THE GENESIS OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR
AND THE THEORY OF FEAR
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INTRODUCTION

In seeking the genesis of the Nigerian civil war it is possible to locate it in a variety of different sources and levels. The origins may, for instance, be explained in terms of political competition a l'outrance, of inter-Regional economic rivalry, of elitist in-fighting; more arguably, of class or religious struggle, of military anomy and ambition; of personal, ethnic and Regional conflict; or in terms of social malaise and dis-enchantment with the golden age that never materialized in the aftermath of colonialism; or of colonialism itself, the outcome of fifty years of divide and rule. In brief, a diagnosis of a series of expectations, aroused, frustrated, and finally sinking into a slough of despondent and cut-throat competitiveness.¹

The origins of the war may also be sought not at levels of observation but at levels of the observer. Thus theories as to its genesis have been variously advanced by the participant leadership (both victorious and vanquished, expectedly from polarised standpoints); by the internal political commentator; by the external analyst, African and alien alike; and by the post-hoc historian, with all the advantages (and certain disadvantages) of accomplished history and more and more archives at his disposal.

None of these interpretations is exclusively correct; few are likely to be totally irrelevant. Like the interpretation of Genesis itself, every kind of interpretation can find its promoters.

By way of example, there is the Federal Military Government's diagnosis that "the failure of the Nigerian Constitution at independence in 1960 to recognize the strong desires of the minorities and other communities for self-determination affected the balance of power at the Centre" and that this deep-seated imbalance "plagued" the First Republic throughout its life.² (See also its apparent 'handbook to the art of unstable government', reproduced here as an Appendix). The Gowon government also identified a general disillusionment with the ruling
political class. The same leadership was attacked by pre-war Ojukwu in his celebrated 'Away with the Old Guard' speech of 25th January 1966, an infamous catalogue of chicanery all of which "led inevitably to the complete loss of moral and political authority by the former regime". For Ironsi, it was not so much the content as the structure that was to blame, "that rigid adherence to the regionalism which was the bane of the last regime and one of the main factors which contributed to its downfall". Later of course, the Eastern Region's tune had to change to that of "Biafra did not secede, Biafra was pushed out", of Hausa/Fulani bullying and Gowon's bad faith; such are the keynotes of Ojukwu's decisive address to the Eastern Consultative Assembly on 26 May 1967 and of the Assembly's consequent resolution to proclaim the Republic of Biafra. They also account for the Enugu historians' choice of vocabulary, "The Survival Edicts and the Push". Azikiwe, not quite living up to the title of his essay on the origins of war, takes his enquiry little beyond the immediate causes of the armed conflict. He glosses over the escalating confrontation before 1966 and prefers to see the tragedy as a constitutional violation and a "shameless premium on double-talk".

Nigerian intellectual circles, not necessarily looking back with the gift of hindsight, declared of the coup d'etat that "the surprise was not so much the fact of intervention as the time that this took place. The ease with which the First Republic was toppled showed how rotten its structures were: it had only to be shaken for it to fall". And, for them, if they were asked to give a single reason for that rottenness, it was that the leaders of the regime "had a warped sense of social justice". The intelligentsia were not slow to see that the real problem was not that of having to endure military rule but of the constitutional snags in the back-to-barracks process: "The problem is not one of ideas but of the right type of ideas". The old leadership was accused of having shown itself more interested in maintaining the status quo than in finding real solutions for the debilitating series of political crises. Many of the ills came about because "the members of the political intelligentsia had settled among themselves to suit their
interests and convenience". In their key summary, Nigeria's intellectuals wrote off the First Republic because "the rulers used power that they held constitutionally to do unconstitutional things... Nigeria had censuses that were not censuses, elections that were not elections, and finally governments that were not governments". (All quotations are from contributors to Nigerian Opinion.) Nigerian columnists - those who were more than hacks paid by party newspapers - had their own views on the root cause of the trouble. For Peter Fan and Tai Solarin, "the fault lay not with our stars but with our leaders". The world press also made its assessment of what caused that 'explosion in Nigeria' on January 15th: the gamble of the whole federal idea, the "fateful division" of the south which guaranteed the political supremacy of the North, the unholy alliance of arrogance between Akintola and Ahmadu Bello, and that Achilles heel of the Tafawa Balewa administration: it had allowed public corruption to flourish almost with official approval and it had failed to assess with sufficient seriousness the attitude which this was breeding among the emerging radical youth in the universities and other places of future leadership. Inevitably, it was smart-alec Nkrumah who had least doubts about the simplicity of why Tafawa Balewa was overthrown. "He dies a victim of forces he did not understand, a martyr to a neo-colonialist system of which he was merely the figure-head ... (he) never examined scientifically the basis of the society over which his Government governed".

