biafrans and back to Nigerians. In their participation as Nigerians, however, they, as a people, contributed in great measure to the benefit of the nation in industry, education, administration, and politics, since independence.

During the colonial period, the Igbos quickly embraced the colonial legacies of education, administration and modern bureaucracy, which after independence placed them in a leadership position in many facets of Nigerian national life, especially in bureaucratic, political, and military endeavors.

This led to the Igbos being partners to the Northern Hausas/Fulanis in the first indigenous government, and in producing the first president, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who also led the main Igbo political party, NCNC. But they enjoyed the greatest power in Nigeria after Igbo-led military coup ousted the northern leaders and Major-General Ironsi, an Igbo, came to power.

His policies and that of other Igbos led to an Hausa-led counter coup that alienated the Igbos and led to a civil war. The Republic of Biafra, carved out of their

former Eastern region by Igbos, finally capitulated after thirty months of war, started by Nigerians to reunite the nation. They returned to be part of Nigeria and have been fully accepted.

Once more in the second civilian administration since independence, the Igbos, more out of the political structure of the new Nigerian Constitution than by national acceptance, again have succeeded in being partners in the government, and have almost regained all lost ground in social and political matters in Nigeria. They lost this ground when they fled to the secessionist Biafra.

In my assessment, it seems that the Igbos will continue to figure as a part of the Nigerian leadership, especially in the wake of the mutual intolerance that has developed since the end of the civil war between the other major ethnic groups that succeeded so well in their unity to fight the Igbos--Fulani/Hausa-North and Yoruba-West. Therefore, the Igbos, as long as this misunderstanding lasts between north and west, will continue under the new constitution to be the needed missing link that the two other major tribes need to gain leadership of the country. This was made evident in the last election, and remains true in the coming 1983 election, as all the vice-presidential candidates for all the other parties besides the Igbo NPP were and remain Igbos.

This, however, is not to say that the Igbos have no presidential aspirations of their own. The former

president, Azikiwe (Igbo) did run for the office, but Igbos know that the road back to the top is long, tedious and slow. Hence they find satisfaction in their current position while working to get back the grassroots, and middle manpower support needed for national leadership.



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