

ETHNICITY AND SECESSIONIST  
MOVEMENTS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
BIAFRA AND ERITREA.

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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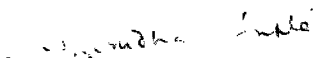
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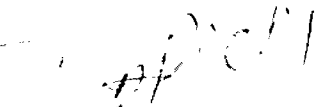
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This is to certify that this dissertation entitled **ETHNICITY AND SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF BIAFRA AND ERITREA**, submitted by **MR. JAMAL MOHAMMED MOOSA**, in partial fulfilment of the award of the degree of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** has not been submitted for any degree of this or any other University. To the best of our knowledge this is a bonafied work.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A major challenge faced by States , in the contemporary era is to contain and manage various disruptive social forces. One of the major motives behind these disruptive forces is ethnicity .

The new states of Asia, Africa and Latin America passed a phase which was characterised by optimistic claims regarding nation-making, strengthening national sovereignty creating national culture and identity.. There were also claims made regarding national integration being achieved and played down internal diversity and cleavages .<sup>1</sup>

This optimism was based on the liberal expectancy that these loyalties would dissolve with the expansion and development of the capitalist market.

Accordingly there was a conscious effort to neglect any attempt to study and analyse ethnicity. This academic neglect was rudely shaken when ethnic assertion began to occur in developed countries and not only in the developing countries of Asia and Africa. Some of the major ethnic conflicts in developed countries are: US (Blacks, Indians), Canada (Quebec), Australia (Aborigines), Spain (Basque)and Britain (Irish, Immigrant).

The Marxist had held out the hope of over coming the 'nationalities' problem. But this too has not held true. Rather ,the collapse of Soviet Union has been attributed to among other things its inability to overcome the

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<sup>1</sup> Tambiah, Stanley J. The Nation State in Crisis and the Raise of Ethno-Nationalism, *The Thatched Patio*, Sept./Oct. 1992, p.8.

the nationality question . In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union many of the pre-Soviet ethnic conflicts have erupted again .

In Africa in the last three decades , two tendencies have gained strength: (a) the determination of the ruling elite to maintain the country's unity at all cost. This has over-centralised <sup>the</sup> effective power and marginalised the peripheral regions.

(b) an equally strong determination on part of the minority community or group to gain autonomy or a larger share of power to run their own affairs.<sup>2</sup>

These two tendencies are directly opposed to each other. To keep the nation-State intact the center uses coercive power and finally brute force to suppress ethnic minority. The process produces counter use of force by the latter.<sup>3</sup>

The assertion or articulation of demands by ethnic groups does not necessarily lead to secession. But if the demands are not appropriately handled than it may aggregate to secession. Rather the chances of it occurring are more if the following factors are present.

The prospect of a group of people converting themselves into a ethnic group and demanding secession, is due to the following factors.

(a) Socially Mobilised Population: To launch a secessionist struggle it is essential to have a socially mobilised group .

(b) Pool of Symbol Connoting Distinctiveness: There should exist same symbols which cannot distinctiveness of the group.

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<sup>2</sup> Gupta, Prof. Anrudha. Ethnic Conflicts: Roots and Problem. *Mainstream* vol XXIX No. 31. May 25. 1991. pp.9-11

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* p. 10

(c) Selection, Standardisation and Transmission of Symbols by the Leadership: The symbols have to be selected, standardised and transmitted to the group by the leadership to instill a feeling of oneness.

(d) Relative Deprivation: The group must have a sense of deprivation (real/imagined) with respect to a reference group.

(e) Size, Concentration and Location: The relative size of the group is proportional to the tendency to secede. If the group is concentrated in an area than the prospects are than a dispersed population. Similarly the groups located near the periphery of the country have greater tendency to secede.

(f) Stakes: This is the most crucial factor. There are two types of stakes - emotional and economic. Emotional stakes of the group are the traditional and historic links, religious or linguistic affiliation and attachment to a certain geographic center or place. Economic stakes of the group consist of , job and educational opportunity, uneven development, partials treatment.

(g) Nature of Demand Articulation: The response of the State to the demands are dependent on the nature and mode of articulation. It is also based on the relative strength of the group.

(h) Response of the State: The State response to the demand plays a crucial role in the aggravation of conflict. If the groups initial demands are appropriately handled then the chances of accommodation are high.

(i) International Context: The response of the international community towards an ethnic conflict plays an important role in the eventual outcome of the conflict. The response can be in terms of moral or material support or with voluntaries. The response is at three levels (a) Big powers, UN, ICRC. (b) regional (c) neighbours.



There is a critical need today to study ethnicity and its leading to secession. If this is not undertaken then the prospects of attempting to solve problems arising out of ethnic assertion are low. With this in mind the study attempts to compare two different secessionist movements - Biafra and Eritrea - in Africa. In both the cases the problem was solved militarily with heavy human toll - one of them failed and the other succeeded.

The first case - Biafra secession - occurred in 1966 when the Ibos of the Eastern Region of Nigeria seceded. While in the second case - Eritrean secession 1961 - 1991 - occurred when the Eritreans seceded from Ethiopia. Both the cases are separated by long spatial and temporal distance. They have had divergent historical experience, while Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914 Ethiopia has existed for the last 2000 years. These differences make both the cases suitable to analyse ethnicity based secession.

The importance of the Nigerian case is that it occurred at a time when the proponents of nation-State were advocating it as an Universal imperative for developing countries. Nigeria is among the largest countries of Africa both in terms of area and population. It contains many ethnic communities of which three were big and powerful and due to the pressure from these communities the colonial power tried to solve the problem by making it a federation in 1954.

Eritrea has had the longest struggle and is the youngest country in Africa. Its importance for the study is it has been able to get the OAU and the other powers to accept the redrawing of the State boundaries.

Another important feature about the Eritrean secession is that it has been successful to secede. In that process the government of Mengistu

was brought down. The terms between the Ethiopia and Eritrea are very cordial unlike in other cases of secession.

The study is divided into five chapters apart from the Introduction. In Chapter Two an attempt has been made to correlate ethnicity and secession. It begins with a brief description of the evolution of the term and the approaches to the study of ethnicity and nation-State. It also looks at the various arguments for the study of ethnicity and the aggregation of the ethnic assertions before correlating ethnicity and secession.

In the next two chapters background to both the cases includes a historical narrative of the country concerned as also the events which preceded or occurred during the secessionist crisis.

In Chapter Five the study attempts to compare both cases to investigate correlation between ethnicity and secession and see how theory applies to the empirical situation.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**ETHNICITY AND SECESSION**

## CHAPTER 2

### ETHNICITY AND SECESSION

The term **ETHNICITY** comes from the Greek term *ethnos*. In French it is *ethnie* with the associated adjective *ethnique*. The noun is not Common in modern French. The adjective exists in English as ethnic with a suffix added to give ethnicity<sup>1</sup>.

**The etymology of this word:** The earliest recorded use was as *ethnos* by Homer. It was used to describe a large undifferentiated group of animals or warriors. Aeschylus uses *ethnos* to describe the Furies (*Eumerudes*) and also the Persians (*Persai*). Sophocles uses it for wild animals (*Philoctetes*, *Antigone*). Pinder employed the term to describe groups of like people, but again people whose location or conduct put them outside the sphere of Greek social normality (*Pythianodes*). Aristotle uses it for foreign or barbarous people as opposed to *Hellenes* (*politics*). Romans writing in Greek, under the empire, use the term to describe a province-area that was not Roman.<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament, Greek *ethnos* was to mean non-Christians and non-Jews. The adjective *ethnikos* was nearly synonymous with barbarous.<sup>3</sup>

The term has long been used in English in its Greek New Testament sense, as an unusual intellectual synonym for 'gentile', denoting pagan. It retained this sense up-till the 19th century. From about mid-19th century, it is being used for a 'group of people with shared characteristics'. The term *ethnos* has itself not been used but its various derivatives, like ethnology,

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<sup>1</sup> Tokin, Elizabeth . Maryon McDonald & Malcolm Chapman . ed. *History and Ethnicity*. London Routledge. 1989. p.11

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p.12

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p.14

ethnography, ethno-centric, ethnic and ethnicity are used. The term *ethnos* was not needed, as all these words related to the study of 'race', where race meant not just the biological, but also a social, cultural and linguistic classification of people. But after the Nazi Racial Doctrine of the 1930's and 1940's, the word 'ethnic' began to be used in place of 'race'.<sup>4</sup>

Even as it is evident that the word has had a long and chequered history and it has come to be used to describe groups of people who in some way are strange or different, the controversy about its usage in academia is far from settled.

#### APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF ETHNICITY

There are divergent explanatory **approaches** and **perspectives** to the study of ethnicity. They can be classified as (a) Primordialist (b) Cultural Pluralist (c) Modernist and Developmentalist (d) Marxist and neo-Marxist<sup>5</sup> (e) behaviouralist<sup>6</sup>. Tambiah adds a sixth perspective (e) Instrumentalist.<sup>7</sup>

*Primordialist*. This approach has culture as the main focus. According to it ethnic identities are not chosen but are 'given'. The emphasis is on certain attachments in the cultural sphere as part of personality formation and development which persists throughout life, consciously or unconsciously. They provide the impulse and impetus for social and political mobilisation.<sup>8</sup> Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff are of the opinion that the approach considers people's ethnic and religious identities as having deep, social, historical and genetic foundations. Modernisation is a threat to ethnic solidarity and that prompt people to mobilise in defense of their

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.14

<sup>5</sup> Phadnis, Urmilla. *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia*. New Delhi . Sage Publications 1990. p.14

<sup>6</sup> Mehar . Ajay K . Ethnicity , Democratization and Governance: The Case of India *Ethnic Studies Report*, vol xi No. 2, July 1993, p.217

<sup>7</sup> Tambiah . Stanley J. The Nation State in Crisis and the Rise of Ethno-Nationalism. *The Thatched Patio*. Sept/Oct. 1992 . p.27

<sup>8</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* P.14

culture and way of life<sup>9</sup>. To Tambiah primordialists are those who, especially in earliest decades of optimistic advocacy of nation-State making, saw ethnicity as a form of tribalism and reactionary addiction to Primordialist feelings and loyalties of blood and locality. Ethnicity was termed as an irrational sentiment, surviving from our past tribalism.<sup>10</sup>

Phadnis criticises this view by saying that the very recognition of primordial sentiment does not explain why inter-ethnic group relation has been harmonious at one point of time but not at another.<sup>11</sup> While Tambiah says, "fortunately, the primordialist thesis has increasingly come to be seen as old fashioned and there is no need to whip a dead horse".<sup>12</sup>

*Cultural Pluralist*. Initiated by Furivill and subsequently refined by Smith this approach is an improvement on the primordialist theory with an emphasis not merely on ethnic distinctiveness but also on the dominant-subordinate pattern of interaction among various groups. The dominant-subordinate relation does not take note of intra-ethnic group cleavages. If cultural differences are the critical variable of the ethnic group, why ethnic conflict is led by that segment of society who are culturally the most similar, namely, the westernised elite?<sup>13</sup>

*Development and Communication Theory*. This approach perceives ethnic affiliation as a residual phenomenon, which with the differentiation of division of labour and extension of capitalist market, would be dissolved. In fact the process of modernisation and development are caught in a dialectics of their own design: combating ethnic loyalties on one hand and

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<sup>9</sup> Gurr, Ted R & Barbara Harff. *Ethnic Conflict in World Politics : Dilemmas in World Politics*. Boulder, Westview Press, 1994 p.78

<sup>10</sup> Tambiah *op.cit* p.27

<sup>11</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* p.14

<sup>12</sup> Tambiah *op.cit* p.27

<sup>13</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* p.27

stimulation of ethnic consciousness on the other. Consequently (whatever the level of development of the State), ethnic conflict needs to be viewed as a part of an on going process, which has to be coped up with and managed , but cannot be resolved except through either total assimilation or elimination of a particular group. <sup>14</sup>

Ted Gurr has proposed 'relative deprivation' where there is a gap between expectation and perceived capabilities of a person *vis-a- vis* his economic situation, political power and social status. This feeling of deprivation prompts ethnic conflict. <sup>15</sup>

The Developmental theorist expected ethnic identities to dissolve and new secular identities of the nation-State to develop. This does not appear to have occurred in many developed countries , which are having ethnic conflict . Even relative deprivation only partially explains the problem. It does not explain why conflict is not there, despite structural conditions of deprivation.

*Instrumentalist perspective.* It emphasises the instrumental nature of ethnic mobilisation. The main goals of a group are assumed to be material and political gains. Cultural identity is evoked only as a means to attain those goals. <sup>16</sup> While Tambiah is of the view that the thesis of instrumentalism powerfully interprets ethnic identity and claims, as largely constructed, and used to advance the interests and claims of the collectively -founded and mobilised into a pressure group. They focus attention on utilitarian interests and maximising of choices made in different contexts by persons who were actually inventors of tradition . Incorporation of new members into the group shifts with purposive intentionalities. Historically

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p.18

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p18

<sup>16</sup> Gurr *op.cit* p.78

they are portrayed as 'imagined communities' due to the propagandist effort of the intelligentsia and middle class ideologues.<sup>17</sup>

This view according to Tambiah is very voluntaristic and gives inadequate access to the enduring power of ethnic appeal as a structuring sentiment and as an instant mobiliser of crowds for collective political action.<sup>18</sup>

*Behaviouralist:* This perspective considers that there are cultural differences between ethnic groups but the critical differences between groups reveals themselves only thorough interaction with other groups. Thus the group does not classify itself on the basis of characteristics it posses but by contrasting with the characteristics of others . They also contend that there is no definitional way to distinguish between ethnic identity and other identities . Instead all form part of a social continuum<sup>19</sup>

*Marxist and neo-Marxist.* There are two different views within this perspective. According to one, ethnicity is viewed as a device detracting from the consciousness of class interest and manipulated by political leadership and vested interests. While according to the other, there is a cultural division of labour, where members of an ethnic group are placed in a subordinate position within a given State, both in internal colonialism and in the global context.<sup>20</sup>

When ethnic identity is seen as a reactionary impulse - antithetical to the development of class consciousness and class solidarity - it is considered to be false consciousness. While nationalism - according to this perspective - is seen as a positive attribute and ethnicity is considered to be a negative

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<sup>17</sup> Tambiah *op.cit* p.27

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.27

<sup>19</sup> Mehra *op.cit.*p. 27

<sup>20</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* p.18



trait.<sup>21</sup>

Those who hold the latter view - emphasising on the 'cultural division of labour'- seem closer to the empirical reality as it brings out the ethnic contradiction of *realpolitik*. Though conceived in the broad gamut of the theory of imperialism and dependency the emphasis of internal colonialism is an attempt to place people rather than class as the central issue. Hachter maintains that an ethnic group could be subjected to internal colonialism in its subjugation to the 'core'. To these theorists the maintenance of ethnic division was not seen as an aberration but as a systemic arrangement between 'core' and 'periphery'. The combination of economic and culture in the analyses of internal colonialists, is a forward thrust in the understanding of politicised ethnicity. However it has a rather limited realm. As Hachter puts it, "The cultural division of labour is a necessary condition for the development of ethno-nationalism but also an insufficient one".<sup>22</sup>

### THE DEFINITION ARGUMENT

The study will look at the definitional arguments put forth by scholars from different perspective. Effort has been made to present the entire analyses of ethnicity by scholars holding different perspective.

The analysis presented by Glazer and Moynihan, analyses the ethnic identities from a position which according to them 'wavers between **primordialist and circumstantialist**'. It considers men as being divided and the reason for these divisions are deep in history and experience and on the other hand, looks at the immediate circumstances for explaining why groups maintain identity.<sup>23</sup>

They take Melvin Tunuin's definition of Ethnicity as a social group.

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.18

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 19-20

<sup>23</sup> Glazer, Nathan & Moynihan, Daniel P, ed..*Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. Cambridge, Havard University Press. 1978. p.4

which within a large cultural and social system, claims or is accorded special status in terms of a complex of traits (ethnic traits) which it exhibits or is believed to exhibit.<sup>24</sup> The definition implies that the term does not refer to a sub-group but to all the groups of a society characterised by a distinct sense of difference owing to culture and descent.

The liberal expectancy was that primordial differences between groups would become less significant with the development of capitalist market. But a new element, interest, is being pursued effectively by the ethnic group<sup>25</sup>. That is the use of deep rooted identities for interest-advance of the group.

While Glazer and Moynihan consider ethnic identities to be deep rooted, Smith arguing from a **Cultural-Pluralist** perspective, considers ethnicity as referring to cultural rather than biological attributes.<sup>26</sup>

For Smith ethnic identity and ethnicity are at two levels - the individual and the collective. His focus is on social and cultural properties of ethnic communities as collective cultural units claiming common ancestry, shared memory and symbol.<sup>27</sup>

When people identify with ethnics they feel a sense of wider kinship with a fictitious super-family that extends outward in space and down the generations in time.<sup>28</sup>

Ethnics possess a common code and a shared symbol and a myth of common descent from a putative ancestor. Their codes, symbols and myths and the associated historical memories of common past experiences, albeit

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* 4

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p.7

<sup>26</sup> Smith, Anthony D. Chosen People: Why Ethnic Groups Survive. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol.15 No. 3, July 1992. P.435

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p.437

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.437

selectively remembered, are the main features of collective cultural identity. They serve to differentiate ethnic community from other types of human groupings.<sup>29</sup>

Smith goes on to define ethnic community as a named human group claiming a homeland sharing a myth of common ancestry, historical memories and a distinct culture<sup>30</sup>.

To survive, the community creates myths based on which patterns of survival can be traced. He calls it 'cultivate a myth of ethnic election'. The creation and dissemination by specialists of the belief, that 'we are the chosen people', has been crucial for assuring long term survival.<sup>31</sup>

He enumerates the following patterns<sup>32</sup>

1. *Imperial-dynastic* - The myth of election is attached to the ruling dynasty, from which the community tends to take its main symbol and culture, with which it is always associated.

2. *Communal-demotic* - This attaches the myth directly to the people in their sacred Land. In this case the community usually has been conquered and is struggling to preserve its former rights and way of life.

3. *Emigrant-colonist* - This myth is attached to a people on the move. They have left or fled their homeland and are bent on building a new community in their new homeland. They carry with them their values and memories.

4. *Diaspora-restoration* - The myth is attached to a community on the move, but the move is in the reverse direction, back towards their old homeland.

Smith's emphasis is on the cultural content of identity and the election and

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p.438

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.441

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p.441

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* pp.446-7

dissemination of the myth by the specialists. While Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff, propound 'relative deprivation', as the cause of ethnic conflict. They are of the view, that there are two approaches - **Primordialist and Instrumentalist** - to explain ethnicity. The former approach argues that ethnic identities are deep social, historical and genetic foundations. Modernisation is a threat to ethnic solidarity that prompts minorities to mobilise in defense of their culture and way of life.<sup>33</sup>

The instrumental approach emphasis on the instrumental nature of ethnic mobilisation. The main goals of the group are assumed to be material and political gains; cultural identity is evoked only as a means to attain those goals.<sup>34</sup>

These two views are not fundamentally inconsistent. Ethnic groups are most likely to be mobilised when both conditions - a strong sense of ethnic group identity in combination with imposed disadvantages - are present.<sup>35</sup>

Hence the need for both ethnic identity based on deep cultural roots combined with material disadvantage, causes some form of ethnic assertion.

