

Extended Essay – History

Colonial policy, ethnic conflict and Nigeria – a study of how colonial Britain’s policy of divide-and-rule caused the Biafran War.

To what extent did the British colonial policy of indirect rule in Nigeria cause the Biafran War 1967-70?

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Background:

In 1914, the Governor of Nigeria, Sir Frederick Lugard, amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria into a state that was to be ruled as a single British colony.¹ Nigeria's over 250 ethnicities each with individual cultures, languages and political dispositions necessitated a form of rule that took into account such differences.² Indirect rule was a system of colonial governance which operated by maintaining regional structures of feudal power with a traditional king and his underlings, who was in turn answerable to the colonial officer in his region.³ Each region was governed with separate administrations, who each practiced distinctively different policies and methods of rule. This exacerbated differences between the North and South of Nigeria, as they were the regions where the major ethnicities of Igbo and Hausa Fulani predominated.⁴ The object of this paper is to conclude whether indirect rule can be concluded as the most significant cause of inter-ethnic conflict between the Igbo and Hausa-Fulani people in the Biafran War 1967-70.

Introduction:

*Our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men... high and low....as Ministers... of waste... tribalists, nepotists.*⁵

To many contemporary observers, the proclamation by the leader of Nigeria's 1966 coup, Major Nzeogwu, is nothing if not honourable. However, the fact that six out of the seven majors that spearheaded the coup was Igbo was enough to convince many Northerners of an Igbo

¹ Onigu Otite, *Ethnic Pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Shaneson, 1990), 57.

² Elizabeth A. Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, (New York: Longman, 1983), 380.

³ Ibid.,

⁴ See *Fig. 1* and *Fig. 2* in Appendix

⁵ Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu's proclamation, quoted in Walter Schwartz, *Nigeria*, (London: Pall Mall, 1968), 196.

conspiracy to control the government.⁶ Thus began a year of coups, counter-coups and ethnic violence that resulted in the secession of the Eastern region as the Republic of Biafra on May 30th 1967, and the ensuing Nigerian Civil War to contest Biafra's sovereignty.⁷

The resolution of the war on 15th January 1970 resulted in 2 million casualties, and was followed by 10 years of dictatorial military rule.⁸ Nigeria is unfortunately seen as still possessing many of the conditions that resulted in the Biafran War. As such, the question 'to what extent did the British colonial policy of indirect rule cause the Biafran War' is one that must be addressed to fully understand the impacts of colonial policy, and more pressingly, the causes of ethnic conflict in Nigeria today.

To answer this, accounts by various Nigerian peasants and political elites were investigated, in order to fully understand the extent of ethnic tension. The policies, and the perceptions of British colonial administrators were investigated using primary sources and secondary sources, such as autobiographies. Further, secondary sources are utilised in order to understand and evaluate the historical perspectives of historians on the causal impact of colonial policy.

Most Nigerian historians portray the colonial policy of indirect rule - practiced in Nigeria in the late 19th and early 20th century - as the most significant cause of the Biafran War.⁹ Onyeoziri claimed that divide-and-rule had created 'so much inequality and injustice,' that the civil war was bound to happen.¹⁰ It is difficult to contest that the factors that many argue were key conditions

⁶ = Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 471.

⁷ Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 88.

⁸ Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, 227.

⁹ See: Osahieme Benson Osafolor, "The Historiography of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970," in *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath*, ed. Eghosa E. Osaghae, Ebere Onwudiwe, and Rotimit T. Suberu (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, 2002); Fred Onyeoziri, "What Caused the Nigerian Civil War?" in Osaghae, Onwudiwe, and Suberu, *Nigerian War and Its Aftermath*, 91-99; Suzanne Cronje, *The World and Nigeria* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972); Chukwuemeka O. Ojukwu, *Biafra* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

¹⁰ Onyeoziri, "What Caused the Nigerian Civil War?" 91-99.

of the war were a result of indirect rule. Yet, to argue that indirect rule was the most significant cause of the Biafran War could be to overstate the extent colonial policy caused inter-ethnic tensions within Nigeria; further, to argue that war was inevitable from the early 20th century could be to take a deterministic view that simplifies the causes of inter-ethnic conflict between Nigerians and Biafrans before 1967. Certainly, colonial policy could be argued to have limited agency in creating the conditions for war; inter-ethnic tensions were only more prevalent in the years leading up to Nigerian independence, as the British rulers were preparing to cede power to the Nigerians.

