



Columbia Model United Nations
Conference and Exposition

BIAFRAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Nigeria, April 1967

Lesedi Mbatha, Chair

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear Delegates,

My name is Lesedi Mbatha and I will be serving as your Chair as we take a journey through Nigerian history. I'm a sophomore at Barnard College, majoring in Political Science, possibly Human Rights, and minoring in Psychology. This is my second time Chairing a committee, but the first time working on CMUNCE so I'm very excited to work with all of you. I was Vice-Chair for a committee at our college conference (CMUNNY) and have been on the traveling team since the first semester of my freshman year.

I, like many of you, will attempt to start my research online. After a while I realized the little information I could find online was completely superficial. For that reason, I would HIGHLY recommend going to your library. It's almost as easy as using Wikipedia, just search "Biafra" or "Nigerian Civil War" in your library's database, pick as many books as you can, skim a few, and read whichever seem interesting. If going to the library seems like too much of a hike, the previews on Google Books generally have quite a bit of information as well.

Someone once said "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and expecting a different result." Because this is a historical committee, you may be tempted to look into the history, follow the same historical path, and hope crisis staff is nice and lets you win this time. They will not. Your research should focus on contextualizing the conflict, understanding what went wrong, and using foresight to prevent your side from having the problems the real Biafrans had.

This committee is first and foremost a gathering of leaders of Southeastern Nigeria. The issues you should discuss are not simply related to the coup and should focus on acting in the best interest of Southeast Nigeria. There were many socio-political centers of disagreement between the Nigerian government and the Eastern government; is there a way you can work those differences out without going to war? If you come up with an adequate compromise there is no reason you cannot avoid the civil war altogether!

If you have any questions leading up to the conference feel free to e-mail me at lnm2115@barnard.edu.

Best,

Lesedi Mbatha
Chair, Biafran Independence Movement
Barnard College 2012

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Nigeria is located in the western part of Africa and has a population of almost 150 million. It is occupied by a variety of ethnic groups which speak over 250 dialects; however, the three major ethnic groups are the Yoruba who inhabit western Nigeria, the Igbo who inhabit the east, and the Hausa-Fulani who dominate the north.

HAUSA-FULANI

Hausa and Fulani collectively make up 29% of the Nigerian population and are often at the forefront of government and society.¹ Although they were once separate, their histories have been intertwined since the Fulani War of 1801 and both closely identify with one another.² Most Hausas are Sunni Muslims, though a small minority practices a pagan religion known as Maguzawas. Hausa supremacy declined with the end of the slave trade and arrival of the British, who eventually conquered the Hausa's through a combination of force and diplomacy. The British admired the Hausa for their monotheistic beliefs and organized social structure, so they entrusted the Hausa with control of the territory. The Hausa utilized Sharia law while governing, which, combined with Hausa nationalism, created tension with other groups, especially the Christian Igbo living in the North.

YORUBA

Yoruba is the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria, constituting 21% of the population. Yoruba culture is largely centered on traditional religious practices, although modern Yoruba often practice Christianity or Islam. Although the west threatened to secede at Aruba if the east did so first, ultimately they did not. During the Civil War, Yoruba in the Southeast were often mistreated because of the perception that they sided with the government.

IGBO

Igbo make up the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria at 18% of the population. When the British arrived, the Igbo fought off western influence. However, missionaries helped transform British-Igbo relations and eventually many Igbo converted to Christianity. Their embrace of Christianity was soon followed by a fascination with western education. Their eagerness to learn, strong work ethic, and perceived embrace of western values made the Igbo colonial favourites. Although the Igbo were once tribal elites, after Nigerian independence they would feel persecuted by the northern majority. Laws were enacted to challenge the gains made by the Igbo, they were often excluded from high civil and military positions. Igboland was originally located in eastern Nigeria but the Igbo conquered the South in the period preceding the Civil War.

¹ Central Intelligence Agency. (2009). *FaxbackThe World Factbook: Nigeria*. Updated June 3, 2008, Retrieved May 20, 2009, from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications...>

² The Fulani took control of Sokoto, a major Hausa state. Since then their histories have been largely intertwined.

Prior to 1914, the ethnic groups existed independent of one another. The North was a theocratic regime ruled by emirs who, along with the Sultan, ensured that Islamic law was followed. Western Nigeria had an autocracy with all the power vested in Obas.³ Southern Nigeria was different from both the West and the North; it had no central government and instead was separated into hundreds of tribes that made their decisions democratically.

On the first of January, 1914 the Northern and Southern Nigerian territories, both of which were British protectorates, united to form what is modern Nigeria.