Among these selected interpretations of the genesis of the Nigerian civil war, none does total justice to the hairspring delicacy and complexity of the Nigerian political system. Indictment is by itself no explanation. To quote Sklar, "Governments are rarely if ever overthrown because they are abusive or incompetent. Revolutions are not automatic. They are made by men who believe in themselves and feel frustrated by the political order". It could be that we can find no higher common factor than that there was something rotten in the state of Nigeria in 1965 and that someone was determined to do something about it. And it may well prove that to determine exactly what that action should effectively have been is
far more complex than the simple determination never again to risk a repetition of the days and ways of the ancien régime. The purpose of this paper is, by design, not primarily prognostic. Rather is it to examine, by way of a synopsis of the record of political Nigeria, the spectrum of reasons adduced and then to evaluate their relevance to our search for the origins of the Nigerian civil war. From this it may be possible to reduce them to a fundamental and formative set of coinciding forces and circumstances whose applicability could have a more general validity for the wider issue of conflict-potential in the new states of independent Africa.

The Genesis of the Conflict

In talking of the 'genesis of the Nigerian civil war' one must be careful to distinguish between the cause of the long-term tensions and that of the final crack in the edifice; between the origin and the flashpoint; between the months of crisis and the moment of conflict. In this paper we are less interested in what started the war than in why there was a war to start. This is not the place to present a full chronology of the Nigerian civil war. The focus is not on 'What was Nigeria 1967-70?' but on 'Why was Nigeria 1966?' Nonetheless, my choice of terms in the title, 'the genesis of the civil war in Nigeria', is susceptible of two interpretations, and due consideration must be given to both.

On the first definition of 'the genesis', there is little disagreement about the immediate causes of the fighting. To adopt a gunpowder metaphor: the explosion of 15 January 1966 can be traced back along the powder trail to the fuse lit at the time of the Western Regional election of October 1965. However further back that fuse may be said to have been laid - and some have, with gloomy inexorability, extended it to the very birth of the political entity of Nigeria - the match was surely put to the final length in October 1965. Thereafter it was no longer a question of whether but simply a matter of when detonation would occur. Current research into the military in Nigeria suggests there were several coups in the air at the turn
of 1965. Which beat the other to the post was a matter of chance. It seems that this chance came when a tip-and-run meeting between Sardauna and Akintola in Kaduna on January 14, was attended by the brigadier of No. 1. Brigade and followed by the post-haste despatch of a Northern colonel to Lagos, sparked off the rumour that the army was about to be ordered to restore law and order in 'the wild, wild West'.

To many, the Nigerian Republic acquired a second chance, a new life, on January 15. Reversing the historical process of 1954 - or even of 1947, according to how one views the real thrust of the Richards Constitution - the Ironsi administration committed itself to a unitary system of government. This is based, and justified, on a vilification of the anti-integrative principles of the Federal Republic. It is just possible that had it displayed a more heightened sensitivity to Northern thinking it could have capitalised on the immediate relief that marked the fall of Sardauna. While the jubilation genuinely reached frenzy pitch in Lagos (thereby setting a precedent for capital cities in Black Africa's coups), was widespread in the West and euphoric in the East, in the North the sweeping away of the former political class was most conspicuously welcomed by the even older political leadership - that of the emiratists - and by the likely next political class, the meritocrats. But by May 1966, when Ironsi sprang upon the bruised Northern public his prescription of a unitary govern-ment, including the particularly unpalatable ingredient of a unified civil service, the regime was too suspect in Northern eyes to have any hope of success. With the built-in contradic-tion of what to do with 'the majors' - the ringleaders of the coup d'etat, arrested by Ironsi and still uncertain whether they would end up as heroes of the revolution or be shot as traitors for having mutinied and murdered -, handicapped by his own shortcomings (he joined the army as a tally-clerk and remained a tally-clerk most of the time" - Nsoogwo), Ironsi never really stood a chance. Like the Ahuri accord in January and the battle of Odo in August 1967, Ironsi's implementation of his vision of reform in the North must remain one of the capital 'IFs' of these Nigerian crisis years.
May 1966 was one highwater mark in the post-January ebb tide towards conflict. There were at least three others. There was the bloody July counter-coup by 'the Sergeants' from the North and the emergence of Gowon, the senior surviving Northerner in the officer corps, along with his summoning of the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in September 1966 to find the answer to 'Nigeria's last chance'. After that had ended nugatory in an adjournment 

sine die, the next turning-point in Gowon's pre-war leadership came with the Aburi meeting of January 1967. Here, though a wide measure of consensus was reached between 'the colonels' - much of it with Ojukwu making the running - , the agreements were executable neither in the way that Ojukwu claimed he had understood them nor, more decisively, in the way that would satisfy the formidable cadre of One Nigeria-minded Federal Permanent Secretaries. If the Conciliation Committee of April 1967 counts as another highwater mark, it was a very low tide. The final high water, and the greatest of floodtides, of this phase of Gowon's leadership came in May 1967 with his Decree - and only a no-nonsense, no-referendum, military government could have effected overnight such a fundamental reversal of half a century of Nigeria's political history and administrative thinking - to replace the four Regions by twelve States.

Whether Decree No. 14 was designed to forestall secession (would-be Biafra was now to consist of 3 states instead of the Eastern Region, two of them mischievously emphasising the East's long-contained minorities problem of Ibibio/Efik discontent and Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers separatism, and the third a landlocked, oil-less, overpopulated Ibo enclave) or whether it pushed Ojukwu into the final defiance of declaring a secessionist Republic remains a matter of argument. What remains unchallenged is the unequalled point of no return in Nigeria's history that the States Decree constitutes.

