

**OJUKWU'S
REBELLION
AND
WORLD
OPINION**

By

Dr Nabo B. Graham-Douglas

Formerly Attorney-General for Eastern Nigeria

OJUKWU'S REBELLION
AND
WORLD OPINION

BY

Dr Nabo B. Graham-Douglas
Formerly Attorney-General for Eastern Nigeria

Printed by the Nigerian National Press Limited, Malu Road, Apapa

MUCH has been said and written about the Nigerian Civil War and its antecedents. Many observers and audiences have already taken their positions on the conflict, and some have been very vocal in expressing their sympathies. I cannot pretend to be able to bring about any change of attitudes now by the few things which I am going to say, but it is just possible that as a person who was himself involved in the national crisis which led to the civil war at its inception, as one who strove to bring about some understanding between Enugu and Lagos at that time, and as one for whom in the thick of the civil war adversity created an opportunity of being drawn once again into some close quarters with those who were now rebels against their own country and thus of knowing, at first-hand, the strategy upon which the hope of the sustenance of their rebellion now rested, there may yet be facts in my possession which are either not known at all or only partially known to the world and facts upon which world-understanding may as yet be wrongly oriented. In the interest of all involved in the current conflict and of the world at large it is my duty at this, the first opportune, time to place such facts at the disposal of others. What use they may make of such facts it would be presumptuous of me to suggest, but I will have done some service to humanity if positive results ensue. This is my humble mission.

Prejudice and Distortion

I am aware that I proceed to attempt to fulfil this mission against the background of a general prejudice in favour of the rebel regime in what is now the East-Central State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on the part of a sizeable portion of a beguiled world and against the far-reaching products of a properly organized propaganda system mounted by the rebels themselves with the undisguised complicity of some sections of the world press.

It is regrettable that many of the dispatches on the Nigerian situation by Pressmen who have been to 'Biafra' as guests of the 'Biafran' government have contained very little to recommend them as releases by persons who, at any rate, owe it as a duty not to mislead the world. To many who can speak from positions of eye-witnesses many of the releases are uninhibited distortions: in many cases they have been subjective falsehoods; at times they have set out only half-truths or grossly exaggerated accounts of the 'horrors' perpetrated upon 'Biafrans' by the 'Lagos Junta'; in almost every case they have only echoed the words of some 'Biafran' informant or official source of information; and very seldom have they called world attention to the atrocities which the 'Biafrans' themselves have consistently perpetrated upon 'fellow-Biafrans', that is, the peoples of the 'minority areas.'

The world has obviously not lost its conscience, going by the manner in which, on 'humanitarian grounds', sympathy is now as a matter of course daily expressed with the 'Biafran' cause and by the number of some such things as 'Save Biafra' demonstrations in some world capitals. But it does appear that a good part of the world is losing its sense of judgment and of equality, for many ordinarily reasonable men and women in many parts of the world seem to have been so much preoccupied with the sins of the Federal Government of Nigeria against the "poor, oppressed, needy and down-trodden people of 'Biafra'" that they have become apparently blind to the root-cause of the 1966 Crisis which culminated in the civil war, to the actual as distinct from the hypocritical motive-spring of secession, and to the fact that if the Ibos are an under-dog deserving of world sympathy and succour there are other, worse placed, under-dogs, the peoples of the minority areas of what was Eastern Nigeria, against whom a deliberate war of extermination and, to use the word much brandished by the so-called 'Biafrans' themselves, *genocide*, is being prosecuted by the Ibos as if relentlessly committed to the task of suppressing a colonial revolt. These peoples suffer greater hardships, molestations and depredations from the hands of the Ibos than the

Ibos can ever claim, in honesty, to have suffered at the hands of the Northern Nigerians or the Federal Nigerian authorities, everything considered.

It is such a great piece of injustice that whereas the leaders of the so-called 'Republic of Biafra' have a very powerful propaganda machinery and a network of mass information media by means of which they have to a large extent deluded an apparently gullible world that same world has been kept in utter darkness about the atrocities which their soldiers and other agents have systematically carried out with unconscionable devotion upon the defenceless minority peoples everywhere. However, as more and more places in the minority areas become liberated by Federal troops the world may be better placed to assess the situation for itself.