SEEDS OF HATE

"[Nigeria is] a collection of independent Native States, separated from one another by great distances, by differences of history and traditions and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers."—Hugh Clifford, Governor General of Nigeria

Igbo tribes rarely interacted with one another unless to negotiate marriage agreements. They lived in self-sufficient communal cells and as a result did not regularly trade or interact with other tribal groups or even other Igbo. However, as British influence increased, the Igbo became less self-involved and more engrossed in absorbing the imported knowledge. As a result, they were rewarded for their embrace of western culture and became central figures in controlling the institutions that ruled over Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and the other 300 or so ethnic groups.

The Igbo initially practiced a pagan religion which worshipped nature above all else. By the 1890's independent churches as well as fundamentalist and revivalist movements were strong in Nigeria. Although at first the Igbo pushed back against many of the churches, eventually Christianity replaced the tribal religions and the Igbo were united under the banner of Christianity. By the time northern and southern Nigeria united, Christianity was embedded as a part of Igbo culture. While the Igbo were not necessarily united under one denomination, one lesson transcended denomination: the basic teaching that Christianity is the one true religion and others (paganism and Islam) are detestable.

In the years leading up to 1880, Nigerian Christians mainly concerned themselves with converting Muslims to Christianity. Attempts to do so were met with limited success so they shifted their interest to limiting the spread of Islam. While pagans were seen as misguided individuals who needed conversion, Muslims were treated less sympathetically. Many independent missions and churches did not simply preach Islamic inferiority, but also preached that Islam is evil. It was not uncommon for Nigerian Muslims to be attacked and even slaughtered by Christian Igbo who were schooled in fundamentalist churches. While the importation of Christianity was successful at uniting the Ibo, it would have a lasting impact on how Igbo related to non-Igbo.

³ Traditional heads of Yoruba settlements akin to a tribal monarch.

HISTORY

COLONIALISM

In 1821, the British government sponsored an expedition to Bornu.⁴ Hugh Clapperton, an explorer on the expedition, was commissioned by the British government to return to Nigeria and did so four years later with his servant Richard Lander. Clapperton did not survive his second expedition but Lander did and upon returning to London was re-commissioned by the government to explore the region south of the Niger. Richard and his brother John discovered a link from the interior of the country to the Niger Delta which opened the doors to trade with Nigeria.

In 1807, the slave trade was banned in the British Empire. England pressed other nations to follow suit, afraid that being the sole power to ban slavery would make British colonies uncompetitive. Despite England's close trade ties with Lagos, Lagos did not follow the slave trade ban and a large slave port remained active in the territory. The slave port acted as a point of contention between the royal family of Lagos and the British government, who feared the French would utilize the port to dominate Lagos. When direct negotiations between the king and the consul broke down in 1851, England attacked Lagos. Lagos was eventually annexed in 1861, after two relatives of the disposed king failed to abolish slavery.

The colonization process in Nigeria was first headed by small British companies which eventually merged to form Royal Nigeria Company. Tribal conflict and instability convinced the British government to gradually intervene in [Southern] Nigeria until in 1900 the Royal Nigeria Company's charter was revoked. Continued instability caused England to feel that centralization was the only way to successfully rule Nigeria. In 1906 Lagos became the capital of the Southern Nigerian territories. By 1906 the south had basically accepted British rule while the north continually refused to do so. Frederik Lugard was appointed High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of northern Nigeria to negotiate with the north. Lugard pacified northerners by assuring them that the British would only take an indirect role in the territory and day-to-day decisions would be left in the hands of tribal chiefs. Chiefs would be given most of the power in absence of British involvement in tribal affairs. By maintaining the Northern feudal structure, Lugard ensured Britain would be able to get the resources it desired with little dispute. Lugard was appointed Governor-General in 1912 and charged with merging Northern and Southern Nigeria; he succeeded in 1914.

POLITICAL SITUATION IN POST-INDEPENDENCE NIGERIA

After its independence on October 1, 1960, Nigeria attempted to model its government after that of Britain, the former colonial master, by adopting a parliamentary democracy. Nigerian politics were fragmented along regional and ethnic lines. Minister Tafawa Balewa once referred to Nigeria as existing "as one country only on paper."⁵ After independence, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) took control of the federal government alongside the

⁴ A state of Nigeria, it incorporated parts of Chad and Cameroon in its territory as it expanded.

⁵ Siollun, Max. Oil, Politics and Violence. New York : Algora, 2009. 13. Print.