This paper is ordered thematically by the causes of the Biafran War, where the extent to which indirect rule was a cause is evaluated individually. The following argues that indirect rule was a significant cause for the promulgation of a political culture that was a key cause of the war; however, the explosive lead-up to the war support that an even more significant impact of colonial rule was the accepted political culture of violence. Further, the conflict over the control of resources was the most significant cause, as it was the centrepiece of the ethnic conflict between the North and the South, both in the years leading up to the war, and arguably the war itself.

Colonial injustice and the political culture

The preservation of traditional feudal power was significant in fostering a Nigerian political culture – a key condition of ethnic conflict. While the British claimed to be a civilising influence, the maintenance of a feudal structure stifled development, as conservative warrant chiefs were unwilling to modernise.¹¹ Until the founding of Yaba College in 1932, higher education could only

¹¹ Walter R. Crocker, *Nigeria: A Critique of British Colonial Administration*, (New South Wales: Allen & Unwin, 1936), 216-217.

be accessed abroad, which meant professional careers were open to a small minority of Nigerians.¹² As such, opportunities for social mobility and education during the late 19th and early 20th century were few; even if there was access to education (as there was in the South), the British colonial leaders stifled social mobility. Legislation prevented Nigerians from rising above the level of Chief Clerk and a salary of £300 a year. Most accounts of colonial officers from 1900 onwards were critical of education; for example, a colonial officer claimed that education made the Igbo 'so... bumptious [that they thought themselves] superior to everyone, white men included.'¹³ While this isn't necessarily indicative of all colonial officers, the content and origin of the accounts are valuable in understanding the racist preconceptions of certain British officers, which is important for understanding the British approach to rule. Thus, indirect rule ensured poor social mobility by systematically excluding people from being able to access better jobs. The demands of the Nigerian Nationalist movement were largely economic, thus proving that many Nigerians wanted access to better jobs.¹⁴ This was extremely significant in the formation of a mutual fear of exclusion, which was a feature of the Nigerian political culture post-Independence as Nigerians competed for more economic power – hence a significant cause of inter-ethnic conflict.

In the South, where there was no feudal structure, the British imposed a chief in the region. One could argue that the British-imposed rulers were responsible for a culture of cynicism that pervaded the South. The imposed 'warrant chiefs' were largely perceived as venal rulers who took advantage of their subjects.¹⁵ In 1920, the people of southern Awka complained that the

¹² Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 401.

¹³ A.F. Bridges. *Diary*. 24 March 1922. Rhodes House. MSS Afr. s.697.

¹⁴ Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 401.

¹⁵ Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 380.

'chiefs have continually ...extort[ed]... from us.'¹⁶ A key reason for this corrupt behavior was the fact that the chiefs were selected indiscriminately; in some cases, the 'village idiot' was selected as the leader.¹⁷ As shown through the petition, and various other sources, the British-imposed warrant chiefs were perceived as corrupt and exploitative by the everyday man. Further, on the part of the rulers, there was a prevalent culture of self-enrichment. One warrant chief later noted that 'to grow fat an insect must feed on fellow insects.'¹⁸ Both the attitude of cynicism and the culture of self-enrichment was significant in post-Independence Nigeria, as many Igbo felt that they were unlikely to get a stake in their government. Despite this, it is important to note that the rulers were in some cases virtuous.¹⁹ Little change was made in the status quo in the Northern states which were always ruled by kingdoms. However, at least in the South, the cynical view was prevalent, and an extremely significant part of the Igbo mindset that fueled the secession of Biafra. Thus, indirect rule was significant in the promulgation of a cynical mindset on the part of the South, which was a significant factor that caused Biafra to secede.

Yet, the violence of British colonial administration can be argued to have had a more devastating legacy on Nigerians. An example of a violent colonial administrator was Henry Douglas, who was active from 1897 to 1920, described by his contemporaries as 'autocratic.'²⁰ Douglas claimed to have violently subdued 135 villages and towns during his rule.²¹ Given the autocratic rule exerted upon them, Nigerians were forced to utilise violent protest as a form of political

¹⁶ Petition from people of Iboe Town, Awka, to Resident, Onitsha, 5 January 1920. NAE CSE 2/13/2 (A276/1920).