Armstrong - arguing from a **Behaviouralist** perspective - tries to explain the emergence of intense group identification, which he terms **nation**. He studies the emergence of a nation till the threshold of nationalism - late 18th century - when the consciousness for ethnic identity became the predominant force for creating independent political structure.<sup>36</sup>

An extended temporal perspective is important as a means of perceiving modern nationalism as a part of a cycle of ethnic consciousness. The epoch of absolutism that immediately preceded European nationalism involved an

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<sup>33</sup> Gurr *op.cit.* p. 78

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p.78

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p.79

<sup>36</sup> Armstrong John A. *Nations before Nationalism*. Chapel Hill . University of North Carolina. 1982. p.4

exceptionally strong rejection of ethnic differentiation. A larger look suggests that a widespread intense ethnic identification expressed in other forms is recurrent feature.<sup>37</sup>

Armstrong uses the concept of boundaries of Fadrik Barth. Which does not impose a fixed character to the group but examines the perception of its members which distinguishes them from others. There are three advantages if ethnicity is defined by boundaries. Both the cultural as well as biological content of the group can change as long as the boundary mechanisms are maintained. Secondly ethnic groups need not necessarily be based on the occupation of exclusive territories. Lastly this facilitates consideration of other ethnic phenomena.<sup>38</sup>

It is implicit in this definition that groups define themselves not by reference to their own characteristic but by contrasting, that is, by comparison to strangers. There is no definitional way of distinguishing ethnicity from other types of identities. The principle of ethnicity is part of a continuum of social collectives.<sup>39</sup>

According to Armstrong , ethnic issues are not exhausted or diminished in the modern world but have continually recurred in history. They persist as the group defines its boundaries and uses myths, symbols and communication rather than material factors. But more importantly, he emphasises the interactive aspect of the identity, myths are altered to maintain the group's exclusivity with regard to others developed in the course of interaction with them.

In sharp contrast to the above arguments, Paul R Brass argues from an **Instrumental** perspective. He considers that ethnicity and nationalism are

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p.4

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p.4

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p.6

not 'givens' but are socio- political construction. The other argument of his is that ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralising State.<sup>40)</sup>

There is no such thing as fixed plural segments in multi- ethnic societies and ethnic identities are always in a flux. The solution is to keep the system open and in a state of flux while attempting to decentralise the over-centralised State.<sup>41</sup>

The principal argument Brass puts forth are the following. The first one is the variability of ethnic identities. There is nothing inevitable about the rise of ethnic identity and its transformation into nationalism. Political differentiation between people arises only under specific circumstances. The elite competition is the basic dynamics which precipitates ethnic conflict under specific conditions. In other words conflict arises from the broader political economic environment rather than past cultural values of ethnic groups.<sup>42</sup>

The second is the critical role of the relationship between elites and the State. Particularly the role played by the collaborators and opponents of the State and the extent of inroads the State makes into regions inhabited by the distinct ethnic group. Elite is defined as an influential sub-group within various ethnic groups and classes.<sup>43</sup>

Thirdly, political leadership plays an important independent role. The process of ethnic identity formation has consequences for the very composition of the ethnic group and for its persistence. The cultural forms, values, practices of the ethnic group become political resources for elite

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<sup>40</sup> Brass . Pual R . *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* . New Delhi. Sage Publication . 1991. p.10

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p.13

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p.13

competition . The process of transforming cultural forms into political symbols, elites in competition, strive to enhance or break the solidarity of the group. It follows that ethnic identity formation and its transformation into nationalism is reversible process.<sup>44</sup>

Brass goes on to define an ethnic category 'as any group of people dissimilar from other people in terms of objective cultural criteria and contain within its membership, either in principle or in practice, the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction, forms an ethnic category'. The objective cultural markers may be a language or a dialect, distinctive code of dressing , diet or custom, religion or race.<sup>45</sup>

While an ethnic group uses cultural symbols in such a way, that a 'subjective self-conscious' community that establishes criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the group. Ethnicity then is the sense of ethnic identity'.<sup>46</sup>

Urmila Phadnis, defines ethnic group as a historically formed aggregate of people having a real or imagined association with a specific territory, a shared cluster of beliefs and values, connoting its distinctiveness in relation to a similar group and recognised as such by others. The definition has five components:<sup>47</sup>

- a) a subjective belief in real or assumed historical antecedent.
- b) a symbolic or real geographic center
- c) shared cultural emblems such as race language, religion, dress or diet.
- d) self-ascribed awareness of distinctiveness and belonging to a group.
- e) recognition by others of group differentiation.

Though an ethnic group has the above traits, it is not a monolith. It has

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.16

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p.19

<sup>47</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* p.14

vertical and horizontal differentiation which preclude its categorisation in an amalgam of multiple identities. However the hierarchy of these identities can change.<sup>48</sup>

The situational context of the ethnic group symbolises the manner in which it responds to and is affected by the larger social milieu. In this respect, migration, conquest, conversion, perception and the policies of the 'dominant' group, have serious implications for the ethnic group identity. The ethnic identity formation is marked by a process of fission and fusion.<sup>49</sup>

Closely related to the structural dimension of identities formation, compression and recognition of the ethnic group is the notion of ethnicity. It is the summation of impulses and motives of power and recognition. It can therefore be defined as a device as well as focus for group mobilisation by its leadership through selected uses of ethnic symbols for socio-cultural and politico-economic purposes.

#### **DIFFERENT CONCEPTS OF NATIONALISM**

When an ethnic group demands sovereignty and separation, it assumes or considers itself to be a nation. So that its struggle is seen as a struggle for self-determination. The study looks at the various concepts of nation and their emergence before proceeding further

Uri Ra'anana, propounds the theory that nation-State far from constituting the rule on the contemporary political map, remains a very exceptional phenomenon, where a high degree of ethnic homogeneity and congruity between geographic outlines of the State and nation are regarded as the primary criteria<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p.14

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>50</sup> Ra'anana, Uri, ed., *Ethnic Resurgence in Modern Democratic States*, New York, Pergamon Press, 1980 p.5





Multi-ethnic politics have constituted the norm of polyglot ethno-nationalism. This is self-assertion of ethnic groups, ranging primarily from cultural, religious and educational endeavours to the ultimate step of struggling for territorial or State-power has been a highly significant phenomenon throughout most of recorded history.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of modern nation-State was born during the 16th and the 17th centuries, in the bureaucratically centralised post-medieval societies of Western Europe. By the 19th century, following the French revolution, the idea of 'La nation' emerged in reaction to the Napoleonic expansionist drive for conquest. This led to the formation of unitary States in Central Europe. By the 20th century, it had move further East to the Middle East and to the rest of the colonial Asia and Africa. It was taken for granted ,that the West had recovered from or even had proven immune to the 'infantile malady' which was affecting less fortunate lands. But now the problem of ethnicity has reemerged in the West<sup>52</sup>.

The protagonist of the nation-State hailed the large post- colonial State based on entirely artificial administrative entities of colonial period, as laboratories of process of nation-building.<sup>53</sup>

There are three distinct concepts of nationality and nationalism. In the West, roughly West of Rhine and western hemisphere, a primarily territorial concept of nationality ( much common with the legal concept of *jus soli*) has developed during the modern era. Western Europe was the only area where classical feudalism flourished. It provided in several cases a congenial environment for the development of the centralised and bureaucratic Statehood.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* .p.5

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p.8

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p.8

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p.9

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It was assumed that certain western concepts which are products of a particular historical context have universal application. That this experience should be copied in the Third world. And that the accidental and artificial Afro-Asian State frontiers constitute a framework for rapid creation of a single nation out of several distinct and antagonist nationalities. What is forgotten is that even in the West the process required many centuries and often has remained incomplete<sup>55</sup>.

In majority of the ancient communities, as most of contemporary non-western societies, the criteria determining a persons nationality was not derived from *Jus Soli* but *Jus Sangeninis*. It is not where an individual resides and which State has jurisdiction over him that determines his nationality but rather who he is , his culture, religion and historic identity that determines his nationality. In other words, his nationality is based on his ethnicity, a heritage received from his ancestors and carried with him , irrespective of his current place of domicile<sup>56</sup>.

From this general model, two non-western concepts of nationality are derived. The Eastern, roughly covering Europe which is east of Rhine and the Southern, roughly covering southern and eastern rim of the Mediterranean. The Eastern concept focuses on cultural touchstone like ancestral language. for determining a persons nationality. In the southern view religion is the primary hallmark of nationality. Ra'anan charts three different types of nationality and nationalism - the Western, the Eastern and the southern - based on respectively on the Hansburg empire, Romonov empire and the Ottoman empire.

Phadnis , on the other hand criticises that the accepted practice of the last two centuries in Europe is that of one nation - one State. Where nation

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p.11

refers to a large number of people who could be distinguished by certain common characteristics. Characteristics like unified territory, common language, common culture, common community through which the nation is differentiated from the world around it<sup>57</sup>.

State is defined as a historically constructed stable community of people formed on the bases of common territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.<sup>58</sup>

Two divergent views emerge with regard to nation-State - ethnist and statist. The Statist consider the European heritage of the term nation-State as the most accepted view. It connotes a situation in which the boundaries of a State are approximately or perceived to be that of a nation. In effect, it implies the coalescing of diverse - at times antagonistic -social collectives within an institutional framework. Equating of the nation, is most often done with the numerically dominant ethnic group and with the State<sup>59</sup>.

The State is primarily a politico-legal concept, whereas, the nation is a psycho-cultural one. A nation can exist without a State and a State can exist without a nation. A nation-State is a State in which a nation has its own State i.e. a nation having political sovereignty.

While the Ethnist view a nation as a large politicised ethnic group formed by common culture and alleged descent. In the world today approximation of a national group with a State is rather rare occurrence. Hence there is a preponderance of a multi-national State<sup>60</sup>.

The debate between the ethnist and the statist at its extreme is between, on the one hand, nation-making and nation-building. And on the other, involves State-breaking, i.e., altering the territorial base of the State for

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<sup>57</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* p.21

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* p.21-22

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p.23

achieving nationhood or nation-Statehood.<sup>61</sup>

For Tambiah, there are two models of nationalism that are in interaction as well as in contention in many parts of the world. Each model has its benefits and costs. The existential task is to find a way to reconciling both and finding a new synthesis in the political life of collectivities of people<sup>62</sup>.

One is the nationalism of the nation-State which was conceived and substantially realised first in Europe, particularly western Europe. There is another form, ethno- nationalism, which has originated in many parts of the globe like Africa, Middle East, South and South-East Asia and Latin America.<sup>63</sup>

The western European model of secular nation-State based on the ideals proclaimed by the French revolution at one hand and on the other on the Universalist claim of 'Enlightenment' Rationalism. Essentially its components are: (a) separation of Church and virtual privatisation of religion (b) the concept of citizenship based on formal equality of all individuals (c) the jurisdiction of the nation-State as valid by its frontiers (d) the notion that politics is a secular domain of activity, shaped by its own objectives of power and by its own logic and rules.<sup>64</sup>

To sum up the creation of western nation-State, went hand in hand, political integration, continuous economic expansion,, homogenisation for administrative purpose and 'high' cultural production . National identity required from the citizens a loyalty to a secular entity - the State .<sup>65</sup>

This constituted two errors. One, the Western European nation- State was achieved as an end-result of a very special development and many

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* 23

<sup>62</sup> Tambiah *op.cit* p..7

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p8

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p. 9

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p.10

upheavals, internal strains, revolution and divisive wars between States. Second, the fundamental fallacy - it was imposed on a dependent world as if its realisation is a necessary State in universal history. The negative connotation of the western model was its aggressive nationalism, i.e., imperialist expansion. The result was that a sense of inferiority and the threat of cultural extinction among the colonised people impelled reaction and a retaliatory attitude to the West.<sup>66</sup>

There are three phases of the political history of Third World countries. First, the actual decolonisation phase when western imperial powers following World War II transferred power to local elite groups. While the colonial period created certain dislocations, decolonisation was usually preceded and accomplished by violence and civil disobedience<sup>67</sup>.

The second phase, spanning from the late 1950's and gathering momentum in the 1960's, was characterised by optimism and strident claims were made, concerning their having achieved the objectives of nation-making, strengthening national sovereignty, creating national culture and national identity and achieving national integration. It played down internal diversity and social cleavages in favour of the primacy of the nation-State. It was marked by the confident expectation of expanding economic horizons.<sup>68</sup>

The third phase, above hopeful expansion of the nation-building was put to test, seriously questioned and even reversed. Due to the eruption of ethnic conflicts in the 1960's. The central political authority - the State - was counseled to be a referee, adjudicating ethnic conflicts.

*Ethno-nationalism.* Ethnicity and ethno-nationalism have been always

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p. 11

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p. 12

potent bases for collective mobilisation and are powerfully at work in many modern contexts at a time when global processes of modernisation and homogenisation are alleged to be dominant currents<sup>69</sup>.

Two inter-woven processes constitute the double helix of ethnicity: One is the substantialisation and recreation of qualities and attributes such as enduring collective possessions, using mytho-historical charters and of blood descent and race; the other complementary process is that ethnic boundary-making has always been a flexible, to historical circumstances and politico-economic opportunities. Multiple identities are invoked, disclaimed or manipulated according to context.<sup>70</sup>

Ethno-nationalistic appeals are powerfully efficacious: as they are made to blood, race and purity of descent, to territory as father or motherland), to language as a common literary and communicational heritage in which memories and myths are embedded, to religion as the exclusive affiliation. Participation in ethno- nationalism transforms analogical and metaphorical comparison into a sense of identity relation, which fuse people and their causes to the amalgams. It is through these participatory processes which inscribe relation of identity that one's sense of continuity with others through space and time is generated and shared. Ethnic communities are not merely imagined communities, rather they are participatory communities.<sup>71</sup>

#### AGGREGATION OF ETHNIC DEMANDS

An ethnic group's transformation from a mass of unrelated people to a nation is a long and difficult process. It entails the group, on the one hand, to mobilise and consolidate on ethnic basis and on the other hand to counter the pressure applied by the State applies. Invariably the group accepts a

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p.13

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p.26

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p.30

negotiated settlement at much lesser concessions instead of seceding.

The ethnic group, to be successful, has to instill among its members a sense of nationhood, on an ethnic basis. Once the group considers itself to be a different nation, it justifies its claim on the basis of the principle of self-determination. It also instills in the members a will to struggle for it.

There are different stages of articulation and aggregation of ethnic demands. It is at the last instance that the group makes the demand to secede.

According to Glazer and Moynihan, the origin and causes of ethnic demands are not new but the extent, scale and intensity are.<sup>72</sup> They suggest two related reasons for this trend: (a) The strategic efficacy of ethnicity in making legitimate claims on the resources of the modern State. (b) The social dynamics that led to such a claim. The latter depends on the nature of inequity.<sup>73</sup> Aggregation according to them occurs in combination of the existence of ethnic identity and the nature of inequality.

There are, according to Ted Gurr and Barbara Harff, four types of politically active ethnic groups which exist along with the modern State<sup>74</sup>,

(a) *Ethno-nationalist* - Historically they were usually independent and are trying to establish their own State.

(b) *Indigenous people* - Protecting their traditional land, resources and culture.

(c) *Communal contenders* - They are among a number of culturally distinct groups in a pluralistic society that are competing for a share of political power.

(d) *Ethno-classes*. They want equal right and opportunities to overcome

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<sup>72</sup> Glazer *op.cit* p.6

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>74</sup> Ted *op.cit* p.15

the effect of discrimination resulting from immigration and/or minority status.<sup>75</sup>

There are three general conditions for ethnic mobilisation: (a) existence of separate ethno-national community (b) actual or perceived disadvantages (c) territorial continuity.<sup>76</sup>

The mobilisation of an ethnic group is the immediate precursor to political action to make demands on the Government. The extent and intensity of conflict depends upon the strategy followed by the ethnic group leaders and those of the government.<sup>77</sup>

To Brass a nation may be created by transforming an ethnic group in a multi-ethnic State into a self-consciousness political entity or by amalgamation of diverse groups and formation of homogenous national character through the agency of the modern State. Ethnic nationalism and the State centered nationalism are sub-type of a general process of identity formation. The process of nationality formation may or may not be perused to the point where political structure become concurrent by creating autonomous or independent self-governing entity. Similarly the process of nation building by the State authority may or may not succeed in creating relatively homogenous national group congruent with the territorial boundary of the State.<sup>78</sup>

Though accommodation is reached in most cases, in some cases both the process are pushed beyond pluralist accommodation. This results in expulsion, counter expulsion exchange of population and in extreme circumstances genocide. There are two stages of nationality formation from an ethnic category: (a) The move from ethnic category to community. When

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<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>76</sup> Glazer *op.cit.* p.76

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.* p.76

<sup>78</sup> Brass *op.cit* p.20



the subjective meanings of symbols of identity are intensified and become more rational. (b) The articulation and acquisition of social, economic and political rights for the members of the group or for the whole group. Depending upon the perceived needs and demands of the group and the political context, demands may range from modest civil, educational or political rights to the ultimate demand of nationality.<sup>79</sup>

In the view of Phadnis, the preconditions for conflict are: (a) a socially mobilised population (b) the existence of pool of symbol connoting distinctiveness (c) the selection, standardisation and transmission of such symbol-pool to the community by the leadership (d) a reference group in relation to which a sense of relative deprivation (real/imagined) is aggregated.<sup>80</sup>

Along with this the spatial and numerical concentration plays a role in the assertion by the ethnic group. Greater the concentration in a territorial confine, greater are the potential for demand articulation<sup>81</sup>.

The critical issue is the stakes - material as well as emotional -of the ethnic group in the political system. It is related to the central leadership's perspective and the response of the ethnic group<sup>82</sup>.

Related to the issue of access and stakes in the system is the nature of demand articulation and aggregation by the leadership of the ethnic group. They range from (a) affirmative discrimination (b) greater autonomy and power (c) autonomy related to systemic change (d) secession<sup>83</sup>.

The international context is important in which the demand is made. Depending on the international opinion the secessionists and the

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>80</sup> Phadnis *op.cit* p. 26

<sup>81</sup> *ibid* p. 26

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* p.27

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p.27

Government get aid and support.