If, as many felt at the time, the following weeks were little more than a countdown to conflict, the question still stands of what triggered off the actual shooting war. The ultimate casus belli was oil. It was reports and rumours - the distinction between the two is of little significance in
moments of crisis and calamity, when it is more important to believe than to know - of partial payment of royalties to Ojukwu and of intended diversion of other oil earnings away from Lagos into some sort of blocked suspense account that prompted the final decision to mount an oil blockade. The understated, overplayed 'police action' followed within hours. The oil industry has too strong diplomatic and international undertones yet to allow the connection between 'oil' and 'war' to be irrefutably proven in the Nigerian case. But the ethnic struggle as interpreted below had strong undertones of a struggle for the mineral riches; and, as Mr. Wilson argues in his autobiography, the Marxist theory of economic determinism "might not be out of place in interpreting the involvement of international financial and oil interests, mainly French, in what was to prove a costly investment". The assumptions are cogent enough to encourage the contention that it was the evil genius of oil that turned the war of words into a shooting war in July 1967.

The Genesis of the Confrontation

So much for the origins of the armed conflict. What of the genesis of the political competition and confrontation that finally erupted in January 1966? Here the checklist of long-term conditions can assume the appearance of infinity.

Such is the style of Nigeria's political history - what I have elsewhere categorised as its house-that-Jack-built nature - that in a search for a summit all one comes across is a series of false crests. It is the sum total of Nigeria's political annals, not an isolated event or a single crisis, that constitutes the essential genesis of the civil war. Those who understandably point, as did the Biafran public relations media, to the appalling civilian massacres of October and the mass murder of Ibo military personnel in July 1966 as provocation for secession are answered by the accusing finger at the attempted castration of Northern virility by the assassination of its top political and military leadership in January 1966 - with the Ibo leadership suggestively left untouched. Those who interpret that coup d'état as UPGA's desperate bid for political
survival once it had seen its chances of constitutional change shattered by the fraudulent census of 1962/3, the abortive general election of 1964 and the death of democracy in the WR election of 1965, must not overlook the fears genuinely held by the North - and so alarmingly confirmed in May 1966 - of Southern supremacy, derived from the accepted basis of more and better-educated manpower, had the doors of the North's bureaucracy and economy been opened to all-comers recruited on strict principles of merit between 1955 and 1965 (the year when the first batch of Northern graduates passed out of the North's university). Though this North-South antagonism does not come compellingly into the open until 1950, at the first nation-wide political (in the sense of political party and representative government) conference, evidence is available to the researcher for a far longer history of mutual mistrust, dislike and contempt. Nor, in such a mutual non-admiration society, must the dislike and distrust of Ibo for Yoruba, of NCNC for AG, of East for West, be for a moment overlooked or played down. It is a moot point whether the British were playing the Nigerians' game or the Nigerians were playing the British game when, as early as 1922 or 1914 (or even 1899), administrative and constitutional change was seen in terms of separate development and the preservation of sub-national identities rather than of a unitary government and a unified administration. The proverbial contention about oil and water being incompatible has been a prominent one, in the political '50s and the post-independence '60s no less than in the divide et impera colonial age.

In the two decades of modern Nigeria's political history up to the overthrow of civilian government in 1966 we have a number of landmarks. Each of them was, certainly in retrospect and often at the time, a step towards a politico-cultural drawing apart as much as towards the creation of a national identity. However supposedly centripetal and in the name of non-existent national unity, each was, always potentially and often actually, centrifugal in practice, even in covert intention. Nigeria's constitutional and political
history seemed to have a limitless capacity for stretching until, like a rubber band, the supreme moment of tension was reached and, after so many expected breaks, there came the unexpected snap. Ignoring the caution of the Nigerian proverbs, the Richards constitution of 1947 tried to mix oil and water. The Ibadan Conference of 1950 began the great pull, when the emirs of Katsina threatened that the North would go its own way unless it was granted at least parity of seats with the South in the proposed central legislature. Sardauna gave the tug-of-war rope a further twitch when he angrily condemned Lugard’s amalgamation of the two Protectorates forty years earlier: "The mistake of 1914 has come to light". It slipped several more notches after the vulgarity of the Lagos mob – cin mutuoci, personal humiliation through public abuse, is to the Hausa a worse offence than physical assault – and the Kano riots. If 1953 was to become one of the Biafran points of no return because of the slaughter of Ibos in Kano, it had never been anything less in the NPC demonology of the South because of their treatment by politicians and proletariat alike in Lagos. The 1954 constitution confirmed the formalised wishes of the Nigerian leadership to move and remain as far apart as they decently could; the choice between Milverton's unitary or federal options had been unmistakably, and probably irrevocably, made. For the next nine years of constitutional advance, the direction was consistently away from a strong centre and towards the positive strengthening, almost insulation, of the Regional base of each major political party.