National Council of Nigerian Citizens(NCNC). Tafawa Balewa, then the NPC's deputy leader, became prime minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader of the NCNC, became Governor-General.⁶

Despite the NPC/NCNC “alliance,” there were stark differences between regional interests. Sir Ahmadu Bello, a powerful NPC leader who was first in line to become Prime Minister, instead chose to become Premier of the Northern Region. As leader of the most powerful political party in Nigeria, Bello was arguably the most powerful man in the country. Bello's declaration that “[He] would rather be Sultan of Sokoto [a city in the northwestern part of the country] than President of Nigeria” emphasized the lack of regional unity in Nigeria. Southern Nigerians felt that Bello only cared about them only insofar as Northern politics were affected by the South.

As for Balewa, although he was technically the country's executive, many saw him as a puppet figure who simply acted according to the wishes of the deeply partisan Ahmadu Bello. Southern politicians resented the fact that they were under the control two intellectual lightweights.⁷

The north felt a deep level of distrust for the western and eastern provinces. They were ready to secede from Nigeria unless they were given half the seats in the new Parliament. When their request was granted, they had a monopoly over governmental decisions. No decision could pass the Nigerian Parliament unless it had the support of Northern politicians. While this asymmetry of power worried western and southern politicians, the north remained unwilling to compromise. Part of their rigidity lay in the fact that they felt threatened by the South's educational advantage. Although the north was the most populated region in Nigeria at the time, Northerners only accounted for 10% of primary school enrollments.⁸ Although Northern Nigeria makes up 60% of Nigeria's landmass, the south had twenty times more schools than the north.⁹

IRONSI AND UNIFICATION

In 1962 the government conducted a census to determine representation in the House of Representatives.¹⁰ The east refused to accept the census, arguing that they had been under represented and other groups' figures were inflated. Two years later, the incumbent's reelection was met with skepticism and accusations of irregularities. Instability and an election that many labeled fraudulent led to a bloody coup. Young militants executed a coup which placed General Aguiyi Ironsi (Igbo), head of the Nigerian army as leader of the Military Nigerian Government. Ironsi and his partners argued that the coup was an attempt to unite the country in the midst of corruption and internal warfare.

Although Igbo, Ironsi made sure to put his vision of “Nigeria” ahead of any ethnic loyalties. Initially the regime was extremely popular throughout Nigeria. Ironsi had promised a return to civilian rule and people saw his ascent to

⁶ Governor-General was largely a ceremonial role. The title would eventually be changed to “President,” although it would still remain solely ceremonial.

⁷ At this time most southern politicians had university degrees and Azikwe was known as an intellectual individual. Neither Balewa nor Bello had degrees.

⁸ Siollun, Max

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/biafra.htm>

power as an opportunity to rid Nigeria of corruption. The NPC, Action Group (West), and the NCC all pledged loyalty to the Ironsi regime.

His first act was to appoint military governors for all four states. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu was appointed Governor of the Eastern Province. Ironsi tried to make appointments in a way that embodied the new spirit of a unified Nigeria. His Supreme Military Council only had one other Igbo out of its nine members. The ethnic composition of the permanent secretaries of the Federal Public Service placed Igbo's last, with a simple three appointments compared to the North which had eight representatives.¹¹ However, in order to ensure stability, Ironsi also arrested southern politicians who he feared would attempt to destabilize his new government.¹²

Ironsi's unification strategy was not well-received in many parts of Nigeria, especially not parts where it mattered. Many Igbo's were in favour of unification because they were the most educated and felt confident competing with other ethnic groups for jobs. Initially autonomy was the farthest thing from their minds. The regional system of government simply led to the persecution of Igbo in Northern Nigeria.

On May 24, 1966, General Ironsi went on the radio to announce a Decree that abolished the Regions and replaced them with groups of provinces (all ruled by the same people and consisting of the same boundaries). The once federated country would now officially be a Republic, or so that was the idea.

Provincial Commissions continued to have many of the same powers they had prior to the Decree. In fact, the Decree really only changed the names of Nigerian governmental bodies, it did not change how they functioned. Nonetheless, Ironsi's actions were seen as an attempt to promote Northern dominance over Nigeria. Emirs from the North sent Ironsi a memo and threatened to secede unless the Decree was scrapped. Although the Decree was not scrapped, Ironsi's interaction with the Emirs led him to admit what many speculated: the constitution would not change the Constitution.¹³