**CHAPTER 3**  
**BIAFRAN SECESSION 1966-1970**

### CHAPTER 3

#### BIAFRAN SECESSION 1966-1970

Nigeria is situated 4o to 14o N latitude and 3E to 15 E longitude off the Gulf of Guinea on the western coast of Africa. It has Benin to the West, Niger to the North, Chad to the Northeast and Southeast. It covers an area of 923,768 Sq.Km (or 356,669 Sq.Miles). In the 1991 census the population was stated to be 88,514,501 inhabitants and a population density of 95.8 inhabitants per Sq.Km.<sup>1</sup>

The physical features of Nigeria are of moderate dimensions. The highest elevations are along the Eastern border of the country and rise to a maximum of 2040m above sea level at Vogel peak. The Jos plateau is located near the center of the country, rises to a height of 1780m at Shere mountain and 1698m at Wadi hill. It is also a watershed from which streams flow to Lake Chad and to the rivers Niger and Benue. The land declines steadily northward from the plateau. This area is known as the High Plains of Hausaland and is characterised by broad expanse of sandy plains with some rocky outcrops. To the southwest, across the river, Niger similar relief features exist in the Yoruba highlands. Elsewhere in the country lowlands of less than 300m stretch inland from the coast for over 250km and continue in the trough like basin of the Niger and Benue rivers. Lowland areas also exist in the Rima and Chad basin in the extreme Northwest and Northeast of the country. These lowlands are dissected by innumerable streams and

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<sup>1</sup> *Africa south of Sahara*. Europa Publication. London.1995. p 692

	NORTH	BIAFRA
POPULATION	51,290,000	14,336,000
AREA	729,800 sq. km.	76,364 sq. km.
GROUPS	Hausa-Fulani, Gwari, Nupe, Angas, Tangale, Kanuri-Fulani, Tiv, Fulani	Ibo, Okopoto, Ibibio, Ekoi, Efik, Ijaw

*Table - 1 Data of 1971*

rivers.<sup>2</sup>

The main river of Nigeria is Niger, the third largest river of Africa. Originating in the Fouta Djallon mountains in the Northeast Sierra Leone, it runs its last one third of its 42,000km course in Nigeria. Benue is its principle tributary. It originates in Cameroon, and it is joined by Katsina, Ala and Gongola rivers before converging with Niger at Lokoja. The main tributaries are Sokoto, Kaduna and Anambra. At Aboh, Niger breaks to form its delta. The other important rivers of Nigeria include the Ogum, the Oshun, the Imo and the Cross. The Nigerian coastline is relatively straight with few natural indentations.<sup>3</sup>

The average annual maximum temperature varies from 35°C in the North to 31° C in the South; the minimum varies from 23°C in the South to 18°C in the North. The Jos Plateau is relatively cooler.<sup>4</sup>

The total annual rainfall decreases from over 3800mm in the coast (Forcados) to below 650mm in the Northeast (Maidujur). The length of the rainy season similarly decreases from 12 months in the South to below 5 months in the North. Rainiest months are from June to September.<sup>5</sup>

The mangrove and rain-forest are found in the South which covers about 20% of the country. Then there are four successive Savanna grassland belts northward - the derived, the Guinea, the Sudan, and the Sahel.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

Tropical hard woods and other forest products are produced in the rain-forest. Cattle, goat and sheep are reared in the grasslands. Nigeria is well endowed with many fishing grounds like Lake Chad, the lagoons along the coast, the creeks and the distributaries of Niger and other rivers apart from the sea.<sup>7</sup>

Among the mineral resources, Tin and Columbite are mined from the Jos plateau. Nigeria was the largest African producer of tin till 1968 before production declined. Extensive resources of medium grade Iron ore deposits are also found.<sup>8</sup>

Fuel resources include deposits of lignite and sub-bituminous coal mined at Enugu. Petroleum resources are extensive. The oil produced is of high quality with low sulphur content. Since Libya curtailed its production in 1973, Nigeria has been the largest producer of petroleum in Africa. It also has abundant reserves of natural gas.<sup>9</sup>

Nigeria has an extremely diverse population with well over 250 ethnic groups. The ten main ethnic groups - Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Nupe, Ibibio and Ijaw - account for nearly 80% of the total population. The population is dense in the South and in the settlements surrounding Kano while the middle belt is sparsely populated<sup>10</sup>.

The earliest known culture in Nigeria is the Nok people of prehistoric periods. Nigeria was drawn into the mainstream of events

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p 692

when the ruler of Kanem embraced Islam in the 12th century.<sup>11</sup>

### COLONIAL PERIOD.

The first contact with the Europeans was with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century. Portuguese explorers and traders landed on the Guinea coast. The contact was largely limited to coastal trade from the various port settlements. The next major inward thrust came with the annexation of Lagos by the British in 1861. This according to Gary Arnold can be taken as the beginning of the colonial period. By the late 1870's, 4 companies were operating from the Delta alone. Taubman Goldie managed to consolidate these companies into the United African Company.<sup>12</sup>

The agencies and methods adopted by the British to bring the whole of Modern Nigeria under their control varied as did the response of the Nigerians.<sup>13</sup>

Yorubaland was won over by the missionaries and the action of the Lagos government; Oil rivers by the missionaries and the Councils and the North by both the National African Company (from 1886 the Royal Niger Company) and the British government. British used both, diplomacy and military confrontation to conquer Nigeria.. Likewise, the Nigerian response varied from open military confrontation to temporary alliances and submission<sup>14</sup>.

British influence and trade increased to most parts of the Yorubaland

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<sup>11</sup>Arnold, Gay. *Modern Nigeria*. London. Longman 1977. p.8

<sup>12</sup> *UNESCO General History of Africa*. New York. UNESCO. 1989p.184

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p.184

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p.184



largely due to the activities of missionaries. A number of anti-slave trade, trade and protection treaties had been concluded between the British and the Yoruba rulers by 1884. In 1886, Ibadan and Ekitiparapo called off their war with the British and signed a peace treaty. The sole state opposing the British in the Yorubaland was the Ijebu. In 1892, with a view to show an example, the British launched a well prepared offensive. Ijebu put up a stiff resistance but was routed. This effectively led to the elimination of all opposition in Yorubaland and all the States accepted British Residents<sup>15</sup>.

Some States in the Niger Delta and Benin chose to confront the British instead of submitting. Though Benin had signed a peace treaty, it asserted its sovereignty. Benin was attacked in 1892. The Obe wanted to submit, but the chiefs opposed him and an army was raised. Benin, however, lost and the capital was looted and burned<sup>16</sup>.

In the Niger delta, many kingdoms had signed treaties of protection, but did not allow missionaries. They also levied duty on British goods. The opposition ceased when the Jaja of Opobo was tricked and deported to the West Indies<sup>17</sup>.

In Northern Nigeria, the Royal Niger Company signed a number of treaties. This was used to secure the British claim following the Berlin Conference. The doors of the North lay through Nupe and Ilrion. Both refused to subjugate themselves. These two states fell when they were invaded in 1897. Thereafter, in a series of campaigns - Kontenora in

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p.184

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p.185

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p.185

1900, Adamawa in 1901, Bauchi in 1902, Kano, Sokoto and Burwuri in 1903 - the North was captured. The rulers of all these emirates rose to the occasion but could not answer the maxim gun, rifles and seven pound canon .<sup>18</sup>

In 1900, the British government took over all the company's territories and established three protectorates: The Niger Coast Protectorate, the Lagos Colony Protectorate and the Protectorate of Northern Niger. In 1914, the three protectorates were united to become the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. However, much of the administration was carried out by the traditional native rulers or as it was called through Indirect Rule with supervision by the colonial authorities<sup>19</sup>.

Nationalist agitation began to grow in the 1930's. The second world war gave it a tremendous impetus. Nationalists continued to demand for the extension of franchise and holding of direct elections. In 1949, the 1947 Constitution was abrogated. In the 1951 Constitution, ministerial government was introduced. The federation became self governing in the 1954 Constitution. (During the 1950's, series of Constitutional conferences took place in an attempt to strike a balance between different regions and ethnic groups).<sup>20</sup>

### **POLITICAL PARTIES IN NIGERIA**

The Eastern Region was dominated by the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC). It was led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe

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<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* p.185

<sup>19</sup> Arnorld *op.cit* p.9

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p.9

and the veteran nationalist, Herbert Macoulay. The NCNC had emerged from a broad based organisation that had opposed the 1947 Constitution. It attracted mainly Ibo support.<sup>21</sup>

The leading political entity in the Western region was the Action Group (AG). It was an offshoot of the National Nigerian Youth movement. The AG was led by the premier of the Western region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Ijebu Yoruba. It was dominated by educated Yoruba.<sup>22</sup>

The largest region in the country, the Northern region was dominated by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) The NPC was based on the traditional and mercantile Hausa - Fulani elite. Its leader was Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello. The other important leader was Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who later became the first federal premier in 1957.<sup>23</sup>

The NPC demanded a large degree of regional autonomy and that the North constitute 50% of the legislature. The AG likewise worried about the loss of cocoa revenue and demanded regional autonomy. It also wanted to incorporate Ilion, Kabba and Lagos into the Western region. The NLNC, on the other hand, favoured the establishment of a centralised government and advocated the distribution of revenue according to need. This reflected its less wealthy and dispersed Ibo base.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.9

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p. 9

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.10

The 1954 Constitution tried to balance these forces. It deprived the Central government of its right to approve regional legislations. Federal subjects were confined to Defence, Foreign Policy and Communication. The Concurrent list constituted Commerce, Agriculture, Labour and Industrial Development, while all other subjects including the residual powers were with the region.<sup>25</sup>

In the election following the 1954 Constitution, NPC and NLNC formed a coalition government with AG as the opposition. It became apparent that no single party could ever make a government in this dispensation. All the major parties began to support the assertion by minority tribes in different regions to weaken the base of the other parties. In 1957, the Western and Eastern region became self-governing while the North became self-governing in 1959.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1959 elections, the Coalition returned to power and Sir Abubakar Balewa became the first Nigerian federal premier. This government lasted till 1964.<sup>27</sup>

Nigeria became independent on 1st October 1960. Steady Nigerianisation began thereafter. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe became the first Nigerian Governor General in November 1960.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, trouble began in the Western region following the split between the supporters of the Awolowo and Akintola, in the AG. The federal government was forced to declare a state of emergency in 1962.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.11

It also created a fourth region - the Mid West region.<sup>29</sup>

Major pointers to the impending crisis were the cancellation of the 1962 Census due to distortions and a strike by 80,000 workers before the elections in December 1964. Though the Coalition came to power, election malpractices came to light. Towards the end of 1965, trouble again began in the Western region. As Nigeria prepared to host the Commonwealth Summit in January 1966, it was facing a major crisis. And by mid-January the first Republic had collapsed.<sup>30</sup>

### IBO COUP

On the night of 14th of January 1966 soldiers struck in a coup codenamed 'operation Damisa' (leopard). The main plotters were six Majors and a Captain, all of them were Ibos with one exception.<sup>31</sup>

In Lagos Major. Ifeajuna led a small detachment of soldiers to the Prime Minister's house. Where he arrested the Premier Sir Abubakar Balewa after allowing him to say his prayers<sup>32</sup>.

Meanwhile, another group went to the commercial suburb of Appa where several senior army officers lived. There they killed the Chief of Staff, the Quarter Master-General and the Adjutant- General.

In Ikoyi, a residential suburb outside Lagos, Major. Okafor had lost his victim - Brigadier. Maimalari. The Brigadier, who had escaped after being tipped off, saw Major. Ifeajuna's car and beckoned him. The Major along with another officer shot and killed him. Similarly

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>31</sup> Jorr. John De St. . *The Nigerian Civil War* . London. Hodder & Stoughton. 1972. p.31

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p.31

Lieutenant Colonel Largema of the 4th Battalion who had come to attend the security conference was killed in his hotel room.<sup>33</sup>

However, within an hour and a half of the first shots of the coup being fired, the counter coup had begun. The plotters could not secure the Police Headquarters where they were confronted by Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, Commander of the Army. He ordered the men back to their barracks and drove to Ikeja garrison to rally it against the mutineers. He browbeat his way through a number of road blocks. In Ikeja Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu (Jack) Gowon was among his first supporters.<sup>34</sup>

In the meantime, Major Ifeajuna and Major Okafor joined up and drove to Enugu in the Eastern region. Enroute they shot the Premier and went into hiding. Major Ifeajuna was later smuggled out of the country by the Ibo poet Christopher Okigbo. In Ghana, President Nkrumah welcomed him as a national hero. This effectively ended the coup in Lagos.<sup>35</sup>

In the Western region, the coup was led by an Ibo Captain Nwobosi. He was stationed at Abuokuta garrison and had been briefed about the coup only a day or two before. At midnight he took out a detachment and went to Ibadan, the capital of the Western region. There they first decommissioned the power station and the telephone exchange. They then arrested the deputy Premier of the region Chief Fani-Kayode and proceeded to the Premier Chief Akintola's house. When the detachment

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p.31

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p.32

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p.32

entered the compound Akintola opened fire and injured the Captain. When he ran out of ammunition, he gave himself up. But was shot by the Captain. Nwobosi in the garden. The group then left for Ijeka garrison where they were arrested.<sup>36</sup>

Events in the North followed the same pattern. Major. Chukwuma Nzeogwu was a mid-Western Ibo and the only member of the inner circle to be stationed outside Lagos led the coup. He first told his officers about the revolt that was taking place in the country, and asked for their support, they all agreed. He, then, spoke to his soldiers who also agreed. They then went to the house of Sardauna of Sokoto, the Premier of the Northern region and killed him along with his wife and bodyguard. The 1st Brigade Commander and his wife and the deputy Brigade Commander were also killed that night. The airport, post office, radio and television station were seized and the Governor arrested.<sup>37</sup>

In Enugu, the capital of the Eastern region and Benin, the capital of the Mid-western region did not witness any violence or killing.<sup>38</sup>

General. Ironsi had in the meantime consolidated his position. The federal parliament met on the 15th and dispersed *sine die*. The same day the federal cabinet met with General. Ironsi and the British High Commissioner Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce. The government was leaderless as the President was convalescing in Britain and the fate of the Premier was not yet known. A wrangle about the successor broke out

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p.35

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* p.36

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p.37

between the coalition partner.<sup>39</sup>

The next day, General.Ironsi, called the cabinet and sounded the cabinet about the feeling in the army. The acting federal President faced with an uncompromising assessment of the situation handed over the power to the military.<sup>40</sup>

General.Ironsi after assumption of power suspended the federal and the regional parliament and the governments. Then he appointed military Governors directly responsible to him .He also promised a popular constitution would be drawn up soon.<sup>41</sup>

On monday( January,15) Major.Nzeogwu surrendered after reaching an agreement with General.Ironsi. He flew to Lagos after handing over power to Major.Hassan Katsina where he was arrested.<sup>42</sup>

The reaction and response to the coup was varied in different regions. In the South it was welcomed with demonstrations. In sharp contrast the mood in the North was that of shock. The people were stunned and shocked at the loss of the region's two most important political leaders and virtually all its senior army officers.<sup>43</sup>

General.Ironsi started well. His first problem was the restiveness in the army. His success in restoring order was due to his tactful bargaining and gradual achievement of an acceptable compromise. A good example was the appointment of the new Commander of the 4th Battalion in Ibadan. The first appointee, an Ibo left when he was

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<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 38

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.* p.39

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p.39

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p.40

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p.43



questioned by the soldiers about the death of their Commander. After this the regimental Sargent-Major went to General.Ironsi, after saluting smartly, reported that he had no Commanding officer. He turned down all the southern officers General.Ironsi offered him. but promptly accepted when a middle-belt officer was offered. <sup>44</sup>

General.Ironsi chose his regional governors pragmatically. Liuetenant Colonel.. Ojukwu was made the governor of the Eastern region. Liuetenant Colonel. Fajuyi of the Western region and Major.Hassan Katsina of the Northern region. Liuetenant Colonel.. Gowon was made the Army Chief of Staff. Army seniority mattered less in these appointments than ethnic and administrative considerations. The former civilian governors were appointed as advisors. <sup>45</sup>

Political appointees of various boards and statutory corporations were removed. Probe was ordered into the financial affairs of politicians .Number of ministries was reduced. A host of committees formed to look into various issues. <sup>46</sup>

A lively debate began especially in the mass media about the future of the country. There were two currents - radicals and conservatives. The radicals or the progressive members among the urban elite in the South wanted an unitary form of government. On the other hand the voices of conservatism expressed the fears of the North wanted a loose federation with strongly entrenched regional autonomy. Then there was a cross current representing some minorities of the middle-belt and eastern

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.52

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* p.41

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p.52

region who wanted to protect themselves from the powerful tribes. The General was like a man caught in a raft amongst the strong current of the sea.

In the budget broadcast on March 31, General Ironsi stressed on his interpretation of the general will. 'I am convinced that the bulk of our people want a united Nigeria and that they want in future one government and not a multitude' This is seen as a turning point of his regime. The regime was no longer seen as an interim military government.<sup>47</sup>

In the North the opposition began to grow. It was helped by a grass-root movements and the vernacular press. The feeling in the North can be easily gauged by a letter published in the *New Nigeria*. "Entitled Federalism is Good for Nigeria" it said 'I feel that our silence is neither born out of fear nor ... out of lack of views to present It is partly born out of shock '. He then listed the causes of the shock. Tribally selective killing of the politicians in the January coup, the murder of innocent army officers again on a tribal basis, failure of General Ironsi to bring the coup leaders to justice, the mad rush of application for jobs pouring into North from other parts of the country.' One sad fact which these journalist as well as some of the top military advisors refuse to admit is that a unitary government does not necessarily unite the people of Nigeria'.<sup>48</sup>

To aid the changes , the government had appointed many committees.