¹⁷ R. A. Stevens. Manuscript f.12. Rhodes House. MSS Afr. s.1068 (1).

¹⁸ Warrant Chief, quoted in Adiele E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria*, (London: Longman, 1972), 309.

¹⁹ Examples include the 'devout' and 'upright' Hassan, Sultan of Sokoto from 1931 to 1938. More examples in Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 381.

²⁰ Felix K. Ekechi, "Portrait of a Coloniser: H. M. Douglas in Colonial Nigeria, 1897-1920," *African Studies Review* 26 (March 1983): 26.

²¹ Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 27.

expression, because no other political channels were available. An example of a protest was the 1929 Women's Riots, where over 70 women died protesting against raises in tax.²² Violent protest in colonial Nigeria was common; in 1924, The Bauchi Province Resident noted that 'for the first time in its history of British occupation... no occasion necessitated firing on the natives.'²³ While not necessarily indicative of all British colonial rulers, the casual nature of the statement that no violence was enacted is valuably indicative of how violence was commonplace during this period. Further, the fact that the account is from an actual colonial officer substantiates the position that violence was accepted by both the colonial rulers and the people. Thus, violence was a legitimate, and accepted tool of political expression among Nigerians. Many of the protests during the colonial period, and indeed in the period after 1960 were largely in opposition to the government over political grievances, such as tax.²⁴ This was extremely significant, because the violence of the Nigerian political culture was a key reason for the accepted political tool of assassination, which was significant in the murder of the Prime Minister in 1966, and the explosive degradation from inter-ethnic fear to violent riots in 1967.

Indirect rule was significant in the promulgation of a political culture that many see as an indispensable feature of tribalist politics. Corruption and self-enrichment were key causes of the mutual distrust between races, as there was an overriding perception that each group would use their power for their own tribe, a key premise of the inter-ethnic conflict that preceded 1966.²⁵ Further, opposition to the torrid state of the Nigerian political culture fuelled the military coups of

²² Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 401.

²³ Bauchi Province Annual Report, 1924. NAI CSO 26/2/12537 II.

²⁴ See: Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*, 79-107 for an account of the number of conflicts in response to taxation.

²⁵ Walter Schwarz, "Tribalism and Politics in Nigeria," *The World Today* 22, no. 11 (1966): 460. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40393799> [Accessed 23 June 2017]

1966, as well as the ensuing Igbo secession from Biafra.²⁶ However, the violent Nigerian political culture was the most significant cause for the descent into violence. Major Nzeogwu's use of political assassination, as well as the Igbo massacre by the people of the North were short term factors which greatly exacerbated conflict. Despite this, it is difficult to contest that indirect rule was not significant for the long term ferment between the North and South, as it fostered a culture of mutual exclusion and corruption that was a significant cause of inter-ethnic conflict.

Economic inequality and the scramble for resources

An extremely significant effect of indirect rule was the formation of a Nigerian identity crafted along ethnic lines. A key proxy to appreciating the extent of this identity formation was the colonial attitude taken towards educational policy. Education in the Northern and Southern provinces were separately administered until 1928;²⁷ while schools in the North educated its citizens for conformation to 'the best traditions of local society,' schools in the South were exposed to Western styles of education.²⁸ In the 1964 primary syllabus, the lack in emphasis on developing broad pan-Nigerian loyalties are evident.²⁹ The focus on one's own culture, and a lack in pan-Nigerian sentiment accounts for the lack of attachment that a Northerner or Southerner could have towards a national identity. One may be more inclined to agree with Colonel Ojukwu's claim that 'Nigeria never was and never can be a united country.'³⁰ However, that is not to argue that individual teachers did not focus on teaching a syllabus incorporating

²⁶ Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 471.

²⁷ Alan Peshkin, "Education and National Integration in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 5, no. 3 (Nov, 1967): 325.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 324.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 326. Though it is worth noting that this was only the case in the North and West, the East did go some ways towards fostering a national identity, see: Eastern Ministry of Education, *Report of the Educational System in Eastern Nigeria* (Enugu, 1962), 23.