PROBLEMS OF GOVERNANCE

In 1946, then Governor Arthur Richards introduced a constitution based on a federal system of government. A central government based in Lagos was charged with governing the country with the advice of regional assemblies. The regional assemblies were based in: Enugue for East Nigeria, Ibadan for the West and Kaduna for the North. The Richard's Constitution was modified twice which gave more autonomy to the states in an attempt to quell ethnic tension. The 1951 version gave more autonomy to the regional bodies, attempted to create a more representative legislature and tried to place more power in the hands of the Nigerian people. However, the 1951 Constitution still ignored the problems faced by lesser ethnic groups: it gave more power to the major ethnic groups but the many small ones remained voiceless in the legislature. Those problems would be addressed in a third constitution three years later. The 1954 Constitution expanded the House of Representatives to ensure *all* ethnicities were represented.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Frederick Forsyth. "The Biafra Story." Pen & Sword Ltd, 2007

¹³ Ibid

The road to independence highlighted many of the underlying problems with Nigerian society. Most Nigerians hoped for independence but the west and the south hoped they would get their own state after ejecting the English. Independence parties were regional: Northern People's Congress represented the north, Action Group represented the west and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons represented the east. None of the three had the broad base of support necessary to successfully lead Nigeria when Nigeria was granted independence in October of 1960. The lack of a common enemy acted as a reminder of the hostilities, mostly between Igbo and Hausa. The once influential Igbo found themselves losing political influence. Many felt they were unfairly deprived of jobs and the Nigerian elite feared that the new Hausa-majority government would take their wealth. Attacks on southern Muslims intensified in the period immediately following the revolution. When news of the attacks reached the north, both Igbo and Yoruba Christians were massacred in the north.

In May 1966, a series of riots swept the North, killing 10,000 Igbo and displacing almost 1.8 million. Those who managed to escape death were left impoverished. A month later, a counter-coup was executed by northern soldiers. General Ironsi was killed and General Gowon became the new leader of Nigeria. His ascent to power led to more massacres and chaos. Many easterners saw the counter-coup as a vengeful act by northern soldiers. Gowon was outranked by a number of Igbo soldiers, including the future head of the short-lived state of Biafra. The counter-coup led to further Igbo distrust of the northerners.

LAST ATTEMPTS AT RECONCILIATION

An Ad Hoc Constitutional Convention was held in September 1966 with representatives from the three regions and Lagos. Representatives gathered in an attempt to find a solution to the chaos that plagued the country. However, the meeting was one of many failed attempts to resolve conflicts locally. Eastern leaders felt they would not be safe in the North or West, meanwhile northern leaders did not want to bow to the eastern rebels. Nigerian military leaders went to Aburi, Ghana, a neutral location, to decide on changes to the constitution. The meeting at Aburi culminated in the Aburi Accords, an agreement which outlined a plan of decentralization.

TOPIC I: ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL GRIEVANCES

NORTHERNIZATION

In response to the economic dominance of the southern Igbo, the government of Bello and Balewa instituted a policy of northernization. Northernization gave Hausa(northerners) priority over government contracts, jobs, financial services and gave them greater control over Nigerian trade. While northern politicians argued they were simply correcting the inequalities created during the colonial era, southerners saw northernization as further proof that they were being marginalized.

CENSUS

The Nigerian government used censuses to determine which region got how many seats in Parliament. In 1963, another census was held and it found that the south had a greater population than the north. Instead of re-counting, the “verification” exercise took the form of a partial recount in the northern region. After this recount, 8 million more Nigerians were found in the Northern Region, making the north the biggest region of all.¹⁴ The census solidified the distrust between Northern and Southern politicians. The fragile alliance between the NCNC and NPC seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

OIL

By the beginning of the Gowon administration in 1966, there was a complete role reversal between the east and the north. The east, once proponents of a strong central government, attempted to convince others that allowing the regions to blossom independently was the only way to save Nigeria. On the other hand, the north, once proponents of a weak central government, now advocated economic and political control being vested in Lagos.

While the new Gowon administration was partially to blame for this shift, there was another more important reason: oil. In 1956, shell and BP made the first commercial discovery of oil, 50 miles west of Port Harcourt.¹⁵ As time progressed it became clear Nigerian would soon switch from an agriculture-based economy to a major oil-producing state. Because allowing the regional governors to maintain control of the natural resources would create a large wealth gap between the Northern Region and the already well-off Eastern Region, the Federal Nigerian Government reacted by centralizing economic power.



¹⁴ Whaley, Jane. "Oil in Nigeria-Curse or Blessing?." Geo Ex Pro (2008): n. pag. Web. 1 Nov 2009. <http://www.geoexpro.com/country_profile/nigeria/>.

¹⁵ Uwechue, Ralph

The federal government made itself guardian of all the oil proceeds and only paid a “derivation formula” royalty to the individual state from which the oil was obtained. This derivation started at 50%, though decreased gradually over time.¹⁶ The oil proceeds were shared among all the regions, whether or not those regions had a hand in producing the oil. While many rejoiced at this policy, many in the oil-producing (largely Eastern) region felt bitter that the fruits of their labour were being hijacked by the Federal Government and states who contributed nothing to the national economy.