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p.54

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p.55

But the Nwokedi committee created to find ways for a unified administration caused a lot of resentment in the North. The committee's report was accepted by General.Ironsi without it even being shown to the other members of the Supreme Military Council. <sup>49</sup>

In the end of May General.Ironsi announced two decrees - one which changed the name of Nigeria from a Federal Republic to just a Republic and abolished the regions. The other was to allow civil servants to be posted anywhere in Nigeria. <sup>50</sup>

#### ANTI-IBO RIOTS

The following weekend ( May,20) riots broke out in the North. The trouble began in Kano after a demonstration by civil servants and students. Soon the riots spread to other towns. The riots claimed several hundred Ibos lives. The police tried to intervene but was overwhelmed and the army stood aside. <sup>51</sup>

The placards like 'let us secede, 'no unitary government without referendum', 'down with General. Ironsi' were raised in the demonstration. <sup>52</sup>

There were three immediate causes of the May riots: an offensive article which appeared in the popular monthly 'Drum'. The article showed the dead Sardauna begging an Ibo journalist for forgiveness from his grave. Along with the steep rise in food prices and the promulgating of the Unitary decree. <sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* p.55

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p.55

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p.56

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p.56

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p.57

Deeper down - the fear of one tribe or region dominating other, of control of the center and preservation of the traditional way of life in the regions - were the important latent causes. The North was ill prepared to compete due to the lack of education (at independence there were only 41 schools in the whole of the North). Added to this was the provocative behaviour of the Ibos. The picture of the dead Sardauna along with that of triumphant Nzeogwu were kept in the Ibo houses. There were Ibo songs celebrating the overthrow of the Northern leaders. There was a lot of resentment amongst the Northerner but it needed a determined elite to channelise it towards the local Ibos. This role was played by the cadre of different parties.<sup>54</sup>

In July, in response to the criticism that he never went out of Lagos, General.Ironsi went on a tour of the country. The tour went off well in the North and the Mid-West. From there he went to Ibadan and was scheduled to return to the capital the next day. But during the night of 28th-29th July soldiers struck for the second time in six months.<sup>55</sup>

Three broad factors in combination can be identified as the causes of General.Ironsi's fall. First was, he lacked the political judgment and sensitivity indispensable for the situation that he inherited. Deficiencies in his own character and those of his close advisers proved costly. Brought up in the army with very little education, he had worked his way up to become its first Nigerian Commander, he could not adapt to the needs of complex and fluid political situation.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p.57

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p.60

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p.60

Second major error was his misjudgment of the mood in the army. Not punishing the January boys was a fatal error. Despite their role in the coup the plotters continued to enjoy all service benefits. This was resented by the northern soldiers. Even a token action like dismissal from service would have placated the northern soldiers.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, General.Ironsi and his advisers had mistakenly interpreted the quiescence in the North as acceptance of their policies. Clear warning signs were ignored. A combination of all these factors led to the growing resentment among northern soldiers and eventually to the counter coup.<sup>58</sup>

#### NORTHERN COUP

A little before mid-night, on July,28, a group of northern subalterns strode into the officers mess in Aboukuta garrison and shot their Commander and two senior Ibo officers dead. The northern officers took over control and began killing the personnel from East.<sup>59</sup>

A telephone call set off the same sequence in Ikeja and the West. In Ibadan the government lodge where the western region's military governor was hosting General.Ironsi was surrounded. By this time the Supreme Command Headquarter was informed. Lieutenant Colonel. Gowon put the army on alert and on the order of Brigadier.Ogundipe. Though surrounded General.Ironsi was able to use the phone. He called Liuetenant Colonel.. Gowon to send him a helicopter. The Police headquarters sent a helicopter to Ibadan. But by the time the helicopter

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p.60

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.62

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* p.63

reached Ibadan the government lodge was empty.<sup>60</sup>

In the meantime Major.Danjuma of the 4th Battalion arrested the Supreme Commander . The three captives. the western regions Governor, General.Ironsi and his northern ADC. were later killed. Their bodies were found a week later but the official announcement of the deaths was made six months later.<sup>61</sup>

Brigadier.Ogundipe tried to rally support. He sent Lieutenant Colonel.. Gowon to hold talks with the mutineers at Ikeja garrison.<sup>62</sup>

At Ikeja complicated negotiations began between .northern civil servants, politicians and soldiers. Lieutenant. Colonel..Murtala Mohammed a strong willed Hausa had emerged as the most powerful spokesman. His initial demand was the renunciation of the Unity decree and a total separation of the eastern and northern soldiers. This was later changed to outright secession and the establishment of the Republic of the North.<sup>63</sup>

In Lagos, Brigadier.Ogundipe declared emergency in the Lagos enclave. He was pledged support by Mid-western region. While the North remained non-committal.In the East Lieutenant Colonel.. Ojukwu who himself was on the run pledged support. Soon Brigadier.Ogundipe realised his weakness and fled at the behest of two junior northern officers. He took refuge in a ship before escaping to London.<sup>64</sup>

By this time the coup had spread to rest of the country. It followed

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<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p.63

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p.63

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p.67

the same pattern of northern soldiers killing their commanding and senior officers from the East before the northern officers took over. Then the remaining eastern personnel were killed. The only exception was the East due to the key role played by the Ibo commander of the 1st Battalion Lieutenant Colonel. David Ogunewe. He was able to convince the northern officers to hand over the armoury keys. Then he organised joint northern and eastern patrols till the crisis was over<sup>65</sup>.

In Lagos for the next three days( July,29 to August,1) there was no government. The talks in Ikeja garrison were the focal point all political activity. The talks between Lieutenant Colonel. Gowon, Lieutenant Colonel..Murtala and other senior northern officers had converted itself into a heated debate on the future of Nigeria. Northern civil servants, politicians, senior police officials and judges were present for consultation. The military governors of all the regions were in constant touch. The British High Commissioner and the American Ambassador to Lagos were there to provide their advice.<sup>66</sup>

There were two vital issues: was the federation to continue? If so, who would - who could -lead it? The battle line were drawn between a cautious and uncertain Lieutenant Colonel. Gowon and an aggressive Lieutenant Colonel..Murtala. While Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon wanted to maintain the status quo, Lieutenant Colonel..Murtala was firm on secession.<sup>67</sup>

Initially the secessionist had an upperhand to the extent that the

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p.67

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p.69

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p.70

dependents of the northern officials were flown back to the North. The northern town of Ilorin near the border with the western region was alerted too receive the northern garrison. Eventually Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon was able to convince others for the retention of the status quo with a northern head of State. Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon being the senior most northern officer was selected to be the new head of State.<sup>68</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon had the added advantage of being a mid-belt Northerner from a minority tribe, the Angas. He was also a devoted christian(evangelist). He had two sources of strength, first a deep knowledge and understanding of how the army ticks. The second was the ability to take advice graciously from any quarter and produce an intelligent and common sensical consensus from it.<sup>69</sup>

In his first broadcast on August, 1 Lieutenant Colonel Gowon emphasised 'the basis of trust and confidence in our unitary system of government has not been able to stand the test of time and the base of unity is not there'<sup>70</sup>

In the evening Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu spoke on Radio Enugu where he underlined the reality of the new situation. 'Nigeria was effectively divided into two parts: the North, the West and the Mid-West, where the coup had been successful and the new regime was accepted and the East where the coup had failed. He made it absolutely plain that he would not accept Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon's elevation to

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p.69

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p.71

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p.71



the post of Supreme commander. He only recognised General.Ironsi as the supreme commander and if he was dead, than Brigadier.Ongundipe as the next most senior officer. Finally the present arrangement was temporary and hastily designed to secure a breathing space.<sup>71</sup>

There were three official accounts of the coup, all strongly coloured by the post-coup events. The northern version stressed that there was a radical Ibo conspiracy, a pre-emptive strike which was designed to crush the North, push aside the slow moving General.Ironsi and replace him with Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu. The federal account paints a reasonable picture of spontaneous haphazard mutiny. While the eastern version talks of a northern plot to kill General.Ironsi, Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu and to install Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon as the Supreme commander. For the next six months, future of Nigeria swung between hope and despair. Through out August Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon tried to assert his authority but the mutiny continued. While publicly he assured Ibo officers of their safety privately he advised them to return to East.<sup>72</sup>

#### **GOWON AS THE HEAD OF STATE**

On the 9th of August Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon ordered all the soldiers back to their respective regions of origin .He abrogated the Unity decree, promised a three phase return to civilian rule. He released popular politicians like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Yoruba leader and the mid-western leader Chief Antony Enahoro who had been imprisoned

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p.72

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p.72

three years earlier by the Balewa government.<sup>73</sup>

In the East tensions remained high as more and more refugees returned and recounted their tales. The popular mood reflected elements of shock, anger and mixed desire for vengeance, government of all the regional government into the most popular. Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu became a folk hero for the Ibos. He also released several politicians. among them notably Michael Okpara whom he had imprisoned. He grew a beard as a sign of mourning for the coup victims.<sup>74</sup>

Relations between Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon and Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu deteriorated. Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu made it clear that he would not recognise a Northerner as the head of State as there were at least six other senior officers above Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon. Behind these legalistic and hierarchical considerations was the personal unacceptability of Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon. To Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu the idea of being subordinate to a junior, less educated and a less experienced officer of Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon's caliber was an anathema. These personal mistrust and incomparability were increased as time passed and was a crucial solvent in the crisis.<sup>75</sup>

In mid September Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon opened the 'Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference" in Lagos to which each region sent their leaders of thought as representatives. Four possible choice were given to the conference as the future basis of the government of Nigeria. They were: (a) a federal system with a strong central government (b) a federal

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p.74

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* p.75

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.80

system with a weak central government (c) confederation (d) entirely new arrangement which may be peculiar to Nigeria. In the conference, discussion on secession was ruled out.<sup>76</sup>

Initially the North and the East were for a confederation While West wanted the creation of more states within the existing federation falling which a confederation. The Mid-West stuck firmly for a federation with a strong center and the creation of new states. A week into the conference, North changed its position from a confederation to a federation with new States if the East and the West too were divided.<sup>77</sup>

The deliberation remained inconclusive and had to be called off due to the riots in the North. On September, 19, a mob of soldiers from the 4th battalion started killing Ibos in Tiv country. This news led to the killing of Northerners in the East. When this news reached the North, massacre of Ibos took place. The government remained helpless and inactive for the most of September and October.<sup>78</sup>

As in the May troubles the students, civil servants and the local politicians led the demonstrations and helped to get the mob out on to the streets. And once the killing began the situation went out of control. By the time killing ended the entire Ibo population of the North - about a million - had abandoned everything it possessed and was trekking to the East. The eastern government produced a detailed and vivid account of the massacre<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* p.80

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.* p.80

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.* p.81

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.* p.81

Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu and the eastern government played a 'number game' rising the death toll figures at least four times. In the foreword of the booklet 'Pogrom" a figure of "more than 700 dead' was given. At the Aburi meeting by then all the casualties had come in, a figure of 10,000 was used. By the time war began the figure had risen to 30,000. In the Ahira declaration ,Biafra's blue print for revolution, he used a figure of 50,000 dead. This along with the myth about his asking the Ibos to go back to the North were used to develop sympathy for the Biafran cause in the intentional media. True figure according to De.Jorr was around six to eight thousand dead.<sup>80</sup>

In a major move in October Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu expelled all the non- Easterners except the Ibos from mid-West, from the region.<sup>81</sup>

And as the year ended both sides began to arm themselves. Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon in one of his toughest speech, in which he laid down the general rules to which he adhered right through the secession. He ruled out a temporary confederation. He also unveiled a plan to crate eight to fourteen new states. To involve the civilians in governance while keeping the old politicians out. The northern troops were to stay in the Lagos enclave and the western region until local troops are trained. lastly he said if 'circumstances compelled me to preserve the integrity by force. I will do my duty'.<sup>82</sup>

#### ABURI SUMMIT

On the 4th of January the Supreme military council of Nigeria met in

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p.82

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.* p.82

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.* p.84

Aburi, Ghana. The military President of Ghana, General Ankrhah, chaired the meeting lasting two days. This was the first and the last time during the entire crisis the two principal actors - Lieutenant Colonel Gowon and Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu - sat and discussed their differences face to face. The extent of mistrust between the two sides was such that, apart from holding the meeting outside the country both the sides flew back to their respective regions at the end of the first day.<sup>83</sup>

The Aburi meeting marked a watershed in the Nigerian crisis. It is important to see the meeting in terms of the pre-conference frame of mind of the participants. Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu came to the meeting from a traumatised and aggrieved eastern region. The eastern region had by now developed a siege mentality. He wanted to take back some concrete proposal for establishing some sort of confederate State. He in effect came to rewrite the constitution and largely succeeded towards that end.<sup>84</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Gowon and the other military governors came with a very different frame of mind. They saw it less as a constitutional conference and much more as an informal ice breaking exercise.<sup>85</sup>

Nearly all the eastern government's proposals were accepted by Lieutenant Colonel Gowon. A cooling off period was agreed upon. A de facto separation of the army and the Lieutenant Colonel Gowon's post was to be graded down from the Supreme Commander to

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* p.86

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p.86

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p.86

Commander-in-Chief and the Head of the Federal government. The regions were to run their internal affairs and the concurrence of all the regions was required for any major decision affecting the country as a whole. This in effectively gave each region a veto on a host of subjects.  
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When Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon went back to Lagos, the civil servants explained the implications of the agreement. Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon backtracked by giving his interpretations of the agreement in response to a press conference by Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu. An attempt was made to salvage the agreement when the civil servants met in February in Benin. But they could not end the dead lock and referred it back to the Supreme military council. The Supreme Military council could not meet again as Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu felt it was too dangerous for him to travel out of the Eastern region.<sup>87</sup>

In a major escalation of the crisis, Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu in a dawn broadcast on Radio Enugu set March , 31 - the end of the financial year - as the deadline for the implementation of the Aburi agreement failing which he would take unilateral action to put it into effect. He called on the East to remain vigilant and be ready to defend itself: ' it is not our intention to be slaughtered in our beds'. He concluded by saying ' on Aburi there will be no compromise'

The Supreme Military Council met on March , 10 and passed the

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p.91

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p.92



Decree No.8. The decree was a compromise between the agreement reached at Aburi and the federal civil servants criticism of the agreement. It delegated more powers to the regions than any of the previous Nigerian constitutions. It would have Nigeria into a loose federation. It also marked the maximum Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon was willing to go to get the East to compromise. It also authorised the Supreme Military Council to declare a state of emergency anywhere in the country with the consent of any three of the four military governors.  
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Hectic efforts for mediation were made and the publication of the decree was withheld for a week to felicitate mediation. By now both the sides had gone far too ahead to retreat. Three days after the decree was published, Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu told a press conference ' we really have come to the line of no return - and crossed it.' And that the East would secede if attacked<sup>89</sup>.

On March , 31 instead of seceding Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu merely issued an edict appropriating all the federal revenue in the East. This was quickly followed by three more edicts taking over the federal corporations, railways, rolling stock, schools and courts. Only the oil revenue was left out.<sup>90</sup>

The end of March constituted the last hillock in the slope down to secession. East was now in possession of its own armed forces, a full fledged government machinery , master of its economy and finance and

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<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* p.92

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.* p.92

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* p.94

imbibed with a hot passion for secession<sup>91</sup>.

From April onwards it was a matter of time before East would announce its secession The Radio Enugu said the count down had began. The federal government had in response declared economic sanctions.<sup>92</sup>

### REPUBLIC OF BIAFRA

On the 20th of May the Eastern consultative Assembly was convened by Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu. In a marathon address he outlined the history of the crisis and asserted that the East was fully prepared to defend itself and gave the assembly three alternatives to choose from: (a) accepting the terms of the North and Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon and thereby submit to the domination by the North.(b) continuing the present stalemate and drift (c) ensuring the survival of our people by asserting our autonomy. The assembly passed a resolution mandating Lieutenant Colonel.. Ojukwu to declare the sovereign Republic of Biafra at an early practical date<sup>93</sup>.

On May, 27 Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu sent his final letter to Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon saying he had 'no alternative but to make plans for a separate existence in the interest of self preservation'. This did not amount to secession but it had taken the East across the point of no return.<sup>94</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel..Gowon activated his contingency plan . He assumed full powers ,declared emergency, abrogated the decree no.8.

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.* p.97

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* p.102

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* p.102

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.* p.103

The most far reaching decision was the division of the country into twelve new states. The North was carved into six new states, the East into three, the Mid-West was to remain intact and the West was to lose a slice to the federal capital to form the Lagos state. This broke the monolith of the three big tribes while giving the smaller tribes some power.<sup>95</sup>

This move was the straw which broke the camels back for the East. At 2am on the 30th of May diplomats and journalist were summoned and Lieutenant Colonel..Ojukwu solemnly proclaimed that the "territory and the region known as the Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and the territorial water shall hence forth be an independent sovereign State of the name and title Republic of Biafra."<sup>96</sup>

#### INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE.

As the situation deteriorated , the international community initially ignored the conflict. Both sides were actively lobbying for their positions. They both not only needed diplomatic recognition of their positions but also arms to continue the fighting<sup>97</sup>.

The US already preoccupied with vietnam and internal problems considered Nigeria to be in the British sphere of influence. The British government supported the federal government throughout the crisis. They did limit their arms sale to small and defensive weapons.<sup>98</sup>

Soviet Union ,on the other hand. did not take a cautious approach.

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p.103

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p.103

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* p. 120

<sup>98</sup>*ibid.* p.121

After the Nigerian lobbyist went to Moscow, ostensibly to inspect the embassy, Soviet weapons were sent in lieu of cash, cocoa or groundnuts. They initially got obsolete weapons but later began giving the latest weapons<sup>99</sup>

The Chinese supported Biafra once it was clear that the USSR was supporting Nigeria. But it was only moral support. No aid, advisors or weapons were sent.<sup>100</sup>

The OAU took up the issue in the Kinshasa conference but decided to rock the boat as little as possible and endorsed the status quo.<sup>101</sup>

The Commonwealth Secretary General Arnold Smith tried to bring about a solution but did not meet with much success. A full fledged conference was slated to be held in May 1969 but before it was held dramatic events took place in April. 4 African states - Tanzania, Gabon, Côte de Ivory and Zambia recognised Biafra in quick succession.<sup>102</sup>

The Portuguese and the French also supported the Biafran cause. While the Portuguese were involved from the beginning, the French accorded recognition in July 1965 to Biafra in response to British support to the Federal government. French arms poured in, sufficient to help Biafra survive but not enough to enable it to win the war.<sup>103</sup>

In the meantime a major hue and cry was raised about food situation in Biafra. ICRC in July 1968 called it the gravest emergency. Though regular flights were taking place between Biafra and Feranda Poo. The

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* p. 122

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* p.123

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* p. 124

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* p.177

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* p.181

food situation did not improve dramatically.

### COLLAPSE OF BIAFRA

The fighting began in July 1967 and in the initial stages the Nigerian forces were able to capture some of the delta areas and also cut off Biafra from Cameroon border. The Oil installations and the Port Harcourt were also captured early in the fighting.

Biafra in a major thrust moved into Mid-West region following a coup by Ibo officers there. They planned to move on till the western region and the Capital Lagos fell . But they could not keep up the momentum. Thereafter the fighting was slow and sluggish.

The Nigerian army used to first shell area to soften it. This would make the population melt into the bush and then the Nigerian forces would pushed the Biafran army back. The after the Biafrans retreated, the population of the area would move behind the Biafran lines. This continuous contraction of Biafra led to severe food shortages.

The third major assault by the Nigerians to end the stalemate took place in December 1969. This time the forces had almost no opposition. On January, 11 . Ojukwu flew to Ivory Coast. The next day January, 12, Major General. Philip Effiong announced the departure of Ojukwu and the surrender of Biafran forces. . Lt. Col. Gowon announced 3 days of prayers and said that the war has no victors and vanquished. The Nigerian reaction to the whole conflict was one of shame instead of jubilation.<sup>104</sup> As the following account shows.

Members of the corporation were from every tribe including Ibos.