These three parties were rarely more national than their essentially Regional leadership allowed them to be. Where they had electoral successes outside their power-base, these were won less under their own label than by their Regional allies. The NPC steadfastly refused to de-localize its name to the Nigerian People's Congress. The deliberate diminution of the status of the central government stopped short, however, at the creation of more Regions. The Mid-West was created in 1963, hypocritically encouraged by the monolith-minded NPC and the wheeling-and-dealing NCNC in order to
confine the AG to its Yoruba heartland and so reduce its influence at the national level. Middle Belt interests could have been realized only over Sardauna’s dead body (as they have now literally been). The NCNC, having aired the idea of a COR State as an election ploy, thought better of its promises once the election was won. The abolition of the Judicial Service Commission, the termination of the right of appeal to the Privy Council, the reductio ad absurdum of the list of so-called fundamental human rights incorporated into the Constitution when set beside its many qualifying exceptions, and the creeping Regional control of the Nigeria Police were other unscheduled inroads on the safeguards that the Minorities Commission had been satisfied with in the situation as it was in 1958. Nor had they been able to foresee the vigorous Islamicization campaigns personally undertaken by Sardauna, claiming a million converts and giving rise to Northern as well as Southern suspicions of a sinister gravitation towards a Nasser-centric political orbit.

The election of 1961 in Northern Nigeria showed the rest of the Federation just how absolute the NPC’s hold was on the Region (it secured 94% of the seats). Fewer analysts read correctly between the lines of the message than should have done. The election of 1964 in the Federation showed how powerfully the North’s leadership could influence the Centre without stepping outside its Regional base. If any lesson was needed by the NPC, it learned it from the disgrace and disintegration of the AG in the NR crisis of 1962. On the internal front, to close the ranks by eliminating NWP as an opposition and holding down Middle Belt separatism in Tivland by calling in the army, became imperative in the face of what direct rule imposed on a divided Region by the Federal Government had meant to the shattered WR. On the external front, the lesson of the NPC’s ill-fated political incursion into the MW — pretentiously carried out in the name of national unity — was to convince its leadership that not to violate further the facit agreement over the boundaries of Regional security was the tactic that would pay off best (unless, like Akintola in 1965 but not Ojadebay in 1963, there was already a puppet government in power). The one lesson
the NPC never learned was that, however successful the manipulation of the rules of the game may be in ensuring victory, those rules are worthless once your opponent decides to play quite a different game. The rules were satisfactory enough, at least to the NPC, when the game was that of the politics of brinkmanship and coercion. They proved woefully inadequate when the loser suddenly reneged and switched to the new game of politics from the barrel of a gun.

Five Sources of Conflict

It is now possible to re-examine the parameters of political Nigeria's continuing capacity for schism at a number of levels of enquiry. While no deterministic theory of an inexorable approach of armed conflict is intended, it is nevertheless suggested that the likelihood of open confrontation was never ambiguously reduced in the period 1954-65. (Excluded are the short and unnatural periods of political truce such as those occasioned by the royal visit in 1956 or the independence celebrations of 1960 - though even then the Tiv were in rumbling revolt against the NPC). Conflict was endemic in the related twin factors of Nigeria's deliberate choice of political centrifugalism and the manifestly composite nature of her socio-ecological history. "One thing only I wish for you", Abubakar Tafawa Balewa said to Harold Wilson as they drove to Lagos airport a few days before the former's death, "that you never have to become Prime Minister of a federal and divided country". There was a built-in potential for antagonism, an inherent capacity for conflict, on at least five levels of national life. Overlapping as they are (for instance, it is still arguable whether the keys of the political kingdom can fully turn the lock of nationhood without the oil of economic independence; social factors are based, directly or indirectly, on economic conditions; and to separate out employment and elites from the economy makes more political than it does economic sense), it is yet possible and profitable to differentiate them here as part of our search for the essential genesis of the Nigerian civil war.
1) Politics as a source of conflict

Once (a) the principle of federalism (b) the quality of Nigerian federalism (loose and lopsided, the very negation of classic Wheareism) had been agreed on by the Nigerian leaders, the direction from 1954 onwards was progressively towards the construction of impregnable bases of power within each Region. Nearly every move can be analysed in terms of increasing the rigidity of the Regional cores and inhibiting the effective extension of the central authority. These Regional bastions had to be immune from assault inside (e.g. call for separate states; effectiveness of opposition parties; threat of counter-leadership, from resentful traditional authorities or a new elite impatient of office) as well as from external aggression (e.g. election campaigns in the North by AG in 1959 and by UPGA in 1964; by NPC in NW in 1963; by the clamour for 'Nigerianization' rather than 'Northernization' or other localisms). The breaching of what has now been usefully identified as the unwritten agreement on 'Regional security' could bring disaster to the aggressor rather than to the aggrieved (NPC in WR in 1965; NCNC in NR in 1964; NPC in NW in 1963; AG in NR in 1959). Nigeria was thus able to present the façade of multi-party, Westminster-model government to the outside world while jealously retaining a neo-classical none-party system within each of her component parts. It is surely significant that the most powerful of all the political leaders, Ahmadu Bello, preferred to remain in his own Region; the move of Azikiwe and of Awolowo to the centre cost them both their political career. The much-vaunted stability of Nigeria was no more than an illusion based on the strength of her integral parts. Federal Nigeria was the antithesis of the saying that the whole is as strong as the sum of its component parts. She was as weak as the strength of those parts could ensure.