TOPIC II: WARTIME CONSIDERATIONS

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The international response to the possibility of secession was largely predictable. The Organization of African Unity (O.A.S), a group composed of countries that often faced problems with warring ethnicities, encouraged a peaceful resolution to disputes and the preservation of a single Nigerian state. The O.A.S and other international representatives attempted to connect the Biafrans with the Nigerians. Although Biafra was only officially recognized by five states, many – most notably France – assisted the Biafrans with arms and medical supplies.

In the midst of negotiations, Nigeria attempted to win the publicity war. On the international front, they targeted the big powers: the USA, USSR and United Kingdom and succeeded at convincing dissuading all three from recognizing the secession and managed to secure arms from allies. In the midst of Nigeria’s arms collection, it continued to trumpet its willingness to talk. Eastern Nigerians were promised safety if they refused to take up arms against Nigeria.

Although Nigeria was more successful at reaching out to other governments, Biafrans had the world’s sympathy. Pictures of emaciated children and articles describing the horrible conditions in which people lived, inspired groups to help the struggling fighters. Religious organizations abroad, including many from the United States, airlifted food to the Biafrans. In response to the crisis, French doctors created Médecins Sans Frontières, or “Doctors Without Borders.”

The Nigerian offensive was organized in four phases: capture Nuskka, capture Ogoja, capture Abaliki, and lastly capture the capital, Enugu. Alongside the ground offensive, they forged a plan to cut Biafra off from foreign aid. Food, weapons, and medicine failed to reach the Biafrans because of the Federal Governments blockade. Biafra may have faced a difficult fight but it had many of the best Generals in the country. Food and medicine (or lack thereof) can potentially play a greater role in defeating the Biafrans than any of the Nigerian’s weapons could.

¹⁶ Siollun, Max

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Despite the asymmetry of power, Biafrans succeeded at balancing against the Nigerians. Their relative military success was accompanied by a disastrous economic situation. The blockade successfully prevented ships from reaching the shore, annihilating any chances of using oil revenue as a source of wealth. The Biafran pound was introduced early into the war but it was not accepted anywhere outside of Biafra. Furthermore, the Nigerians changed their currency soon after the war started, so most of the Nigerian currency available in the east was as useless as the Biafran pound.

The Nigerian blockade succeeded at limiting the importation of food and medical supplies. At the same time, the choice to stop using Nigerian currency left Biafrans with little room to trade. Two years into the war, it is estimated that over a thousand Biafrans died a day, mostly from hunger and disease.¹⁷ The 4.5 million Igbo refugees who fled to Biafra from other regions of the country because of the pogroms were forced into make-shift homes. Jobs were scarce, so the vast majority of refugees depended on government assistance. The fact that countries refused to recognize the Biafran currency meant that the government was also in no state to provide assistance. The lack of economic assistance for millions of Biafrans coupled with the blockade imposed by Northern Nigerians led to what was one of the worst humanitarian disaster in modern history.

LIST OF POSITIONS

There is little to no information about the vast majority of people listed. Delegates would be best served focusing their research on matters related to their characters position.

Chukwuemka Odumegwu Ojukwu-Eastern Regions Military Governor (Chair)

General Ugwu Ezuma-Minister of Labour

Lt. Engr Abbe-Minister of Finance

Major-General Achike Ohakim- Minister of Internal Affairs

General Ikedi Udenwa- Minister of Agriculture

Philip Effiong-Chief of Staff

Dr. Okpara-Political Advisor

¹⁷ Time. *World: Nigeria's Civil War: Hate Hunger and the Will to Survive*. Staff Writer. August 23, 1968.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,838607-2,00.html>

Nnamdi Azikiwe-Minister of State for Energy-Petroleum
Lt. Engr Abbe-Minister of State for Energy-Power
Dr. Onyema Maduekwe-Minister of Information and Communications
Abaeza Soyinka-Junior Minister of Economic Development
Emecheta Ayanwale-Minister of State for Energy-Gas
Obiora Emeagwali-Economic Development
Osiebuni Edoche-Works and Housing
Uzochi Araromi-Minster of Education
Chinua Onwenu-Junior Minister of Education
Chisom Nwangwu-Minister for Youth Development
Lt. Patrick Aguiyi-Junior Minister of Finance
Major N.U. Akpan- Minister of Natural Resources
Alexander Madeibo-Junior Minister of Information and Communications

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