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<sup>104</sup>*ibid.* p.402

when the surrender was announced there was no cheers ,no jubilation or arrangement for celebration. Most of the listeners had tears in their eyes and the editor wept', the Canadian administrator of 'Nigerian Observer'.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>*ibid.* p.403

**CHAPTER 4**  
**ERITREAN SECESSION 1961-1991**

## CHAPTER 4

### ERITREAN SECESSION 1961-1991

Ethiopia (including Eritrea) extends South and West from the Red sea to form the hinterland of the Horn of Africa. Its boundary stretches from latitude 3N to 18N and longitude 33E to 48E. It covers an area of 1,257,282 sq.Km. (483,123sq.Miles). Ethiopia's western neighbour is Sudan, to the South it shares border with Kenya and to the East and South-East lie the Republic of Djibouti and Somalia. To the North-East, Ethiopia has nearly 1000Km. of coastline along the Red sea. Offshore from Massawa, a port in northern Eritrea are the Dahlak Islands, a low lying coral group<sup>1</sup>

Elevation in Ethiopia range from around 100m below sea-level in the Dallol depression to a number of mountain peaks in excess of 4000m above sea-level. The highest is the Ras Dashan peak with a height of 4620m.<sup>2</sup>

The southern half of Ethiopia is bisected by a rift valley. The rift has a range of 40-60 Km. In the latitude of Addis Ababa, the western wall of the rift turns North and runs parallel to the West coast of Arabia, leaving a wide plain between the escarpment and the Red sea coast. It then narrows until, just off Massawa, the foothills of the escarpment are almost on the coastline,<sup>3</sup>

The southern wall of the rift turns to the East at the latitude of Addis Ababa forming an escarpment overlooking the Afar plains. The

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<sup>1</sup> . *Africa South of Sahara* .London, Europa Publication 1995p.344

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p.344

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* p.344



escarpment are nearly always abrupt and rise to a height of 1000m. They are broken at only one point where the Awash river descends from the rim of the plateau.<sup>4</sup>

The plateaux to the West of the rift system dip gently towards the West and are drained by Marab (Gash) and Barka rivers. The plateaux to the North of lake Tana are drained by Takkaze and Angreb rivers. The central plateaux are drained by Abbay (Blue Nile) which originates in Lake Tana. The southern region is also drained by Akobo, Gibe and Baro rivers. The rift valley also contains a number of lakes and closed river basins. River Awash flows North of the rift valley into the Afar plains and falls into the lake Abe.<sup>5</sup>

Although gold and copper are being mined right from the prehistoric times on the Eritrea plateau, very little is known about the mineral wealth of the Country. There are proven potash deposits in the Dallol depression but have yet not been exploited due to poor infrastructure. Oil exploration has yielded promising results in the Bale region.<sup>6</sup>

Ethiopia lies within the tropics but the wide range of altitudes result in considerable variation in temperatures and vegetation. The traditional zones of *dega* or temperate plateaux above 2400m, have an average temperature of 16°C. Then there is the *volla* zone or the hot lowlands situated below 1200m having a temperature of 26°C. There is an intermediate frost free zone of *wonia dega* with an average temperature of 22°C.<sup>7</sup>

Rainy season lasts from June to August when the moist is drawn

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p.344

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p.344

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* p.344

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p.344

	ETHIOPIA	ERITREA
POPULATION	49,947,400	2,000,000
AREA	1,130,130 sq. km.	121,144 sq. km.
GROUPS	Amhara, Harari, Oromo, Gumuz, Koma, Kambata, Hadiya, Gurage, Gimira, Maji, Dorze, Konso, Gedeo, Somali, Barata, Nuer, Anuak, Agaw, Majangir	Tegrengan, Tegrey, Baria, Kunama, Bani Amir, Sahel, Danakil, Akelli Guza, Sera, Maria, Saho, Belani

*Table - 2 Data of 1997*

from the South and West. Most of the highlands receives 1000mm of rain except the Eritrean plateau which receives much less rainfall. The dry lowlands have less than 500mm of rainfall except the Baro and Akobo river plains which receive much more rainfall.<sup>8</sup>

The natural vegetation of the plateaux and the highlands above 1800m is coniferous forest. In the South and South-West at lower elevation broad leaf rain forest are found. In this area coffee bushes grow wild as underbush. Above the treeline, there are wide expanse of mountain grasslands. These grasslands support the largest proportion of population and settled farming is done. In the lowlands depending on the rainfall conditions a wide variety of dryland vegetation grows. These vast tracts of rangeland are a major cattle rearing zone of the country.<sup>9</sup>

## POPULATION

In Ethiopia there has never been a full census. The most extensive census was conducted in 1984 when an estimated 85% of the population was enumerated. Based on this the population in 1991 was estimated to be around 53,383,000 persons. Of this an estimated 10% of the population lives below 1000m, another 20% between 1000m and 1800m and the remaining 70% above 1800m.<sup>10</sup>

The two main elements in its varied ethnic heritage are the numerically dominant, Cushitic speaking people traditionally scattered as pastoralist on the foot hills and lowlands and the politically dominant Semitic speaking people of the highland.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.* p.344

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* p.344

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 344

<sup>11</sup> Lewis, M. *Nationalism and Self-Determination on the Horn of Africa.* London. Ithaca, 1983. p.1

The Semitic speaking Tsegrenas and Amharic have dominated Ethiopian political history since the times of Aksum.

Major linguistic groups in Eritrea are<sup>12</sup>

1. *Tegregna*: Most Tegregna who live in the plateau are Christians and live a settled life. A significant proportion of the merchants in the highlands (the Jibarti) are Tegregna speaking Muslims. They shifted to trade after being debarred from land holding.

2. *Tegra*: Most Tegra speakers are Muslims and inhabit the North Eastern coastal plains. Most are nomads or semi-nomadic. It is also the language of Ben Amir, the dominant confederation of the West and Sahel tribes of the North and North West.

3. *Saho*: They live in the Eastern edge of the plateau and the foot hills of the coastal plains of Akala Guzay. Majority of the speakers are Muslims and pastoralist but there are also pockets of settled peasants and some Christians.

4. *Afar (Dankali)* :All of them are Muslims and majority are nomadic. They inhabit the harsh Dankali led sea coast.

5. *Beja*: Pastoralists living in the North West of Eritrea. A majority of the speakers live in Sudan

6. *Baza/ Kunama*: They are settled village dwellers and followers of Christianity and Islam. They live in the area between crash and Setrt rivers.

7. *Bilen*: Spoken by the people of Keren an important market town and its surrounding. They are equally divided between Muslims and Christians.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.177

Most of these linguistic groups have their own distinct culture, songs and dances. Except for the speakers of Tegra which is well developed rest of the linguistic groups speak Arabic, and are Muslim pastoralist or nomadic.

## HISTORY

Conventionally the history of Ethiopia begins with the visit of Queen Sheba from Ethiopia to Solomon, the King of Israel in the 10th century BC.<sup>13</sup> The first reference of Ethiopians in recorded history are found in the Egyptian sources as far back as 3000 BC.<sup>14</sup>

The earlier migration of the Nilotic people was followed by the great Sabeian migration. The Sabeans revolutionised the daily life and the political organisation of their predecessors.<sup>15</sup>

As the Sabeans began to move to the highlands, they began to build towns and even dams. This civilization began to spread and flourish in the highlands. As early as 1st century AD, Aksum became its important center. The civilization flourished on trade with Egypt and the countries of Mediterranean, Red sea and the Persian gulf. At its zenith the Aksumite State controlled large parts of northern Ethiopia and the Arabian coastline across the Red sea.<sup>16</sup>

The conversion of the Aksumite King Ezana to Christianity in 330 AD brought with it the creed and expressed itself in the culture of the people of the highlands. Aksum attained its peak between fourth and sixth century there after its decline began.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Zewde, Behra. *A History of Ethiopia : 1855-1974*. London. James Currey. 1991. p.7

<sup>14</sup> Sherman . Richard. *Eritrea: The Unfinished Revolution*, New York. Praeger . 1980. p.4

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>16</sup> *op.cit.* Zewde p. 8

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* p.8

The fall of Egypt to Arabs pushed the Beja tribes southward cutting off the inland trade. While on the East Aksum was cut off from the sea ending its maritime trade. The end of commerce, on which the wealth and power of Aksum was based, led to its slow decline. By 750 AD it had began to disintegrating.<sup>18</sup>

The five Beja kingdoms replaced the Aksumite kingdom . Not much is known about the history of these kingdoms. They amongst themselves controlled the area till the middle of 12th century. There after the Zagwe dynasty seized control of the area. This dynasty ruled from 1150 till 1270 when it was overthrown by Yekunno- Amlak, a chieftain of one of the Amahara tribes. He began a dynasty which called it self 'Solomonic' and traced its lineage to the King of Israel. They built an empire which matched its Aksumite predecessor in military as well as territorial expanse.<sup>19</sup>

. The Europeans were cut off from India and the rest of Far East due the control of this region by Arabs. A legend had spread in Europe about a christian king 'Pester John', who had held out to the Muslims and had superlative wealth. In this quest a Portuguese mission reached Ethiopia in 1520. to seek his help in curbing Muslim domination in the area. Despite this the relation remained lukewarm. The Ethiopia's attitude towards the Portuguese changed when a new force led by Ahmad ibn Ibrahim (or Ahmad Gragn) emerged. Ahmad Gragn, a military genius of the nomadic Afar and Somali tribes , won a series of victories taking him right up to Tiger and Eritrean plateaux in a short period of four years.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *op.cit* Sherman p. 6

<sup>19</sup> *op.cit.* Zewde p.8

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* p.8

## ARRIVAL OF PORTUGUESE

In 1541 at the request of the emperor a force of 400 men led by Christopher de Gama landed near Massawa. The emperor in the meantime had died a fugitive. The arrival of the Portuguese and the death of Ahmad helped the Ethiopians get an upperhand. Soon the forces of Ahmad Grgan retreated in disarray.

In 1557, the Ottoman empire reinforced their Massawa garrison and launched assaults on the highlands. They tried for the next 20 years without any success and were forced to retreat. All effort by the Ethiopians to dislodge them from Massawa failed. Thereafter both of them reached an agreement and the Turks remained in the coast for the next 3 centuries.<sup>21</sup>

After the defeat of the forces of Ahmad, the relation between the Portuguese and the Ethiopia improved. The military aid was followed by the missionaries. The Jesuits missionaries tried to convert the people to Catholicism. They nearly succeeded in their endeavour when the emperor Susneyos (r1607-1632) embraced the new creed. This resulted in an uprising by the nobels, clergy and the peasants. The emperor abdicated in favour of his son Fasilidas (r1632-1667). The new emperor built a number of castles and church. But this could not stop the decline of the monarchial power. By the second half of the 17th century the emperor from Gondar reigned but they did not rule. This period is known as *Zamana masafent* (era of Princes).<sup>22</sup>

The area which constitutes the present day Eritrea was identified as 'Medri Bahri' by the Portuguese explorers in the 17th century. Similarly the famous Scottish explorers noted in 1770 that both

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.9

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* p.10

Ethiopia and Medri Bahri were separate political entities that were often at war with each other.

In 1860 Tewodros, the Ethiopian ruler brought Eritrea under his control. When Tewodros arrested some British subjects, Sir Charles Napier was sent to free them. He landed with a force of 12,000 troops from India in January 1868. Sir Napier with the advise and support from the Kassa of Tegra was able to defeat Tewodros at Maychaw in April 1868. Tewodros committed suicide after his defeat. The British forces left after having accomplished their objective. Four years later in 1872 the Kassa of Tiger was crowned as Yohannes IV. He was the first Tegrean to become the King of Kings since the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty in 1270. The opening of Suez canal in 1869 enhanced the importance of Red sea and the Horn of Africa and the strategic significance of Eritrea. The Egyptians quickly established themselves along the red sea and Somali coast. They also displaced the Turks from Massawa in 1872. This gave them control of the lowlands while Yohannes controlled the high lands. In November 1875 and March 1876 the Egyptians were defeated while attempting to expand into the highlands.<sup>23</sup>

In 1879, Yohannes brought the Eritrean highlands under his control by defeating the local chiefs. The region remained under his control till 1889.<sup>24</sup>

During this period Yohannes became preoccupied with repulsing Mahdist forces from Sudan. He was led by the British to believe that he would be allowed to capture Massawa and Keren if he defeated the Mahdist forces .But the British did not honour the 1884 treaty and

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<sup>23</sup> *op.cit* Sherman p.10

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* p.10



instead encouraged the Italians to occupy the cities. In 1885 the Italians were able to defeat the Egyptians and seize the port city of Massawa.<sup>25</sup>

In 1879 the Italian government, through the Rubattino Shipping Company purchased the port of Assab from the local sultan. Assab and its surrounding areas were formally transferred to the Italian government in 1882. They also developed commercial links with King Menilek of Shoa(Amhara).<sup>26</sup>

The Italians soon began to subjugate the coastal areas. In January 1887, Italian forces had a major defeat and lost 480 troops to the forces of Ras Alula, a commander of Yohannes. The Italians in a bid to defeat Yohannes supported Shoa king against Yohannes. Menilek wanting to become the emperor himself agreed to remain neutral for 5000 Remington rifles.<sup>27</sup>

This put Yohannes's in a precarious position as he was completely surrounded. He died fighting the Mahdist forces in 1889. Menilek quickly seized power and was crowned as the King of Kings. However to secure his crown he had to contend with Yohannes's son Mangasha and Ras Alula. He signed the treaty of Ucciali on May 2, 1889 with Antonelli. The Italians got the control of Mardi Bahri - henceforth to be called Eritrea - for their support.<sup>28</sup>

### COLONIAL PERIOD

On January 1, 1890 decree of the King of Italy proclaimed the colony of Eritrea as an Italian colony. The Italians establish their capital at Asmara.

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p.10

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* p.11

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p.12

Differences arose between the Italians and Menilek over the interpretation of the treaty of Ucciali. The Italians contended that the treaty made Ethiopia a protectorate of Italy while the Ethiopia refuted this claim. <sup>29</sup>

During the first half of the next decade both sides began military preparation. The Italians underestimated the strength of the Ethiopians and began to advance into Tegra in 1894. In the following December the Ethiopian army routed the Italians at Amba Alage. In March 1896 in the battle of Adwa, Menileks forces decimated the forces of General Baratieri. <sup>30</sup>

Despite being in a position to remove Italians form Eritrea Menilek choose to return to Addis Ababa. The main reason for this was that he was trying to expand Southward. After the defeat of the Italian the treaty of Ucciali was renounced. A new treaty, the Addis Ababa peace treaty, was signed. It envisaged among other things, War repatriation for Ethiopia and a larger territory for the Italian. <sup>31</sup>

Once Eritrean colony was secured, the Italian government launched a three prong policy to exploit Eritrea. First, Eritrea was to be developed for occupation by Italians. Second, the natural produce of Eritrea was to be exploited and the territory was to become a market for Italian goods. Thirdly, Eritrea was to serve as a base for projected African conquest. <sup>32</sup>

Menilek's last years were marked by administrative paralysis due to his protracted illness. He appointed his grandson Lij Iyasu - a boy of twelve - as his successor. Soon after his death in December 1913,

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p.12

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* p.12

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p.15

the boy was deposed. In September 1916, Menilek's daughter Zawditu was proclaimed the Empress and Tafari son of the Emperor's cousin was made the Regent. <sup>33</sup>

The Regent slowly accumulated power and was crowned Negus in 1928. On the death of the Empress in March 1930, Tafari was crowned Emperor Haile Sellase I in November 1930. <sup>34</sup>

In 1931, a constitution was promulgated which provided for a bicameral parliament with nominated Senate and a chamber of deputies. The Constitution far from being radical, had very little impact on the Ethiopian political life. It left the absolutist power of the Emperor intact. The political culture was characterised by Conservatism, inegalitarian and restrictive social norms and lack of national integration or economic development. <sup>35</sup>

In spite of Italy's colonial ambition and painful memories of the Battle of Adaw, actual relations between the two were remarkably good during the Regency of Tafari. The Fascist regime of Mussolini, however, began preparation for the invasion of Ethiopia. In November 1934, trouble began over the demarcation of the boundary and Italy demanded an apology and indemnity. Haile Selase refused and took the matter to the League of Nations in December. In the meantime, Italy invaded Ethiopia. Despite a spirited defence, Addis Ababa fell on May 6, 1936. <sup>36</sup>

### **BRITISH MILITARY ADMINISTRATION**

The advent of World War II was the beginning of the end of the

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<sup>33</sup> Boahen, A Abu.ed., *UNESCO General History of Africa* . Paris, UNESCO. 1985. p.305

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* p.305

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p.305

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p.305

Italian rule. The British strategy was to weaken Germany's ally, Italy, by destroying its East African army before it could move northward to join with Field Marshal Rommel's army.<sup>37</sup>

The British unified forces entered Eritrea in January 1941 from Sudan and by February, British political officers had assumed the administration of Western Eritrea. The British forces then advanced to Keren where the only serious battle of the Eritrean campaign was fought and Keren fell on March 27th 1941. Three days later Asmara fell and a week after that Massawa fell to the British forces. With the fall of Massawa all of Eritrea was under British occupation. Fifty years of Italian occupation had come to an end.<sup>38</sup>

The British continued to occupy Eritrea for the next 11 years. In this period, political consciousness grew tremendously among the Eritreans. The British rule was geared to maintain the status quo so as to facilitate the status quo. They did not attempt to change the Italian colonial order, most often used Italian staff.<sup>39</sup>

The Ethiopian government of Haile Selassie felt it had enough reasons to ask for a political union with Eritrea. The Unionist had their origin in the 'society for the love of the country', later it became the Unionist party. It encouraged chauvinism against the remaining Italian settlers, sentiments against Muslims were mobilized on an anti-Muslim basis.<sup>40</sup>

The base of the Unionists broadened on two counts over the formation of Italian Eritrean association which was later called New Eritrea party and called for trusteeship under the Italians. This

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<sup>37</sup> *op.cit* Sherman p. 15

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.* p.15

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p.16

<sup>40</sup> *op.cit.* Lewis p. 181

generated a lot of resentment.<sup>41</sup>

Second the support of Ethiopia and the part played by the Coptic church. . A British official posted there says ' every priest had become a propagandist for the Ethiopian cause. The cathedrals , monasteries and the village church would be festooned with the Ethiopian flag . Sermons and prayers would be delivered in unequivocal language'.<sup>42</sup> The Church began to play an active role as early as 1941.