This was the Janus-image of the Nigerian political system. With each Government intent on exploiting the political factor in every pseudo- or non-political decision and on giving primacy in political decisions to the delicate balance forced on them by the built-in minority problem (it is important to
notice how the minority problem was a millstone round the back of each Regional Government), it became de rigueur to frame policy round its reception in the homeland before it was possible to lift its consideration to the extra-Regional level. The theory of federal government was progressively eroded in favour of the practice of Regional autonomy. However compelling the demands for the security of Regional independence, the price of stability in the Regions at the expense of the reality of the Federal presence was to prove too high for the national administration to pay and survive.

2) Economics as a source of conflict

The economic plight of most new states - too many calls on too little capital and too exiguous capacity, too many 'educated' persons chasing too few jobs as the sluice-gates of a controlled colonial education policy are enthusiastically raised, too much jealousy over the 'fair' distribution of mineral or agricultural wealth located in one part of the country - was in Nigeria exacerbated by viruses of specific Nigerian malignance. For instance, a politically necessary programme like that of Northernization - in which priority for employment in the North's bureaucracy, local government, trade and industry discriminated against non-Northern Nigerians in favour of foreigners - made economic nonsense of Nigeria's total manpower situation. It created artificial surpluses of skills where nationally none existed. While there was too much jam in the ER or butter in the Yoruba-speaking areas of the NR, there was not even dripping on some crusts of the Northern loaf.

The National Economic Development plan was placed in constant jeopardy by the politicians' habit of scrutinising every project for signs of its Regional gain or discrimination instead of for evidence of its contribution to national integration. For instance, the eventual decision on the siting of the iron and steel complex plumbed the depths of economic absurdity, with agreement on one site in the NR, another in the ER, and the likelihood of a third in the NR to keep it happy, thereby exceeding the total steel requirements for the whole of West Africa. There were other examples,
e.g. the Sokoto Cement Works and the Regional TV companies, all economic undertakings enforced by political considerations. The Federal Government, essentially the convener and co-ordinator of the national economy, was — at least until 1962, when its no-nonsense intervention into the affairs of the West showed the Regional Governments that there could really be some bite to back up the Federal bite — obliged to step gingerly for fear of treading on Regional toes. The criteria of 'What is there in it for this Region?' and 'Why should that Region benefit?' replaced those of the national interest as a formula for economic planning. Thus the North feared that the ER and the NW would gain unfairly from their immense oil wealth and was unhappy at so much money being spent on the 'wrong side' of Carter Bridge; the South envied the North for the unending subventions made to enable it to 'catch up with the rest of the country'; the WR was getting tired of the economic disadvantages in being politically the odd man out; the ER was jealous of the WR and Lagos having the only two federally financed universities and of the sifting in the NR of the major military installations such as the ordnance factory, the army depot, the air force base, and the defence academy: "Take a look at what they have done with the little power we surrendered to them" ran the preamble to a NNCN catalogue of economic discrimination released in March 1964. In short, the primacy of politics (sometimes even local politics) in the formulation of national economic decisions threatened to give rise to a chequered board of over- and under-development.

3) **Society as a source of conflict**

It is a tenable thesis that the tragedy at the all-pervasive level of societal relations was enacted not so much in the commonplace terms of undiluted tribalism or polarised Marxist class conflict as in terms of involuted ethnicity. The Moslem Hausa/fulani v. Ibo Christian stereotype of the civil war could be easily broken down by an analysis of the tribal composition of the Nigerian army, with its high proportion of non-Moslems — officers and men alike — from the Middle Belt areas of the North. If the Ibo had a monopoly of senior posts
in some corporations, the Yoruba predominated in the universities and the professions. The accusation of Hausa/Pulani dominance of the Northern civil service had to be modified when one noticed the Middle Belt - especially Northern Yoruba - preponderance in the senior cadres of every technical department in the old Northern government. Again, the assertion that the traditional elites of Hausaland were dominating the new bureaucratic class in the same way as they clearly made up the bulk of the political class up to 1965 has been statistically disproved. There was discernible an area of common 'culture', acceptable to the bureaucratic elites of all Regions and one to which they could all respond and adapt.

When one is talking in terms of cultural and linguistic groups of 8 - 12 million, 'tribalism' is too primitive, too miniscule a concept to do justice to the big-time influence of the forces of ethnicity. The chronic, almost endemic, societal disease was that of mutual dislike, distrust and disparagement - far more disintegrative of national unity than the alleged Nigerian weakness for corruption and nepotism. Thinking in ethnic stereotypes, the Hausa from his position of social superiority behaved in his relations with the Ibo as though the arriviste Ibo was too crude a creature for proper human recognition. In his intellectual arrogance, the Ibo behaved towards the non-Western educated Hausa confident that he was an object of contempt. As the configuration of political alliances - and, even more significantly, of non-alliances - proved, neither Hausa nor Ibo really trusted the volatile Yoruba, with their history of sectional strife and their propensity for operating on a fine political margin. The so-called Islamic factor was far more of a cultural and social one, a way of life, rather than that of militant proselytism. For all the seemingly unlimited rhetoric on tribalism, some of it quite impertinent, its force as a cultural factor has been a puissant one in political Africa. Translated to the political plane and seen as a background to national unity, the ethnic factor was to prove too obstinate for the First Republic.