³⁰ Ojukwu, *Biafra*, 1.

the concept of Nigerian unity; just that there was no official emphasis on a pan-Nigerian sentiment. The fact that it is not on the syllabus, however, suggest that it was not on the agenda of the educational authorities. Thus, Nigerian people in the North and South were, in their formative years, educated in a way that placed more emphasis on their regional, ethnic background; this was significant, as it allowed for a formation of a grassroots identity that was tied more towards their ethnic background than a Nigerian one. In the conflict that was to follow, the distinction along ethnic lines was prevalent; thus, indirect rule resulted in a formation of identity that was a significant cause of the inter-ethnic conflict.

A more significant result of the differing attitudes towards education was the resultant educational disparity between the North and the South, a factor which would cause significant conflict post-Independence. While a system of universal primary education was introduced in Eastern Nigeria in 1953, no such system existed for other regions of Nigeria.³¹ The levels of tertiary education were similarly spread, with a larger number of Eastern graduates than their counterparts in the West, mid-West and the North.³² A significant consequence of this was it allowed predominantly the Igbo to get better, higher paying jobs – a key condition that caused ethnic conflict. The spread of ethnicities in Nigerian institutions was noticeable, and in some cases, cause for tension; for example, the distinct disparity in power in the army - where the officers and technicians were mainly Igbos from the South whereas most of the infantry were from the North – cemented the perception of unequal society run by the more educated Igbo.³³ Many Nigerian historians argue that the educational disparity caused by indirect rule allowed for

³¹ Paul Anber, "Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 5, no.2 (1967): 172.

³² Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, (Reading: Heinemann Educational Books, 1984), 25.
<https://books.google.com.my/books?id=AA8ut32-lf8C>. [Accessed 10th June 2017]

³³ S. C. Ukpabi, "The Changing Role of the Military in Nigeria, 1900-1970," *Africa Spectrum* 11, no. 1 (1976): 71.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40173795>. [Accessed 23rd July 2017]

the fear of the Igbo people dominating structures of power within the Nigerian government, thus being a key cause of the Biafran War.³⁴ Osafolor argues that British rule had created 'so much inequality and justice' that the civil war was unavoidable.³⁵ However, note that the educational disparity was only to a limited extent the result of indirect rule. Rather, the Igbo were more highly educated because Igbo culture was receptive to change.³⁶ One observer noted that 'Igbos absorbed western education as readily as they responded to urbanization.'³⁷ Such attitudes among the Igbo ensured that many were highly educated and have better job prospects. However, it is difficult to contest that in many cases, the inaccessibility of education was a key reason for why many Northerners and Westerners were less educated. Thence, the differing educational attitude – to a substantial extent affected by indirect rule– was a significant cause of the Biafran War as it resulted in an economically unequal Nigerian citizenry, a key condition for conflict in post-Independence Nigeria.

The resultant economic inequality was a key feature of the disputes between the North and South, especially around Nigerian independence in 1960. Jobs, especially in the civil service and the army, were hotly contested between the more educated South and less educated North. As a result of the predominance of Igbo officers in the army, a quota was established in the army in 1958, where 50% of the officers had to be from the North, and 25% each from both East and West.³⁸ However, efforts to rebalance the noticeable ethnic predominance were themselves

³⁴ Examples include: Osahieme Benson Osafolor, "The Historiography of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970," in *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath*, ed. Eghosa E. Osaghae, Ebere Onwudiwe, and Rotimit T. Suberu (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers. 2002). Fred Onyeoziri, "What Caused the Nigerian Civil War?" in Osaghae, Onwudiwe, and Suberu, *Nigerian War and Its Aftermath*, 91-99; Suzanne Cronje, *The World and Nigeria* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1972). Chukwuemeka O. Ojukwu, *Biafra* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

³⁵ Osafolor, "The Historiography of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970," 88.

³⁶ Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, 74.

³⁷ Anber, "Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos," 171.