The movement for independence had its origin in 'Serf emancipation movement' formed in 1941 to liberate the Tegra from the rule of the Nabtab and Shumagulla. With the coming of the British, the rebellion of the Serfs took place.<sup>43</sup>

The Italians had divided the clans into aristocrats and serfs. The aristocrats levied taxes on the subjects. When the Nataba and Tegra began to led a sedentary life in the vicinity of market broke down this distinction as they produced equal to each other. <sup>44</sup>

A nascent separatist movement began at around the same time in Appele. One of the earliest leaders of the separatist movement was the newspaper editor Woldeab Woldemariam. <sup>45</sup>

The British view during the mid 1940's was for a partition of Eritrea between Ethiopia and Sudan in such a way as to allow the Eritrean Abyssinians to join their kinsman in Ethiopia and the Moslem tribes of Western Eritrea to incorporate into Sudan. <sup>46</sup>

Till then there was no clear indication about what the Muslims wanted to do till 1946. In December 1946, Ibrahim Sultan called a

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* p. 181

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p.181

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p.181

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p.180

<sup>45</sup> *op.cit* Sherman p.18

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p.19

meeting of all the Muslim communities to consider the question of Eritrea's future. In this meeting the Muslim League was created which opposed the union with Ethiopia. The majority in the meeting favoured independence after a limited period under international trusteeship. No one opted for the partition of Eritrea.<sup>47</sup>

#### DISPOSAL OF ERITREA

In September 1946, the Council of Foreign Ministers met and agreed that the four powers should decide the fate of Italy's former colonies. In case they failed to reach a decision, then the problem should be dealt by the UN General Assembly.<sup>48</sup>

Political activity gained momentum as the future of Eritrea was being discussed. The main political parties emerged. Apart from the Muslim League, (ML) Eritrean Christians separatists organised themselves under the Liberal Progressive Party (LPP) and Unionist Party, led by Tadla Bayru supported unionist plans.<sup>49</sup>

The differences took a violent turn, when the young unionists began terrorist attacks against selected leaders of the ML and LPP. This led to further escalation of terrorist attacks and counter attacks. These attacks led to the polarization based on religious persuasion and were exploited by the Ethiopians, the British and the Italian to serve their purposes.<sup>50</sup>

The Italians supported an independent Eritrea once their claim for trusteeship was not accepted. An independent Eritrea would have looked towards Italy for economic assistance. The launching of Eritrean Old Soldiers Association in March 1947 was a part of Italian

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p.19

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.* p.19

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.* p.19

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p.19

policy to have a stake in the future of Eritrea. And throughout the late 40's, a cycle of meddling, exploitation of differences, violence and polarization continued.<sup>51</sup>

The question of the disposal of Eritrea and other Italian colonies first came up at the London Conference of the Council of Foreign Ministers in September 1945. The terms of the Italian peace treaty provided for the colonies to be jointly disposed of by Britain, France, the US and the Soviet Union within one year of its coming into force. In case the four powers could not agree on a solution by September 15, 1948, the matter would be referred to the UN General Assembly. The four powers, due to existing post-war environment could not reach an acceptable solution.<sup>52</sup>

There were two possible solutions, with a number of variations. Eritrea could become independent immediately or after a period of trusteeship. Alternatively, it could be united partially or wholly with Ethiopia. A Commission Investigation was sent to Eritrea and other territories to report on the wishes of the inhabitants.<sup>53</sup>

Before the arrival of the Commission in 1948, the British military administration called for representations from each of the clans and family to be elected and subsequently meet the commission members. The number of representative elected was 3336 of which the Unionist had support of 44.%, ML had 40.5% and 4.5% were LPP's and the pro-Italy representatives accounted for the remaining 9.2%. The Muslim League and the LPP were committed to independence, but were willing to have a 10 year trusteeship period, if needed. But due to

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p.19

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.* p.20

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.* p.20

internal politics between the four powers, a solution could not be arrived at. So on September, 15 1948, the case was referred to the UN General Assembly. <sup>54</sup>

In the UN, Italy became more hopeful of getting a favorable decision. The ML, LPP and the pro-Italy party formed the Independence bloc and demanded immediate independence. Based on the four power Commission, they could claim majority. The Italian Liaison Officer in Asmara played an active role in weakening the Unionist. <sup>55</sup>

In September 1949, the General Assembly decided that Libya should become independent immediately and that Somalia should be granted independence after a ten year period of Italian trusteeship. However, with regard to Eritrea, it decided to send its own commission to Eritrea to determine the wishes of the inhabitants. The Commission consisted of representatives of Norway, Guatemala, South Africa, Pakistan and Burma. <sup>56</sup>

In the early 1950's, after the formation of the UN Committee, an increase in terrorist violence began. Also, in major political development, a split occurred in both the ML and LPP due to resentment to the pro-Italian attitude. The break away faction of the Muslim League formed the ML of Western province, while the break away faction of LPP formed the Liberal Unionists Party which called for a conditional union. <sup>57</sup>

The UN Commission arrived in Eritrea in February 14 and stayed up till April 6, 1950. This Commission did not employ any systematic

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<sup>54</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p.21

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p.22

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p.22



method of evaluation. In addition, the members of the Commission produced two reports and proposed three different proposals.<sup>58</sup>

The Norwegian, South African and Burmese delegates felt that only a minority of Eritreans favoured independence. Pakistani and Guatemala delegates concluded the majority wanted independence. The latter two accused the British military administration of preventing economic development as a means of furthering British dreams of partition. The three proposals were: 1. Union with Ethiopia, 2. Federation with Ethiopia, and 3. independence preceded by a ten year trusteeship under UN administration.<sup>59</sup>

#### **FEDERATION WITH ETHIOPIA**

The General Assembly favoured a middle of the road solution, of federation between the extremes, of Union with Ethiopia and independence. On December 2, 1950, the General Assembly adopted a resolution 390 A(V) by a vote of 46 to 10. It provided that Eritrea should constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the Sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown.<sup>60</sup>

The Eritrean government was to have legislative, executive and judicial powers in the field of domestic affairs. The jurisdiction of the federal government was to include defence, foreign and inter-state commerce and external and interstate communication including ports. An Imperial Federal Council composed of equal number of Ethiopian and Eritreans representatives was to be setup. There was to be a transition period not extending beyond September 15, 1952, during which the Eritrean government was to be organised and a Constitution

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p.22

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* p.23

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* p.23

drawn up. The British administration was to organise an Eritrean administration and a representative assembly in conjunction with an appointed UN Commission.<sup>61</sup>

A Constituent Assembly of 68 members was elected in which the Unionist had 32 members, Democratic Bloc (pro-independence) had 18 and the ML of WP had 15 seats. The remaining 3 seats were divided between 3 splinter groups. Due to personality clash and political condition, the Muslim League supported the Unionist in a moderate compromise constitutional framework.<sup>62</sup>

The new Constitution provided that the Ethiopian government will also be the federal government and that the Emperor was to be represented in Eritrea by a Governor-General. The federal representative was to promulgate legislation as well as render his opinion on any legislation that might involve 'international responsibility'. The legislature was a single assembly with an elected president. The executive would be headed by a chief executive who would be elected by the Assembly and would appoint Secretaries to head the government department. He was to also appoint judges who were to be free of legislature and executive control.<sup>63</sup>

Moreover, Eritrea was to have its own flag and official language, Tsegreña and Arabic. The Constitution was ratified by Haile Selassie on September 11 and on September 15, 1952, the Union Jack was lowered and Eritrea passed on to its federated status with Ethiopia.<sup>64</sup>

The federation with Ethiopia lasted only ten years ending in November 1962. The Federal arrangement had several incongruities.

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<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p.23

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* p.24

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.* p.26

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.* p.26

First, the disparity of the size between the two. Second, the two units were expected to co-exist politically with radically different socio-political structures. Eritrea was based on the principles of democratic government stood in stark contrast with the authoritarian of the Ethiopian monarchy. Third, there was no federal constitution to regulate clearly the relationship of governmental authority and responsibility.<sup>65</sup>

The parliamentary elections of 1952 were the first and last to be held under the Eritrean constitution. Later the Constitution itself was suspended. Tadla Bayru, the Chief Executive of Eritrea resigned in mid 1955 due to excessive interference from the Emperor's official representative in Eritrea. A crack down of newspapers began.<sup>66</sup>

In 1956, Eritrean Assembly was temporarily suspended. Later in the year, new parliamentary elections were held, but without organised political parties. Amahara , the language of Sohans was made the national language of Eritrea and Tsegreña and Arabic ceased to be official languages.<sup>67</sup>

In December 1958, it was announced that the Eritrean Assembly had voted to discard the Eritrean flag and to fly only the Ethiopian flag. In September 1959, Eritrean law was replaced by Ethiopian Penal Code. In May 1960, the Assembly voted to change the name of the Eritrean government to Eritrean administration. The seal was changed to Eritrean administration under Haile Selassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia.<sup>68</sup>

In 1952, the Trade Union movement under the leadership of

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* p.26

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p.26

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p.26

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* p.26

Woldeab Woldemariam formed the Eritrean General Union of Labour Syndicates. A short time later, it was banned, in response the dock workers staged a two week strike which ended after clashes between the Ethiopian army and the dock workers.<sup>69</sup>

By 1962, Haile Selassie was ready to move towards full annexation of Eritrea and an abrogation of the federal status. It was not that Eritreans did not protest to the UN but nothing was done to alter his course of action. And on November 14, 1962, the federation of Eritrea and Ethiopia was declared null and void and Eritrea became Ethiopia's 14th province.<sup>70</sup>

The Ethiopians felt that the union of Ethiopia and Eritrea constituted a reintegration of two artificially separate cultures. The complimentary nature of their economics and their geographic unity was emphasized. And the need for a sea outlet was stressed.<sup>71</sup>

Another aspect of unity stressed by the proponents is that of ethnic affiliations. The people of the Eritrean plateau speak the same language - Tsegna of the neighbouring province of Tegra and are predominantly Coptic Christians. And that they share the same values and the same social, religious and cultural patterns of behaviour. Lastly, the Ethiopians have historically believed in a three pronged Islamic threat. They claimed that Muslims who constitute a minority 40% (instead of an estimated one half) are instigating the Eritrean struggle as a part of Pan-Arabism.<sup>72</sup>

The Eritreans claim was based on historical considerations, lack of central authority, economic exploitation, ethnic differences, UN's

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.* p.27

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p.27

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* p.27

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p.28

role the formation of the late federation and abrogation of federation by Ethiopia.<sup>73</sup>

### ERITREAN SECESSION

The lack of success of the national movements in 1950 's and the disenchantment with peaceful means were the major causes for the formation of ELF ( Eritrean Liberation Front). It was formed by a group of political exiles in Cairo. They were led by Idris Muhammad Adam, a nationalist and the former speaker of the Eritrean assembly, Ibrahim Sultan, the former head of ML and Woldeab Woldemariam, the former head of the General Union of Eritrean workers. Its expansion into Eritrea was through this kinship relation of Idris Mohammad with Hamid Idris Await. (Both from Ben Amir) a nationalist with a history of resistance to the British.<sup>74</sup>

ELF's first engagement with Ethiopians was an attack on a police unit in the Mount Adal in Western Eritrea. ELF's main supporters were from the pastoral nomads and their recently settled brothers in the Western region. Though the pastoralist spoke a different dialect they used Arabic as a lingua franca and were Muslims. Some Christians mainly Protestants joined the front.<sup>75</sup>

In 1963 ELF formed a Supreme Council with Idris Mohammad as its president, Woldeab Woldemariam as the director of the Cairo office and Osman Saleh as the Secretary General, and Ambassador at large. ELF continued to grow and gradually gained control of most of rural Western and Northern Eritrea.<sup>76</sup>

In 1965 ELF was reorganised into four zones under relatively

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p.29

<sup>74</sup> *op.cit.* Lewis p.184

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.188

<sup>76</sup> *op.cit.* Sherman p.174

autonomous regional commanders. In 1966 a fifth zone was carved out for the Central highlands with a Christian commander. Although there was a Central military training camp, the fighters were distributed on the basis of region, religion and tribe.<sup>77</sup>

Eritrea was portrayed as a predominantly Arab and Muslim society and the Eritrean struggle as a fight for Islam. This led to tension between the Muslims and Christians in ELF. The problem was compounded with the expansion of ELF into the highlands. The early bands of Ben Amir and zonal organisation of Barka region led to fears of revival of traditional rivalry between the Ben Amir and the highland Tegregna Christian peasants.<sup>78</sup>

The majority of the dissenters in ELF were Tegregna Christians from the highlands. This difference led to bloody internal conflict in ELF from 1966 onwards. In September 1968, 3 groups, the Oble group, PLF and highland Tegregna Christians formed a united zone. A reconciliation bid took place in the Adobha Conference in August 1969. They agreed to form new provisional military leadership called General Command with 38 members. (18 from the United Zones and 10 each from the autonomous zones). But the agreement soon broke down and the internal conflict resumed.<sup>79</sup>

In July 1970, the ELF split and EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation front) was formed. It was dominated by Tegregna speaking Christian highlanders. The reason for the domination of the Christians was social and not religious. The better educated, more politically conscious highland population was better disposed to serve as the

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<sup>77</sup> *op.cit.* Lewis p.185

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.* p.185

<sup>79</sup> *op.cit.* Sherman p.43

vanguard of the revolution. <sup>80</sup>

The Derge took over power in June 18 1974. In August the Ethiopian policy towards Eritrea was announced in parliament. It laid down the framework in which the Derge would deal with the Eritrean issue. First was that it was a internal problem to Ethiopia. Secondly it was a part of the general question of giving some kind of autonomy to various nationalities.<sup>81</sup>

At that time EPLF was not a very large organisation with limited support from the highland Christian population. The lull after the fall of the emperor gave way to fierce fighting in 1975. The Fronts launched a combined assault on Asmara on 24 January 1975. The Ethiopians were able to repulse the attack. But after that they began retaliatory shelling on the villages surrounding Asmara. They also rounded up people and killed them.(Red Terror).

This was a major turning point in the Eritrean struggle. Henceforth the Coptic Tegregans joined EPLF in great numbers. They did not join the ELF due to their traditional hostility towards pastoralist and Muslims.<sup>82</sup>

The Derge felt that fighting was justified as long as ancien regime was there. As the regime had changed there was no need for continuing the fighting.

The ELF was labeled as Arab reaction and EPLF was seen as belonging to the family of progressives, and that the EPLF was making the demand for independence due to the Arab hand. With this

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid.* p.69

<sup>81</sup> Halliday, Fred & Moyneux, Maxime T p.172

<sup>82</sup> Le Fort, Rene. *Ethiopia : A Hewritical Revolution?.* London, Zed Press, 1982 p.144

view in mind, the Durge opened negotiations with the EPLF.<sup>83</sup>

EPLF, on the other hand felt that General. Aman's (an Eritrean) proposals were close to its own demand. The EPLF also shared Durge ideology. There were ethnic affiliations between the Christian Tsegrenas and the Amahara. All this led to negotiations between the two. These negotiations broke down when EPFL was able to secure large areas and its ranks began to swell in the aftermath of Asmara assault.<sup>84</sup>

The Ethiopians were able to devote their attention to Eritrea after forcing the Somali's out in 1978. This was made possible due to the massive inflow of arms and advisors from the Soviet bloc. But the Ethiopians would not hold on to their gains due to sustained pressure from the Fronts.

The situation did not change much during the famines in the early 80's. But this gave a lot of exposure to the Eritrean cause. By the end of the 80's, the EPLF was pushing the Ethiopians into the main cities. Over a period of the next few years, the Ethiopians lost one by one of these cities. Eventually, in 1990, Massawa was captured and by May, next year entire Eritrea was under the control of the Eritreans. Another major factor was, with the collapse of Soviet bloc the arms aid ceased.

The fall of Mengistu by the coalition of forces, of which EPLF was member - EPDRF (Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front) - led to its forming the defacto government in 1991. On April 23rd and 24th 1993 UN supported referendum was held. The Eritreans voted by 99.8% in favour of independence. And on May 28

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<sup>83</sup> *op.cit.* p. 144

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p.177



1993, Eritrea proclaimed its independence. The independence celebrations were attended, among others, by the President of Ethiopia

#### **INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE.**

The Emperor had the support of the US when he had staked his claim. But by 1970's the US was slowly pulling back its support. When the Derge came to power, Mengistu was able to convince the USSR switch support from Somalia to him. It was the massive inflow of arms and advisors that helped him defeat the Somali's and push back the Eritrean. US in the meantime began to support Somalia.

Iraq, Libya, Syria and some Gulf countries have off and on supported the Eritreans. ELF in initial stages and both later on. Sudan provided active support till the relations between Ethiopia and Sudan improved. The Ethiopians agreed to stop supporting the PLA in lieu of Sudan stopping aid to Eritreans. But they did provide civilian bases to the Eritreans

**CHAPTER 5**  
**ANALYSIS**

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ANALYSIS**

The study has discussed the theoretical aspects of ethnicity and the causes for ethnic assertion and its aggregation to secession. It has also discussed the background to both the cases, namely Biafra and Eritrea. The study in this chapter will analyse what was the role played by ethnicity in both cases of secession and also compare them.

#### **Socially Mobilised Group:**

For secessionist struggle to be launched it is essential that a socially mobilised group should exist.

#### **Nigeria**

Nigeria experienced a short period of colonial rule. The first inward colonial thrust was in 1861 when the British annexed Lagos. In 1892 Yorubaland kingdoms permitted British Residents to stay. It was only in 1903 that the whole of North was subjugated. This meant that the affiliation to the kingdoms was not very old. Secondly many of the kingdoms had fought against British annexation and did not allow missionaries to operate.

During the nationalist struggle ethnic affiliations were used as the primary rallying point. All the 3 major parties were largely based on support of a particular ethnic group. The Eastern region was dominated by the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) which was based on Ibo support. In the Western region Action Group (AG) was the leading political party. It was dominated by educated Yorubas. In largest region of the country, the Northern People's Congress was the main political Party. It had its base in the Hausa-Fulani elite.

No umbrella organisation evolved during the short nationalist struggle. These parties articulated the demands of their respective bases. The NPC and AG wanted a large degree of autonomy while NCNC favoured the establishment of centralised government.

The 1954 constitution tried to balance these demands. It envisaged a weak federal government with jurisdiction on defence, foreign policy and communications. The residual powers was with the provinces.

In the elections all the parties tried to strengthen their own base while encouraging the smaller ethnic group in the other regions to assert themselves.

The response of the ethnic groups to the Ibo coup reflected the old ethnic divisions. While the North was shocked at the losses of its top politicians and military officers ,in the East there was public rejoicing.

When General. Ironsi came to power he chose his regional governors and battalion commander keeping ethnic considerations in mind.

In the following debate regarding the future of the country too, all the ethnic groups strongly presented their positions which differed considerably.

The riots in North and the following politics reflect that in Nigeria the ethnic groups were actively participating in public affairs and the population already was socially mobilised.

### **Ethiopia**

In Eritrea there are three main ethnic groups: Muslims, Protestants and Coptics. The muslims are confederation of many clans speaking different dialects. Apart form these differences muslims in general are either pastoralist, nomads or semi- nomadic people mostly living in the lowlands. They all have Arabic as their lingua franca. Ben Amir is one of

the major sub group among the Muslims.

Historically they have rarely been subjugated and for brief period ruled parts of the highlands. The Turks in order to keep their control of Massawa constantly paid tributes to these lowland groups. When the Italians they were constantly harassed by these groups. In order to control them they helped some groups to subjugate other groups and collect taxes from them.

During the British Military administration the subjugated groups rose against the aristocratic groups. During this movement the muslim leadership emerged which later led to the formation of Muslim League(ML).

In 1946 the muslims from various groups got together to deliberate on their stand regarding the future of Eritrea. They demanded either immediate independence or after a ten year trusteeship. The Muslim League was formed at the end of the deliberations.

The ML was politically active and was a member of the Independence bloc. Before the UN team came, it suffered a split and the aristocratic groups left it. The Aristocratic groups were certain by now that the Italians would not get the trusteeship and hoped that emperors autocratic regime would return them their old powers and prestige.

After the federation with Ethiopia was formed in 1952 ML remained active in the Eritrean assembly. By 1962 Hayle Selassie had dismantled the federation and made Eritrea a province of Ethiopia. Muslims led by ML continued to oppose the moves on one hand and began to consolidate themselves on the other .