In political conflict in Nigeria, ethnicity retained primacy over class. Vice-Chancellor K.O. Dike's condemnation of
Nigerian intellectuals as "the worst pedlars of tribalism."

is applicable to a far wider circle of leadership. 'To defend
our way of life and to preserve our proud heritage', unexcep-
tionable as a culture-wish, could be twisted by an unscrupu-
lous leadership into a rallying-point sufficient to challenge
the needs of modernization and to check economic good sense.
It became too easy to interpret any unwanted move, by the
centre or by another Region, as an abuse of authority and to
reject it as a disruption of traditional cultural values. Thus
the demands of national interest became subordinated to the
dictates of Regional and sub-Regional ethnicity. The fundamen-
tal economic fear of not getting an equal share (the cynic
might say of not getting at least an equal share) of the
national amenities was based on the exploitation of ethnic
and social inequality. Its attempted resolution at the polit-
ical level proved to be the signal for conflict.

4) Elites as a source of conflict

The syndrome of education - employment - elites provided one of
the most conspicuous areas of conflict in pre-1966 Nigeria.
Without being prognostic or too pessimistic, it is possible to
foresee the same desperate competitiveness for jobs becoming as
major and disintegrative a force in the new multi-state struc-
ture as it was in the old Regional one - with, if the worst
comes about, the merit principle being diluted by a quota
factor of 12 instead of the previous 4. Under the political
system of the First Republic, the masses might vote, but it was
a self-perpetuating elite they were apparently voting for. The
rewards did not percolate very far down the social scale. The
political class up to 1966 held on tightly to the positions
that assured them of control over three vital elitist
desiderata: power, prosperity, posterity. Nowhere was the
politics of patronage more conspicuously played than among the
political - and to a lesser extent the professional - elite.

5) History as a source of conflict

This is not a case of history as a determinant but of
chronology as a pre-condition. Historically, the Nigerian
administrative norms have been those of keeping one's ethnic
distance. Leaving aside the arguable existence of 'One Nigeria' or of 'Nigerian political history' before 1900, there has been in the colonial period and beyond sufficient evidence of the inclination towards the several rather than the one Nigeria. The Selborne Committee of 1899, having conceded that "the object to be aimed at is the eventual establishment of a Governor-General for the whole of the territories", went on to advise the Crown to administer its new territory "through the medium of provincial governors" and proposed the division of what was to be Nigeria into, significantly, a Maritime Province and a Soudan Province. In 1914, Lugard's blueprint was carefully inscribed as the amalgamation, not the political unification, of the two administrations. The 1922 constitution continued the policy of separateness-without-separation, removing from the elected members of Legislative Council responsibility for any matter affecting the Northern Provinces: that was to be left to the Governors alone, to legislate by decree. When the modern political age started after World War II, there was no lack of enthusiasm for the growth and exercise of a Regional presence. From 1954 this principle of separate development was written into the constitution. It was established as a fundamental tenet of the country's political, administrative, social and economic thinking up to 1966. The forces of Nigeria's political history have rarely been on the side of a national identity. Hence the urgent need in contemporary Nigeria to look back on the civil war not as 'the Biafran War' but as 'the War of National Unity'. But the rub remains: how to acknowledge the parameters of incompatibility so as to permit the politics of consensus.

The Climax

If one has to illustrate this theme of persistent incompatibility, of socio-political 'we are different - and prefer to remain so, thank you', of ethnic suspicion and rubbing each other up the wrong way, then there is no more revealing climax than the census controversy of 1962/63 and its immediate electoral aftermath of 1964/65. Here all the principal sources of conflict in Nigeria were subsumed under one heading. The cumulative and coinciding political, economic,
social, elitist and historical sources of tension came together in one cataclysmic opportunity for disaster. It was the supreme crisis of confidence. The details of that exercise in political one-upmanship are by now well enough known to require no repetition here. Since, under Nigeria's constitution, seats in the Federal Parliament were allocated according to Regional Population, a majority in the census meant a parliamentary majority; and hence a majority in development amenities, that frequent trigger of Nigerian conflict. But the Prime Minister's acceptance of the final figures, which gave the North 54% of the 'approved' total of 55m., was a cruel blow to the East's hopes of redressing the balance of constitutional power. One chance was now left. If Okpara led the UPGA alliance of NCNC and AG to a victory in the 1964 general election and next wrestled the West from Akinwula's client-government in the election due there in 1965, then UPGA would control three of the four Regional Governments as well as the Federal Government. In the event, both calculations were wildly upset: the Federal election by Okpara's maladroit decision - and Slik's compromising willingness to become seemingly involved - to boycott it at the last moment; and the WR election by the blatant absence of the one condition UPGA needed for otherwise certain victory - a free and fair election. As I have written elsewhere:  

"In this cumulative progression towards the internal collapse of 1966, particularly the key quarrel over the inflated census figures and the consequent crisis over the conduct and outcome of the ensuing general election which may well have constituted the ultimate point of no return, there emerge some of the eroding forces identified earlier: the disappointment of all but one of the political parties seeking power by constitutional means and with it the open-sesame to 'life more abundant' for their expectant electorates; the disenchantment with the deteriorating quality of Nigeria's political culture by many of the intelligentsia at all levels; and the disillusion of the semi-educated underpaid and unemployed".
These were the clouds of the gathering storm. In the assessment of the Federal Military Government, "sooner or later there would be a fundamental, and probably violent change". That moment of truth came on 15th January 1966.