³⁸ Ukpabi, "The Changing Role of the Military in Nigeria, 1900-1970," 71.

suspect; the Igbo would likely see affirmative action as discriminatory legislation implemented by Northern politicians.³⁹ Mutual distrust and fear were a distinct feature of the political culture. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo argued that resource control was at the heart of tension behind Nigeria and Biafra, as different races simultaneously sought greater economic power and feared the acquisition of the same economic power by other races, thus a key reason for the inter-ethnic conflict in the wake of Nigerian Independence.⁴⁰ Indeed, in the 1966 Northern publication *The Nigerian Situation: facts and background*, fear of Igbo domination was clear, as they asserted that public services were 45% Igbo and ‘threatening to reach 60% by 1968.’⁴¹ While the language used in the source indicates a severe fear of Igbo domination, it’s important to note that this degree of fear was not ubiquitous. In most cases, the mutual distrust was substantial but underlying – as shown through other accounts by Northerners.⁴² However, the Northern publication is valuable in recognizing that the fear among some Northerners were severe. Thus, the propagation of ethnicity-based distrust and in some cases severe fear by grassroots agents can be seen as a key reason for the ethnic conflict; the mindset of different groups was an extremely significant cause of both the lack of Nigerian unity, and the secession that caused the Biafran War.

The presence of oil is increasingly being attributed more significance in Nigerian historiography as an extremely important short-term cause of the secession of Biafra. Oil was discovered in commercial quantities in Eastern Nigeria in 1958.⁴³ However, the fact that the substantial oil

³⁹ Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, ‘Obasanjo’s Obsession with Biafra versus Facts of History,’ <http://www.usafricaonline.com/ekweekwe.biafra.htm>. [Accessed 2 August 2017]

⁴⁰ Schwarz, “Tribalism and Politics in Nigeria,” 460.

⁴¹ Anber, “Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos,” 172.

⁴² Example quoted in Peter C. Lloyd, *Power and Independence: Urban Africans’ Perception of Social Inequality*, (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge & K. Paul, 1974), 146-7.

⁴³ Chibuikwe Uche, “Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War,” *The Journal of African History* 49, no.1 (2008): 115. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40206616>. [Accessed 10th July 2017]

revenue belonged to the region of origin was cause for conflict between regions, which resulted in the 1957/58 Constitutional Conference that soured relations at the eve of Nigerian independence.⁴⁴ Certainly, control over the substantial resources were a key reason for the secession of Biafra. In a pamphlet by the Biafran Student's Association in 1967, a claim was made over the region's natural resources.⁴⁵ Further, in attempts to reach a compromise prior to Biafra's secession, the Northern-led government began offering significant concessions to the South, such as the division of the country into 12 states, which undermined the possibility of Northern domination.⁴⁶ However, the South perceived the newly drawn borders as a means of deliberately cutting off the centre of the Igbo community from oil producing regions.⁴⁷ Unsurprisingly, the first decree published by Biafran leadership after secession was the Revenue Collection (no. 2) Decree of 1967.⁴⁸ The fact that oil was given so much weight by both parties in the conflict strongly argues in favour of the view that oil was an extremely significant short term factor. This evidence contradicts the perspective of the historians who attribute the conflict to more long term factors, such as Cronje, who claimed that she 'saw the trouble in Nigeria coming a long time before Biafra's secession.'⁴⁹ However, it is difficult to discount the long term factors of the conflict, such as the substantial conflict over economic inequality that preceded Biafra's secession in 1967; thus, oil was a significant factor that exacerbated the short term descent into ethnic conflict.

⁴⁴ Ibid.,

⁴⁵ Quoted in Godwin N. Anyaogu, *The Philosophy of the Biafran Revolution: A Call for African Originality*, (New York: Africa House, 1967), ix, 13.

⁴⁶ Annalisa Zinn, "Theory versus Reality: Civil War Onset and Avoidance in Nigeria since 1960," in ed. Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis, *Understanding Civil War*, vol. 1: *Africa*, (Washington DC: World Bank, 2005), 99.

⁴⁷ Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, 91.

⁴⁸ Uche, "Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War," 123.

⁴⁹ Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, ix.

Resource control was arguably the most significant cause of the Nigerian Civil War. Many of the disputes that preceded and exacerbated ethnic conflict, such as the conflict over alleged inflated census numbers in 1963-64, were motivated by each region's strive towards controlling resources.⁵⁰ Further, the motivations of the Northern Igbo 'pogrom' was based on a conspiracy that perceived the 1966 military coup as an Igbo quest for national domination.⁵¹ The continual conflict over resources was in some ways as a result of indirect rule; however, the escalation of the conflict over resources was largely because of Nigerian independence - as British administrators left, positions in the civil service opened up.⁵² Increasingly, control over the government was perceived as the centre of the conflict, as a governmental position allowed one to have considerable power and resources.⁵³ While one may argue that the conflict was exacerbated significantly - either through the political culture or the resultant educational inequality - by indirect rule, it is difficult to ignore the impacts of indirect rule were merely conditions, albeit significant ones, that allowed for conflict. Resource control was the central cause for inter-ethnic conflict. It pitted different groups against each other in a bid for control over positions and resources, which directly fostered inter-ethnic conflict. Certainly, control over the oil resources can be seen directly as one of the most significant short-term causes of the Biafran War.