Frustrated with the peaceful and institutional opposition the muslims were the main force behind the formation of the ELF (Eritrean Liberation

Front) when it was formed in 1962. They continued to remain with ELF though some sections joined EPLF.

The Eritreans Coptic have historic and religious links with the Ethiopian Coptic Church. This was used by Haile Selassie from 1941 onwards to further the Ethiopian claim. They are mostly Tsegrean speaking peasants living in the highlands. When the Unionist party was formed they were its main supporters. The party used the anti-Italian and anti- muslim rhetoric to mobilise them.

When the federation was formed they received extensive patronage from the ancien regime. When the emperor was deposed they had the most number of government jobs after the Amharas. The first chairman of the Derge was an Eritrean General. Being in the fringe area of the highlands they were never subjugated for long periods by the Amhara's.

When the federation was dismantled they did not oppose it , as it did not harm their interests. For the Same reason they were hostile towards ELF. Their attitude changed after the repression unleashed by the durge in 1975 (Red Terror)

The membership of Eritrean Evangelist church was around ten thousand in the 1940's. Despite this small number they rose to powerful position during the British Military administration. When the question of disposal of Eritrea came up they supported independence. Towards this end they formed the Liberal Progressive party(LPP) led by Waleab Woulde Mariam. They were an active member of the independence bloc.

When the federation was formed LPP remained active in the Eritrean assembly. After the dismantling of the Federation they joined ELF. When the internal crisis began in ELF they broke away from it to form the EPLF in 1970. They continued to control EPLF leadership and the first

president of Eritrea is a Protestant.

### **Pool of Symbol Connoting Distinctiveness:**

A symbol pool has to exist which connotes distinctiveness of the group vis-a-vis another group.

### **Nigeria**

All the ethnic groups in Nigeria have myths regarding their origin and how they came to reside in that part of the country. Like, the Yorubas consider Ife to be the spot where God created man.<sup>1</sup>

Then due to the short colonial rule and use of local chiefs to administer (indirect rule), the chiefs continued to remain relevant and a symbol for the group. They also had a figure head above the local chief like the Sarduna of Sokoto and Alfine of Oyo.

The ethnic group though internally divided spoke the same language or its dialect like the Hausa based languages spoken by the people of the North and the Ibos of East spoke ibo. Each group had its set of traditional dress, deity food habits and ceremonies.

Different religions dominated the different regions. In the East Catholicism was prevalent among Ibos, in the West protestants were in a majority and in the North most of the people were muslims.

This apart as all the groups were in contention for control of the center hence all these traits were used to maintain distinctness.

### **Ethiopia**

The major group occupied different regions while the muslims mostly were in the lowlands, the christians stayed in the high lands. This led to their pursuing different occupations. The highland dwellers were mostly peasants and did farming. While those in the lowlands were either nomadic or pastoralist. They have historic hostilities with each other over

grazing rights.

The lowland muslims spoke different dialects but all of them used Arabic as a lingua franca, while the highland christians spoke Tegrean. They also had different sets of traditional dress, food habits, dances and songs.

Within the christians, the majority of them were Coptic while the rest were protestants. The differences were due to rise protestants under the British rule .

### **Selection, Standardisation and Transmission of the Symbol-Pool by the Leadership:**

From the symbol-pool certain symbols are selected and standardised by the leadership of the group. These standardised symbols are then transmitted by the leadership to the group.

#### **Nigeria**

The need to standardise symbols was not needed as there were standardised symbols available to the leadership. The task of transmission of these symbol for political purpose was under taken by the 3 political parties.

The government took an active role in reinforcing these symbols as the conflict aggravated. The Eastern government brought out vivid and well documented reports of the riots. Radio Nigeria and Radio Enugu played a crucial role in disseminating propaganda.

#### **Ethiopia**

The ELF did not try to broaden the identity, instead let the old identities operate. It did not need to do so because the lowland pastoralists were always hostile to occupation. Hence it did not need to create new identity but chanalise the resentment in the proper direction.



EPLF on the other hand had to develop new identity. It was formed by the group of protestants highlander who were a very small minority and had been close to the establishment.. It adopted Leninist principle to organise the front and tried to imbibe the cadre with an identity of new Eritrea. They encouraged new dances and songs for this purpose. They accorded to Arabic an status equal to Tегegan.

The size of the front grew rapidly only after Coptic christians began to join after the repression

### **Relative Deprivation**

The group must have a sense of deprivation with respect to a reference group. This feeling of deprivation can be either real or imagined.

### **Nigeria**

All the 3 major groups of Nigeria wanted to control the center. They were also apprehensive about others getting control of the center. A major cause for the resentment in the North was the killing of the two top most politicians of the region in the coup. All the military officers except one were from the North. During the coup no violence or killing occurred in Enugu the capital of the Eastern region. Also the coup plotters were not even dismissed from the service by General. Ironsi.

While there was shock and silence in the North over the killing in the coup, in the Eastern region there was public jubilation. The Ibos living in the North displayed provocative behaviour by singing songs in praise of the coup and the end of Northern rule. Then some articles like the one in 'drum' showing the late Sarduna begging for forgiveness from a Ibo added to the anger.

Deeper down they opposed the unitary moves and the unification of administration. They feared loss of employment opportunities as they had

very few schools at the time of Independence. If the administration is unified then they would not be able to compete with others for jobs. The Ibos resented being treated as second class citizens in the North. They had to stay in colonies called 'Strangers Quarters'. The killing of Ibos during riots and police inaction added to this resentment when the refugees reached East, they recounted their tales, this increased the tension and they called for Secession. Then in Northern coup, Eastern personnel in the army were rounded up and killed by Northern soldiers.

The taking over of General Gowon as the Head of State was not accepted by General Ojukwu. Their personal hostility was a major solvent of the conflict.

After the riots in the North the entire Ibo population in the North about a million abandoned everything and trekked to the Eastern region.

### **Ethiopia**

The Muslims of the lowland were traditionally independent pastoralists or nomadic groups. The few muslims in the highlands like the Tegrean speaking traders had been alienated from their lands and were constantly harassed by the Ethiopians. Being independent minded they did not like to be subjugated to a king or a group. They wanted to live a unhindered life based on their traditional and Islamic laws.

The Italians in order to control the population subjugated certain tribes to others. The subjugated clans had to pay a tax to the autocratic laws. The fear of return of this system was the main cause of opposition by the Muslims for an Italian trusteeship.

They did not want a union with Ethiopia due to the fears of this system returning. The Ethiopians were traditionally anti-Islamic/ Arab. They had alienated Muslims from land rights in Ethiopia. There were also no

prospects of Muslim rising in Ethiopia.

While for the Protestants, they feared loss of their power and privileges they had under British administration. So they preferred Independence. They feared the reversal of the privileges and power if either Italians or Ethiopians got to rule Eritrea.

While for the Coptics, they did not want the Italians, as the experience of their rule was fresh in their minds. They opposed Independence as it would give the Italians or the Protestants privileges at their expense.

They were also consolidated by the use of the Coptic church to support independence.

The Tegregan speaking Coptics of the highlands had opposed the Amaharas but due to compulsion of the situation they supported unification. It was only after the repression in Asmara in 1975 that they joined EPLF.

#### **Size Concentration and Location**

The tendency of the group to assert or articulate its demands depends on its relative size and concentration. If the group is of relatively large proportion of the population then the tendency to assert and make greater demands will be more in comparison to a relatively smaller group.

Similarly a concentrated population have a greater tendency to articulate and demand more than a dispersed population.

If the location of the group is closed to the boarder or the sea coast then the tendency to assert is greater than a group situated in the interior.

#### **Nigeria**

The North constituted the largest proportion of the population of Nigeria. The population was not only concentrated in the North but in the settlements around Kano. Rest of the region was sparingly populated.

Very few of the Northerners went outside the region for work. In the aftermath of the Second coup when there were plans for North to secede, plans were made to transport the Northern garrison and dependents of Northern federal officials back to the North.

In the case of Ibos, the population was very dispersed and did most of the semi-skilled and skilled jobs in the country. After the May riots a large number of Ibo refugees left North and went to the East. While Frederick Forsyth and W. Schwarz claim that Ojukwu asked the Ibos to return for the sake of unity and after the riots he felt personally responsible for the loss of life. As a sign of mourning he grew a beard. This claim is refuted by De Jorr who could not find the statement in either of the cited sources.

As a result of the riots the entire Ibo population abandoned everything and went to the Eastern region. In a move to strengthen Ibo concentration in the East, Ojukwu expelled all the non-Ibos in October 1966.

He also tried to rally support of the regions ethnic minority and to get West and mid-West to revolt against the North. Gowon on the other hand promised the ethnic minorities their own state by dividing Nigeria into 8 to 14 regions.

### **Ethiopia**

The Muslims in Eritrea are divided into many similar groups but share a broader identity making them one. They constitute about half the population of Eritrea and stay in the lowlands.

The Christian Tегegan speakers are all in the highland villages around Asmara. They are also about half the population of Eritrea.

### **Stakes**

It is a crucial variable in ethnic assertion. There are two types of stakes a group has in the existing State - emotional and economic. The

group or its leadership has or perceives certain benefits or advantages in continuing the relation. The loss of these benefits prevents them from articulating their demands. When these benefits do not exist or are counter balanced then the groups assertion easily aggregates to secession.

Emotional stakes of the group may consist of traditional or historic links, religious or linguistic attachments or affiliations and/or attachment to certain geographic center. As long as the group or its leadership has emotional stakes., the prospects of ethnic assertion or secession are less.

Economic stakes of the group may consist of the following: threat to traditional occupation, employment opportunity, loss of economic rights, denial of educational opportunity, uneven development and partisans treatment. If the group or its leadership begins to feel or fears economic disadvantages, it develops a higher stake in its own identity . Economic stakes of the group is a critical variable in the decision to articulate demand.

### **Nigeria**

The various regions had a relatively different history of their own. The period after amalgamation too was very short to develop any emotional stakes in the system.

There was not much economic interdependence between the regions. Economic stakes for the North were not many as they did not have jobs outside the region. After the Ibo coup, they had lost control of the Center.

This was the reason for the secessionists having the upper hand during the deliberations after the Ibo coup. But the Northern federal officials, civil servants, judges and police personnel had major stake in the continuation of the Federation. Another major factor was the loss of Oil revenues in case of a secession. As oil had been struck and beginning to

constitute a major revenue source.

For the East, Ibos were mainly employed in skilled and semi- skilled jobs spread over the entire country. The loss of these jobs would have been a major loss to them. The plans for unified administration of General. Ironsi would have increased the job opportunities for the Ibos.

The loss of life and property in the riots led the Ibos to decisively support secession. The refugees were one of the main supporters of the cause.

The oil industry and Nigeria's sole refinery was in the East. If the East could control them, then it would have access to a lot of resources.

### **Ethiopia**

The Muslims had no emotional and economic stake in the Ethiopian state. Hence they were the first to make the call for Independence. They held this view till Eritrea eventually became free.

The Protestants had a lot of privileges during the British administration. Once the federation was formed they were continually sidelined. They never had an emotional or economic stake in the Ethiopian state. When the federation was dismantled, it was easy for them to join the ELF.

When hostilities began in ELF, they broke away and formed the EPLF. The EPLF negotiated with the Ethiopian government in 1974 as it was small and in difficult position. But, when the ground situation changed they decided to continue struggle.

The Coptics were the first to demand unification. They were aided by the church and the Ethiopian government in this endeavour. After the federation was formed, they secured the second largest number of government jobs. Their support to the Ethiopian government ended after

the repression following the Asmara assault in 1975. Also General Aman, the Eritrean General who was the Chairman of Durge had been killed.

#### **Nature of Demand Articulation and the Response of State.**

The nature of the demand of the group and the mode of articulation play a major role in the aggregation of ethnic assertion. The demand for cultural and educational opportunities will aggregate to secession if they are not handled properly. The group in such a situation develops a higher stake in its own identity and may eventually make the demand for secession. If the demands are made on the basis of relative strength of the group than the chances for accommodation are high.

The response of the State to the articulation of demand by the ethnic group plays a crucial role in the aggravation of the conflict. If the group's demand are appropriately addressed then the prospects of accommodation are high. On the other hand if the States response is highhanded or repressive then the group develops a higher stake in its assertion. A demand for cultural right may lead to demand for autonomy and eventually to secessionist demand depending on the response of the State.

#### **Nigeria**

North and West have traditionally demanded autonomy while the East wanted a unitary government. The Constitution of 1960 tried to accommodate these demands by giving regions autonomy and residual powers.

After the Ibo coup the Ibos responded by public celebrations in favour of the coup. In the debate which followed the coup, they wanted an unitary state with an unified administration. This was opposed by the North. The North was shocked by the coup as it had lost its topmost

politicians and almost its entire military top brass. They wanted a loose federation and entrenched regional autonomy. They also feared the loss of job opportunities in a unitary state.

After the Ibo coup, the Ibos did not recognise the new regime. While North had changed its plans to secede in favour of government with a Northern Head of State. There was an ego clash between the Gowon and Ojukwu.

In September 1966, the regions sent 'leaders of thought' as representatives to 'Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference'. The options were given

- a) Federal system with strong central Government.
- b) Federal system with weak Central Government.
- c) Confederation
- d) Unique new arrangement.

North wanted a Federation with more states if East and West are also divided. West wanted more states within the existing system. The mid-West wanted a strong center and more states. While the East wanted a Confederation.

The Eastern government brought out well documented reports of riots. It also expelled all the non-Ibos.

The Supreme Military Council met in Aburi Ghana on January 4, 1967. Here all the proposals of the Eastern government were accepted. The agreement envisaged a cooling off period, defacto separation of Army, change in the designation of Gowon and most importantly concurrence of all the four regions in all major decisions.

Federal civil servants opposed this agreement. Gowon backtracked after a press conference by Ojukwu.



On February 21, Ojukwu set 31st March as the deadline for implementation of the Aburi agreement. The SMC responded by passing decree No. 8. It made Nigeria a loose federation and emergency could be imposed with the concurrence of any 3 of the 4 regional governors.

On 31st March, East proclaimed an edict appropriating federal revenues. The Federal government responded by imposing economic blockade.

On May, 26 the Biafran Assembly was summoned. Ojukwu gave it three options.

- a) Accept the domination of the North
- b) Continue the present drift
- c) Ensure survival by assenting over autonomy.

The following day the assembly passed a resolution mandating Ojukwu to declare the sovereign of Biafra at an early practical date.

### **Ethiopia**

The muslims had always wanted to be independent. This was reaffirmed in the 1946 deliberations and subsequently formed the ML to strive for it.

The protestants had been calling for independence since 1946. They later formed the LPP to struggle for it.

The Ethiopians , on the other hand were spreading the call for unification using the Coptic church and through the Unity party. It also began to lobby in the UN for support. It succeeded in it's endeavours when Eritrea was federates with it in 1951. It soon began to dismantle the federation and in 1961 it made Eritrea one of its provinces. The LPP and the ML tried to oppose the moves but did not succeed .

Frustrated at the institutional means, the muslims and the protestants

formed the ELF in Cairo in 1961. It grew fast and soon controlled large areas in the North and West of Eritrea.

When the durge came to power it called all the groups fighting the ancien regime to lay down the arms as there was no need to continue the struggle. It also tried to divide the ELF and EPLF by using historic and ethnic differences. The negotiations ended as the situation on the ground began to improve for EPLF.

The response of the durge was a brutal retaliation on Asmara and its surrounding villages. This brought the Coptics to EPLF .

Due to the growing strength , the fronts were able to slowly push the Ethiopian forces into the towns. The EPLF had joined the TPLF's alliance against Mengistu - EPDRF. When Addis Ababa fell in May 1991 after Mengistu had fled, the EPLF formed the defacto government in Eritrea. The popular support (99.8%) for Eritrea was reaffirmed in the referendum.

### **International Situation**

The response of the International community towards an ethnic conflict plays a important role in its eventual Outcome . The response can be in terms of moral or material support ( food, medicine, arms etc.) or in terms of voluntaries (civilian or military, combat or non-combat) International response is at 3 levels (a) Big powers UN, ICRC, . (b) at the regional or the continental level (c) bilateral relations.

Both sides in an ethnic conflict try to rally international support by use of International media, Diplomacy, terrorist acts to focus international attention.

### **Nigeria**

The initial response of the international community was that of

indifference. But as the fighting continued the big powers became slowly involved. The Soviet Union and Britain supported the Nigerian government . While the French, Portuguese and Chinese supported the Biafrans.

As the war progressed, the African countries slowly began to accept Biafra and accord it recognition. By this time the Biafran's will to continue the struggle was exhausted and Biafra collapsed in the next major offensive in December 1969.

### **Ethiopia**

The fortunes of Eritrea depended on the supplies of arms to Ethiopia . The ancien regime got its supplies from US. When the durge came to power it switched support to the USSR. This resulted in its getting massive arms aid and advisors from the Eastern bloc. This also resulted in a setback to the Eritrean fronts in 1978.

The Eritreans initially got aid from the Arabs but the aid went primarily to ELF , than to ELF-PLF of Osman Sahel. The EPLF has largely remained self-sufficient.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study shows the ethnicity plays a major role in the consolidation of a group of unrelated people and then demanding and struggling to secede. This entails the constitution and mobilisation of the people on an ethnic basis and then articulating their demands. If the demands are not appropriately handle then the group assert itself and in the last instance struggles to secede.

The prospects of further secession in Nigeria are less due to the policies adopted by the Nigerian government. The Nigerian governments have tried to manage the ethnic assertion by making more and more

	Nigeria		Eritrea		
	North	Ibos	Muslim	Coptics	Protestants
Social Mobilised Population <sup>1</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes	yes
Symbol - Pool <sup>2</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Selection, Standardisation and Transmission of Pool by Leadership	NPC	NCNC	MI	Church, Unionist Party	LPP
Relative Deprivation	Ibos for jobs and control of State	Riots in the North and control of State	Ethiopians, Coptics later from Protestants	Protestants later from Amharas	Ethiopia, Coptics later from Muslims & Ethiopia
Size (1), Concentration(2), and Location(3)	1 more 50% 2 concentrated round Kano 3 Most of the Country's area	1 1/3 and 1/4 2 dispersed - after the riot concentrated 3 Periphery	1 50%(approx) 2 concentrated 3 western and Northern coastal belt	1 45%-40% 2 concentrated around Asmara 3 comparatively interior	1 small fraction 2 concentrated around Asmara and Appelle-Guan 3 comparatively interior
Stakes <sup>3</sup> 1 Emotional 2 Economic	1 no 2 no - then developed	1 no 2 yes than counterbalanced	1 no 2 no	1 yes 2 yes in Ethiopia	1 no 2 not the unity of Ethiopia
Nature of Articulation	- For federation - then for secession - then for federation if Head is from North	- For Unitary State - after lose of center - for secession	- For Independence - after unification for secession	- for unification after 1975 for secession	- For Independence - For secession
Response of State	-	-	unification and repression	unification and privileges	unification negotiation -repression
International Response	Support of Soviet, UK	Support of France, Portugal, China	some support from Arabs	-	International community ignores, self sufficient

Table - 3 Comparison of Biafran and Eritrean Secessionist Movements

<sup>1</sup>Yes implies that a mobilised population exists

<sup>2</sup>Yes implies that the concerned group has a symbol-pool

<sup>3</sup>Yes implies that stakes exists,

No implies that there are no stakes

provinces. This breaks the large ethnic group into manageable smaller units. It also gives the leadership of the smaller groups a stake in the continuation of the existing regime.