In seeking to explain that violent change, the thesis has been advanced here that in the Nigerian context the older ecological and socio-cultural antagonisms proved too strong for the newer and necessary politico-economic demands of the nation-state. The weakness lay in the fact that traditional antipathies had been carried over into the sphere of modern political competition. Historical conflicts were revived and relived in a contemporary context. The wholesome effects of competition by merit were eroded by the divisiveness of winner-takes-all competitiveness. Such a degree of intensity did this reach that competition gave way, first to confrontation and finally to armed conflict. In each Region loyalty to the dominant ethnic (Yoruba, Ibo, Hausa/Fulani) or cultural (Moslem North, Christian Middle Belt, Westernized South) group was seldom able to rise above this level of localism and acknowledge that of the paramountcy of the nation-state. If regionalism was the lifeblood of the First Republic, it was also the embolus that caused the fatal coagulation in its arteries. In the final analysis, it may be said that in Nigeria political needs were too often subordinated to the ethnic imperative.

Conclusion
Is there one single element in this countdown to conflict that we can identify as the certain compound of disaster? Is there one heading under which every source, every level, every manifestation of conflict in the political history of modern Nigeria can be surely subsumed? If the argument of this paper is conceded, there is one such quality. It is the pressure of fear.

Fear has been the constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of retribution, but the psychological fear
of discrimination, of domination. It is the fear of not getting one's fair share, one's desserts. At the political level, this can be described as constitutional imbalance. At the economic level, as uneven distribution. At the social level, as a threat to traditional values. At the education and manpower level, as inequality of opportunity. And at the level of political leadership, as discrimination and penal measures to coerce and convert. Significantly, this was the very word used in the curious title of the Willink Commission of 1958: "Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into the fears of the Minorities and the means of allaying them".

Seldom has the underlying reality of the Nigerian situation been more succinctly, or more sombrely, expressed than in the preamble to the memorandum submitted by the Northern delegation to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference that met in Lagos in the critical months of September 1966. This was no time for the glib politicians' lip-service to national unity, no time for the empty repetition of the national anthem's pie-in-the-sky sentiments about "Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand". This was the moment for the heart to speak:

"We all have our fears of one another. Some fear that opportunities in their own areas are limited and they would therefore wish to expand and venture unhampered in other parts. Some fear the sheer weight of numbers of other parts which they feel could be used to the detriment of their own interests. Some fear the sheer weight of skills and the aggressive drive of other groups which they feel has to be regulated, if they are not to be left as the economic, social, and possibly political under-dogs in their own areas of origin in the very near future. These fears may be real or imagined; they may be reasonable or petty. Whether they are genuine or not, they have to be taken account of because they influence to a considerable degree the actions of the groups towards one another and, more important perhaps, the daily actions of the individual in each group towards individuals from other groups".
Because of its prior association with cowardice, the word 'fear' is better replaced by the term Angst. This has a greater connotation of anxiety rather than terror, of psychological apprehension rather than physical dread, of constant back-of-the-mind worry rather than the forefront fright of a single moment. Angst emerges as the highest common factor in situations of potential conflict in the new states of Africa: reciprocal and relentless suspicion, what Colin Legum talked of as 'the Politics of Paranoia'. Such a tentative theory derives support from the Sudanese experience and a certain amount, too, from that of Chad, Uganda and Northern Ireland.

In Nigeria, there are few crises in the stormy history of the First Republic that cannot be interpreted in terms of Angst. And response to Angst can take one of two forms. A man may flee it or fight it; in terms of the nation, succession or civil war.

We are now in a position to determine the potential crisis-point of our Angstcomplex. Its symptoms are an unmitting and manifest sense of injustice and victimization. Violence erupts when the Angst generated by the cumulative and coincident sources of this aggravation reaches a point where relief by extra-constitutional means appears to be the only remedy. Armed conflict is thus most likely to occur in cases where concurrently

a) traditional socio-economic stresses and animosities are translated to the modern arena of political competition;

b) a sense of post-colonial national identity remains sub-ordinated to the pressures of parochial values and pre-colonial loyalties;

c) the legitimate opportunities for discrimination in the distribution of the nation's 'wealth' and in the exercise of political power are so blatantly exploited as to appear destined for perpetuity.