⁵⁰ Northerners recounts their fear in the submissions of the Northern Delegation to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference 1966, quoted in Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Genesis of the Nigerian Civil War and the Theory of Fear*, (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1975), 20.

⁵¹ Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*, 471-473.

⁵² Annalisa Zinn, "Theory versus Reality: Civil War Onset and Avoidance in Nigeria since 1960," 97.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

Fear

Yet, to argue that indirect rule was extremely significant could be to overstate the extent to which long term conditions could cause a civil war. Instead, Kirk-Greene argues that a key factor was the effect of short-term violence on the formation of a 'siege psychology' by the Igbo people.⁵⁴ Indeed, there seems to be strong evidence that the Igbo pogrom of September 1967, where over 30,000 Igbo men, women and children were murdered, was an event that led to a perception by the Igbo that secession was the only option. One observer in Lagos recounted:

Somebody said... "If I were you, leave..." ...I was not a criminal, I had done nothing. Eventually I did leave... I decided to send my family home, and as we were doing this the people were jeering ..."Let them [The Igbos] go, food will be cheaper in Lagos..."⁵⁵

Since the purpose of the source was to recount the event, this source is valuably indicative of an actual perception of an Igbo at the time. The fact that this observer perceived such deep hatred by the residents of the multi-ethnic Lagos suggests that the mindset of the Igbo was deeply affected. Further, the impacts on the Igbo psyche can be seen more empirically by the 1.5 million refugees that were in the Eastern region by March 1967, even before the Igbo massacre.⁵⁶ However, Kirk-Greene's view may be skewed by a narrow focus on the Igbo people. Certainly, there seems to be strong evidence that the fear was mutual, as accounts from the North and the account of the observer above suggests.⁵⁷ Further, that this fear was also long-standing - as evidenced by other accounts - suggest that the effect of short term violence was

⁵⁴ Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria*, vol. 2: *January 1966-July 1967* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1:58.

⁵⁵ Account from an Igbo in Lagos, quoted in John De St. Jorre, *The Brother's War: Biafra and Nigeria*, (London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 91.

⁵⁶ St. Jorre, *The Brother's War: Biafra and Nigeria*, 88.

⁵⁷ Anber, "Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos," 172.

significant but limited – a history of marginalization also played into their perception.⁵⁸ Therefore, a key short term factor that led to the secession of Biafra and the war was the psyche of the Igbos and also the other Nigerians in response to recent events. Fear of mass slaughter and marginalization was a key factor that encouraged both sides that war was the only option.

Key agents in the conflict – Ojukwu and Gowon

A line of argument that is typically presented by the North portrays the leader of Biafra, Colonel Ojukwu as the main catalyst for conflict. Azikiwe claims that Ojukwu was the main cause of the civil war, and that 'Ojukwu has deceived his people to believe that they are fighting the civil war for their survival.'⁵⁹ Indeed, an example of Ojukwu's attempts to incite war was his refusal to respond to any of the concessions made by the Northern leader, Gowon, before the beginning of the Civil War, such as a promise to implement the Aburi Accord in return for lifting the economic sanctions on Biafra.⁶⁰ However, Gowon had failed to implement the Aburi Accord in the first place, which had been agreed as a part of prior peace negotiations.⁶¹ Further, accounts from other ethnic Igbos of the period strongly support the view that secessionist sentiment was widespread.⁶² While Azikiwe's claim is ostensibly valuably accurate as he was an Igbo that lived in Biafra at the time, Azikiwe's claim is limited by the fact that Azikiwe, when making his statement, had swapped to supporting the Nigerian cause after being rebuffed by Ojukwu.⁶³

⁵⁸ Lloyd, *Power and Independence: Urban Africans' Perception of Social Inequality*, 146-7.