The prospects of further secession in Eritrea is high, as the various ELF fractions have not yet been incorporated into the new regime. The chances can be minimised if the government incorporates the various groups into governance so that they also have a stake in the continuation of the regime.

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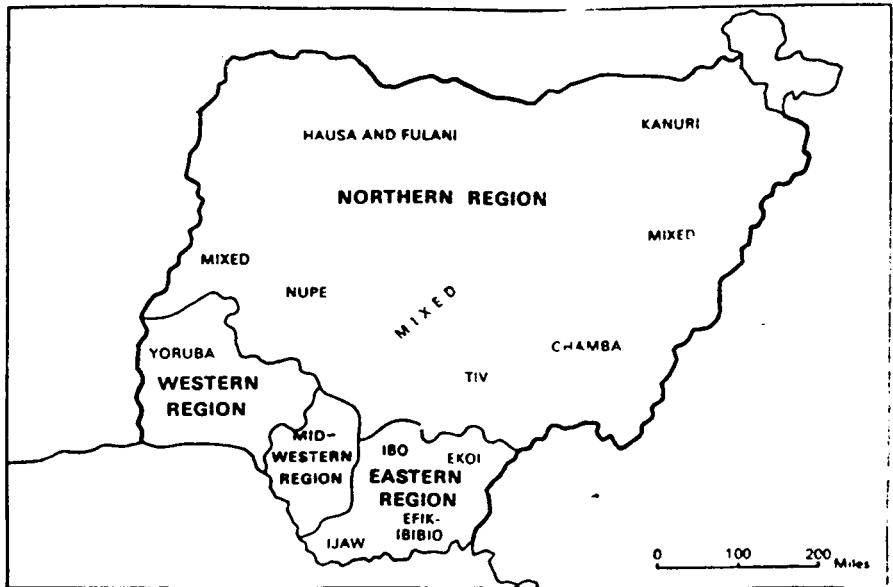
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**MAP5**

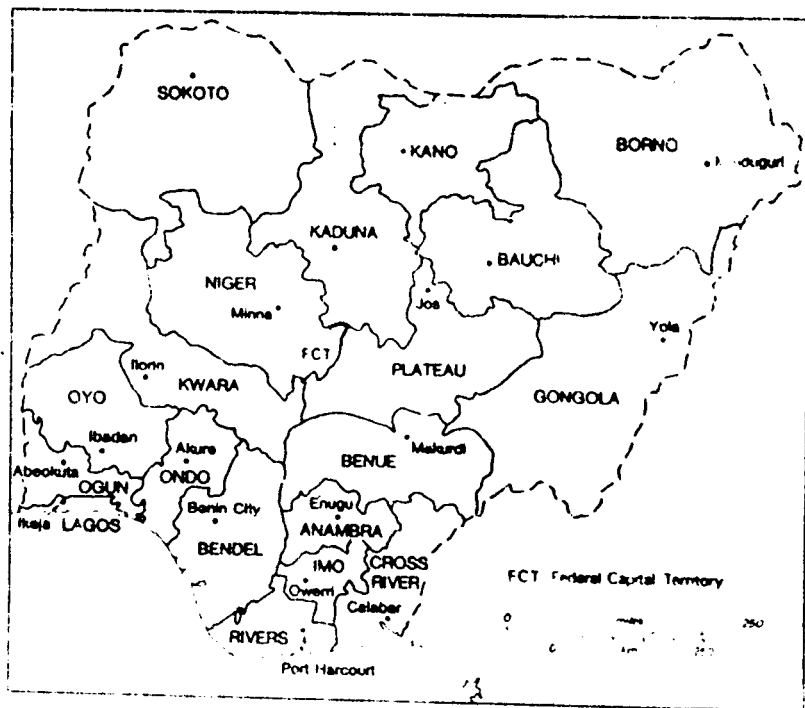


The four Regions and the principal tribes of Nigeria,  
January 1967

Map - 1

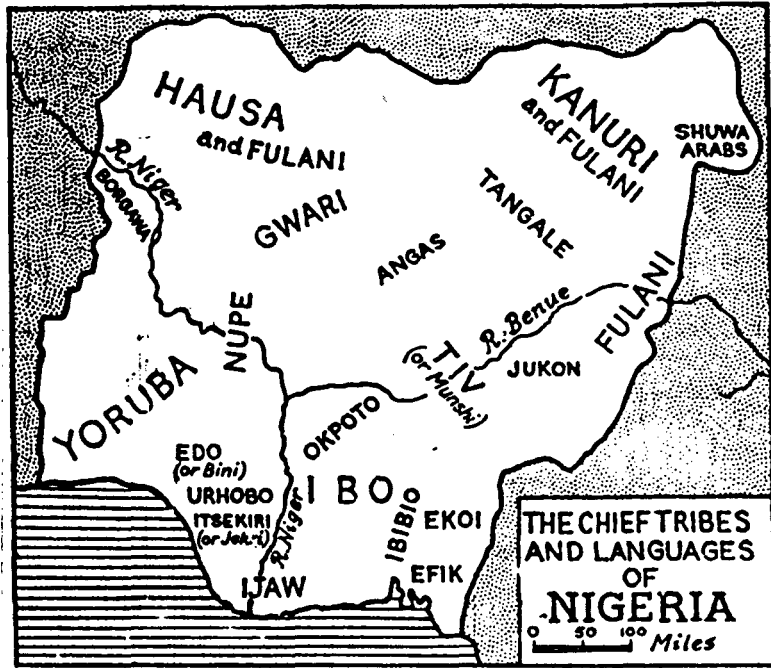


Map - 2

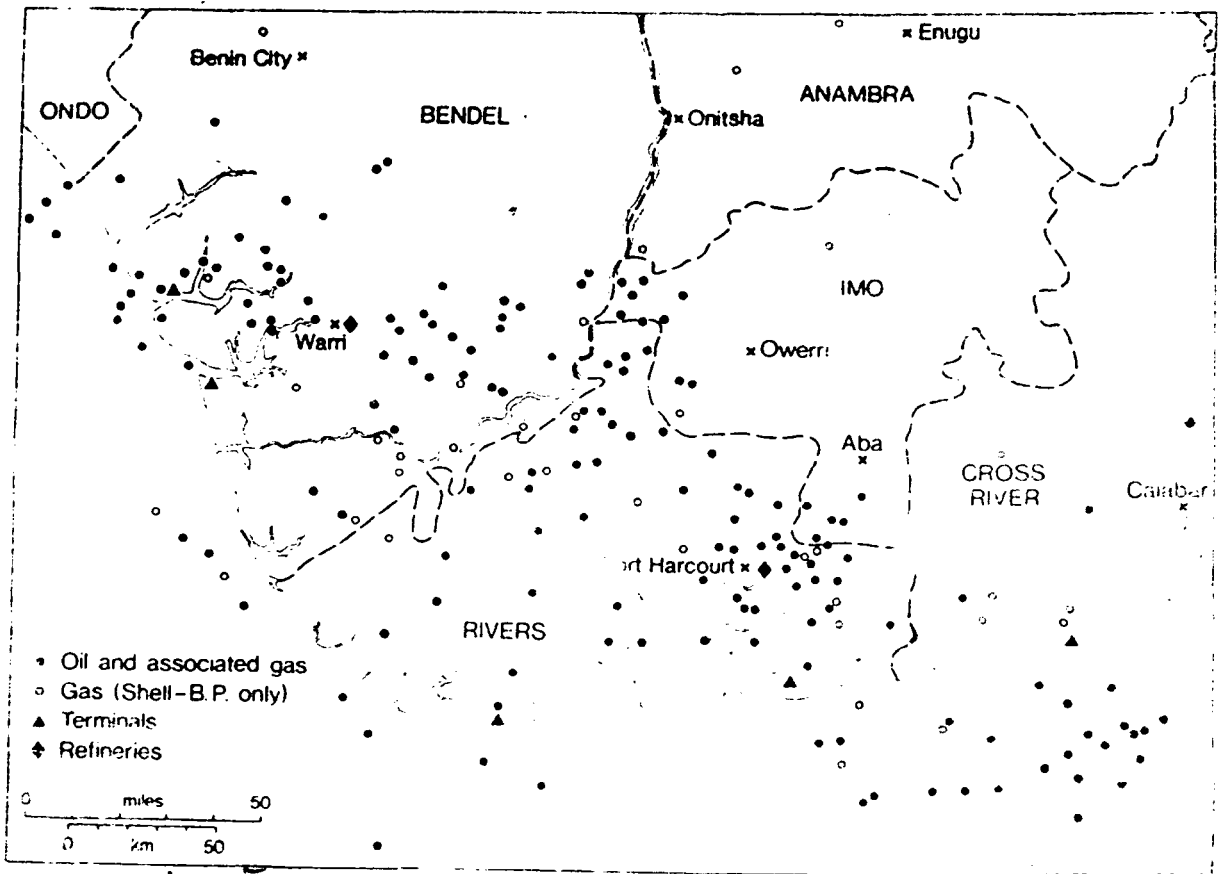


State boundaries from April 1976 (19 States)

Map - 3

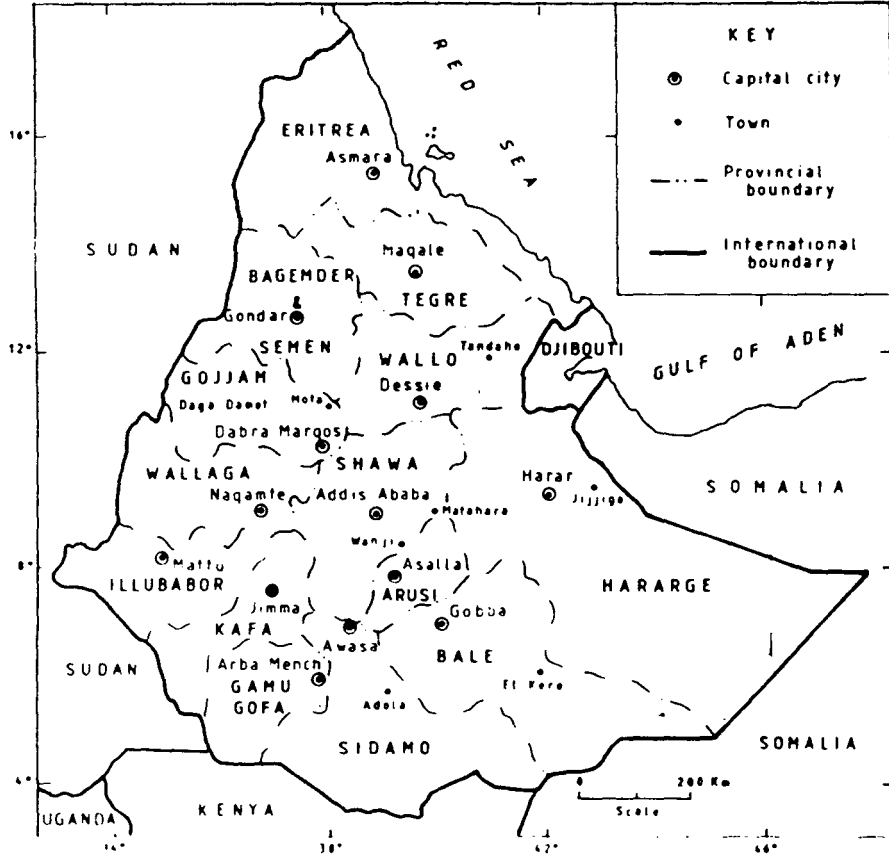


Map-4

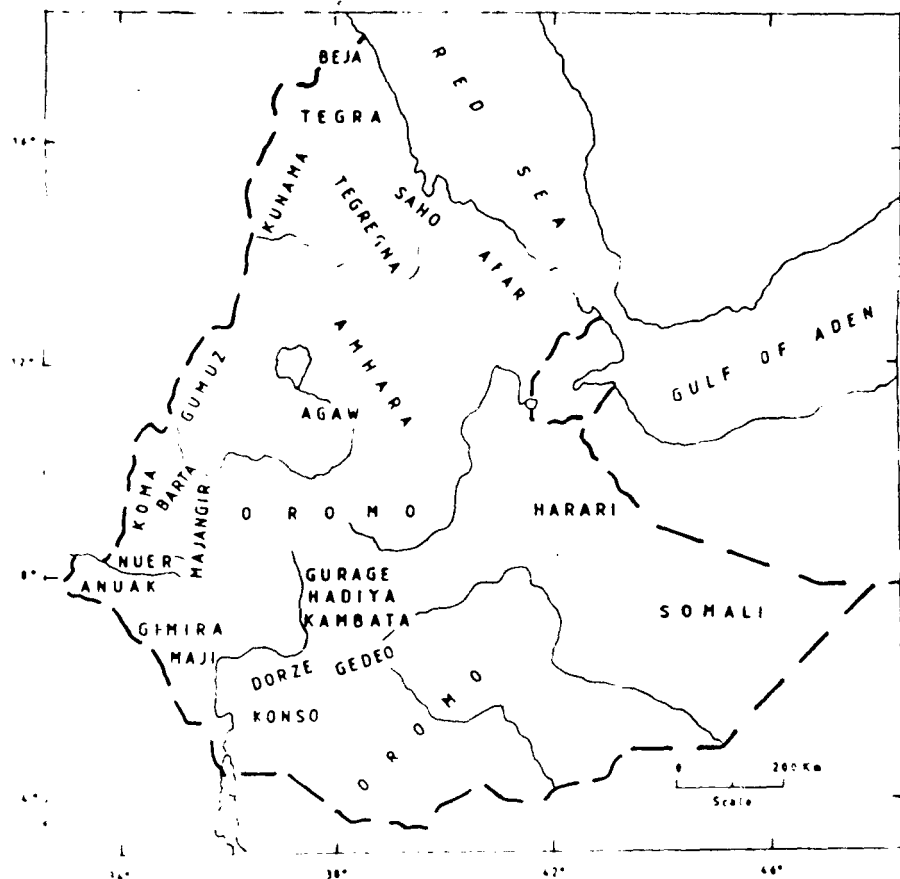


Location of oil wells in Nigeria

*Regions of Ethiopia*



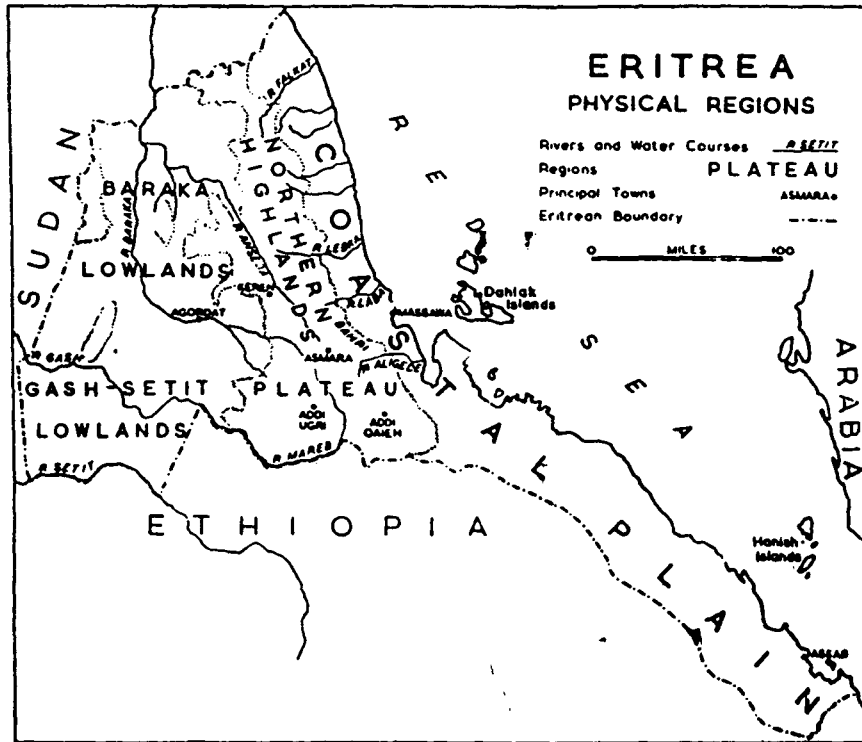
Map - 5



*Social groups in Ethiopia*

Eritrea: Physical Regions

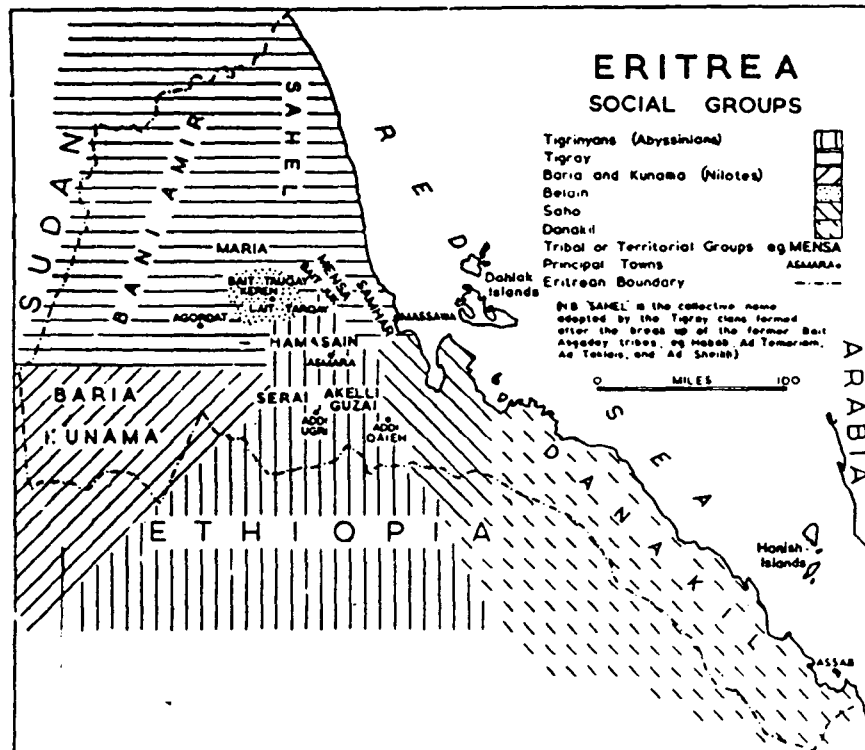
Map- 7



Source: G. K. N. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 2.

Eritrea: Social Groups

Map- 8



Source: G. K. N. Trevaskis, Eritrea: A Colony in Transition (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 12.