Although this paper, focussed on the genesis of the Nigerian civil war rather than on the Nigeria of tomorrow, is by definition and design a backward-looking one and not a
prognosis, it would be inappropriate to conclude it without offering some tentative treatment for the abating of Nigerians' Angstkomplex. Their intellectuals have themselves called for a re-examination of national goals and priorities so as to create a new ideology, and have warned against the ostrich-habit of forgetting the past too soon. There may well be no guaranteed panacea to cure - or better, to prevent the recurrence of - all the maladies of the First Republic. Some of them may be endemic, a few congenital. Yet the most effective medicine - and one which, like penicillin, has many of the properties of a cure for all seasons - has already been administered. The greatest sources of Angst was the concentrated 'Regionalism', in thought and spirit as well as in dogged practice, of the pre-1966 political culture. Gowon's creation of twelve States in May 1967, with its erstwhile open-ended option of creating more if the case therefore warrants, has all the appearance of having brought more relief to the Angst pressures that Nigeria suffered from than any other prescription. It signals a fundamental break-through in attitude without which any real hope of a New Jerusalem could be ruled out. Those who saw in the creation of states nothing more than a simulated rather than a natural response to crisis, a Northern ploy to bluff the secession-minded East, have been proved wrong: the North of the old NPC is conclusively dead. Those who see in the creation of yet more states greater extravagance in administrative superstructure, less bureaucratic capability and a further step towards the instability of 'balkanization unlimited', may care to reflect on the increased measure of central control (the absences of which was a primary weakness of the First Republic) that a Federal Government could exercise through direct rule over 15 - 20 states based on the modified boundaries of the colonial provincial administration.

Nothing has had a greater potential for the effective suppression of Nigerians' Angst than the creation of States. Wole Soyinka has re-structured the Federal Military Government's equivalent of our own wartime slogan 'Dig for Victory' "To keep Nigeria one, justice must be done".
'Justice' here is the deliberate dissipation of all the sources of Angst that we have had to consider in our search to determine the ultimate genesis of the Nigerian civil war. In creating the states Gowon has dispensed an Angstlöschmittel, a conflict-dissolvent, an answer to the parochialism-patriotism struggle of loyalties that independent Nigeria took two decades and two million lives to discover. Of course, as with a number of efficacious medicines, the cure for disease A may produce the side-effects of illness B or condition C. If the multi-state structure has been the cure for pre-1966 divisiveness, the twelve states may yet give rise to fresh tensions and troubles in their own right as Gowon moves towards the promised return to civilian rule. But at least Gowon's prescription of the states has given the Nigerian patient a real chance of relief from his congenital disease and measurably reduced the likelihood of a relapse.
APPENDIX

The causes of Nigeria's instability: the Federal Military Government's catalogue

(i) The existence at the Centre of a very powerful executive which weakened the Central Legislature in its role of safeguarding the interests of component units of the Federation.

(ii) The abolition of the Judicial Service Commissions, the precipitate termination of appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, and the subordination of Public Prosecutions to political control.

(iii) The restrictions imposed on the emergence of truly national political parties and the refusal of regional authorities to accept or work with political parties with roots in other regions.

(iv) The electoral systems which left the control of elections to machineries dominated by politicians who could and did manipulate elections to the advantage of their supporters.

(v) The abuse of powers such as the power to control the Police Forces and the use of Courts and appointments of Judges for political ends.

(vi) The ineffectiveness of Parliaments in the discharge of their functions and the misuse of the powers of Parliament.

(vii) The avoidance of public accountability and public examination by Ministers.

(viii) The division of powers between the Federal and Regional authorities, which in certain cases left vital areas of conflict between them and, in others, failed to allocate to the Federal authority functions which would have promoted national unity.

(ix) The absence of codes of conduct for public functionaries and the absence of democratic traditions.

(x) The collapse of normal safeguards against misrule, in particular:

(a) the right of public protests;
(b) free press and radio;
(c) free public discussion;
(d) the ultimate sanction of the threat of an alternative government.

(xi) National traits of sycophancy and deference support.
(xii) The psychological impact of coups in neighbouring African States.

(xiii) Tribalism, tribal discrimination, nepotism and corrupt practices, particularly in appointments to public offices and in the distribution of amenities.

(xiv) The desire of ethnic and linguistic groups for separate states within the Federation.

(xv) The continued economic and ideological interests of, and intrigues by, the old colonial regime and other foreign countries in Nigeria.

(xvi) The slow pace of social integration among the various population groups.

(xvii) The problem of the Army:

(a) the dichotomy in social origins between the majority of the rank and file and the majority of officers;

(b) political interference with the role of the Army as guardians of legitimacy;

(c) the unanswered question of the peace-time role of young, educated, politically conscious officers."

REFERENCES

1. I wish to make it clear that in dealing with 'conflict' this paper restricts itself to only one side of the picture. The civil war did take place in Nigeria and there was, undeniably, conflict of a considerably longer genesis. However, there is also the other side of the coin, how and why Nigeria did, in the event, hold together in the face of the pressures to come apart. It is my belief that studies in Nigeria's actual integration as well as in her hypothecated disintegration are just as important towards ensuring final unity; and that, with the civil war now several years past, more studies of the overriding factors for integration are due. In this connection, attention may be invited to the paper - well ahead of its time - by Olav Stokke, "Integration and Disintegration: the case of the Nigerian Federation" in which he timely draws attention to the existence of the factors for unity as well as for potential disintegration.

2. The Struggle for One Nigeria (Lagos, 1967).
15. The phrase occurred in his Convocation Speech at the university, 1966.


18. From the submissions of the Northern Delegation to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference, 1966.