⁵⁹ Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Origins of the Nigerian Civil War*, (Lagos: Nigerian National Press, n.d.), 17.

⁶⁰ Zinn, "Theory versus Reality: Civil War Onset and Avoidance in Nigeria since 1960," 99.

⁶¹ Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, 86.

⁶² Examples include: Quoted in Martin P. Mathews, *Nigeria: Current Issues and Historical Background* (New York: Science Publishers, Inc., 2002), 35. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict In Nigeria*, 1:197. Jones O. Ahauzem, "Perceptions: Biafra, Politics, and War," in ed. Axel Harneit-Sievers, Jones O. Ahauzem, and Sydney Emezue, *A Social History of the Nigerian Civil War: Perspectives from Below* (Enugu, Nigeria: Jemezie Associates, 1997), 19.

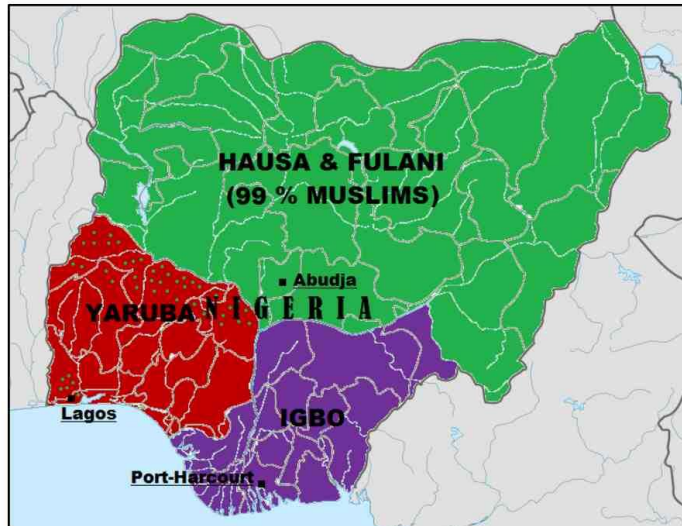
⁶³ Peter P. Ekeh, "Citizenship and Political Conflict: A Sociological Interpretation of the Nigerian Crisis," in ed. Joseph Okpaku, *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood*, (New York: Third Press, 1972), 101.

Therefore, the claim that Ojukwu was the main cause of Biafra's secession is limited. Not only was there significant incentive for the grassroots Igbo agents to secede, but there was also foul play on the part of the Nigerian government that further incentivized Ojukwu to declare the secession of Biafra on the 30th May 1967.

Conclusion

Indirect rule was a significant cause of the Biafran War, as it fostered an underlying ethno-regional identity and political culture that was a key cause of ethnic conflict – a separate regional identity coupled with corruption allowed for mutual distrust, and conflict. Further, indirect rule can be argued to be a key reason for the economic inequality that was an extremely important cause of the conflict over the control of resources. Yet, it is not satisfactory to argue, as some do, that indirect rule was the most significant cause of the conflict. In many cases, the promulgation of conditions that allowed for conflict was only one of the many reasons for inter-ethnic conflict. Economic inequality was only significant insofar as control over resources and political power was significant to the different agents. Further, while the fostering of mutual distrust can be argued as a cause for conflict, the political culture of violence is the only factor which sufficiently explains the descent into mass violence that preceded the war; hence, the extent to which indirect rule can be attributed blame is limited. Rather, the fight over the control of resources and mutual fear among the races was central to the pre-war conflict. Given the violence that was already an accepted part of Nigerian political culture, fear of marginalization and mass murder was the most significant cause that fueled Biafra's secession, and the ensuing Nigerian Civil War.

Appendix



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Fig. 1 A simplified map of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria



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Fig. 2 A map of the wartime boundaries of Nigeria and Biafra

⁶⁴ 'Map of Ethnic Groups in Nigeria' <http://www.nairaland.com/2453728/map-ethnic-groups-nigeria-it> [Accessed 21 September 2017]

⁶⁵ 'The Great Debate about Igbo Future' by Oguchi Nkwocha. <http://www.lnc-usa.org/blog/us-igbo-diaspora-community-to-convene-in-houston-to-decide-nigerias-fate/> [Accessed 21st September 2017]

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Abbreviations:

NAI: National Archive of Ibadan

NAE: National Archive of Enugu

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