The theme upon which most patrons of 'Biafra' have scored their greatest successes in mobilizing feeling against the Federal Government of Nigeria is that the declaration of secession, the immediate forerunner of the civil war, was an inevitable outcome of the 'massacre' of Ibos by Northern Nigerians following the *coup d'etat* of July 29, 1966, and in particular the incidents of September and October, 1966. The attempt by Ojukwu and his supporters to take the former Eastern Nigeria out of the Federation and their determination to sustain it by military means, they argue, is accordingly justifiable, and the so-called 'Biafrans' are therefore entitled to world sympathy and support. This illusion it is one of my humble duties herein to try to correct.

It is also part of my duty to attempt to show that if there are any people or peoples sinned against and deserving of world sympathy in the current Nigerian context they are not the Ibos but the peoples of the 'minority areas' of the former Eastern Nigeria, now happily the peoples of the Rivers and South-Eastern States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

I must apologize that in attempting to perform this task I will to a large extent be saying something about myself, that is, about my involvement in the national crisis at its beginning. But this is inevitable because whatever fact I may have to set out in the context is an inextricable part of such involvement.

The Fatal Decree

In March, 1966, following the military *coup* of January, 1966, and the establishment of military regimes both at the Federal Nigerian level and in all the constituent regions of the Federation, I was appointed by Lt.-Col. C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, then Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, as Attorney-General for Eastern Nigeria, to assist him, as he put it, 'in the work of reconstruction' facing the new military set-up throughout the country. I was in that position when in May of that year I became aware of the proposal to replace the existing federal system of administration with a unitary system.

In my official capacity I was called upon to advise on the draft decree by means of which the conversion was intended to be carried out; I advised against it. It was obvious to me that the move was Eastern—(more accurately, Ibo—) inspired, and I advised my Military Governor that if it was enacted and implemented there would be such a violent reaction from the North that rather than unify the country it would tend towards its disintegration. Later that month we attended a meeting of the Central Executive Council in Lagos, and informal discussions with my colleagues, the Attorney-General for the Mid-West and the Solicitors-General of the North and West, made me feel certain that I had given the proper advice. However, decision on the draft decree would be taken not by the Central Executive Council but by the Supreme Military Council.

On Tuesday, 24th May, in a nation-wide broadcast the Head of State and Supreme

Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces, (now the late) Major-General J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, announced the change. Decree No. 34 of 1966 had been promulgated. The immediate reaction of the North was as I had foreseen: on Sunday, 29th May, there were unpleasant incidents in most cosmopolitan areas of Northern Nigeria, and Eastern (more so, Ibo) residents thereof appeared to have come off pretty badly. The nation at once appeared to be facing the grim prospect of disintegration; to stave this off the Head of State held meetings with representatives of the Northern Chiefs and subsequently with the Military Governors of all the regions.

Ojukwu's Ambition

On the return of my Military Governor from Lagos, on or about the 7th of June, I had the opportunity of a full-length discussion of the situation with him, and the one thing that emerged from such discussion was his determination to take the East out of the Federation sooner or later. 'We are finished with the Federation . . . it is all a question of time', he assured me. I wondered! I knew that he had hoped to become Head of State of the Federation of Nigeria sometime, replacing Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, the contempt for whom he did not much disguise, founding such hope as he did on the belief that by virtue of his formal education he would be more acceptable than the other *possibles* for the position in due course. That hope was dashed by the Northern incident of 29th May and after, an unmistakable expression of resentment of Ibo domination. He wasted no time in planning for himself for the future, and the one answer was to be Head of State of an independent Eastern Nigeria, by whatever name it might be called. I realized this at once, in the course of our discussion, but there was nothing I could do other than advise that such a move would be successful only if predicated upon the common consent of all the peoples comprised in the region and that accordingly his first task would be to work for the 'solidarity' of the peoples.

I was still in that position when on July 29 the country was awakened to the news of another *coup d'etat*; the former one was Ibo-inspired and executed, this time it was a Northern affair. On learning of it we of the Eastern administration were at once paralysed by fear—of our own safety and of the probable outcome of it all—but at first we adopted an attitude of 'wait and see', which soon gave way to a strong hope of immediate independence and sovereignty for Eastern Nigeria brought about by news, reaching us on Saturday, July 30, that negotiations were going on in Lagos between representatives of the Northern officers of the Nigerian Army behind the *coup* and those still loyal to the Federal Military Government and that the firm standpoint of the Northerners was the disintegration of the country into four or so sovereign and independent nations on the basis of the existing regions. Nothing could be more pleasing to the Eastern Executive Council, and, in the manner in which the name, 'Republic of Biafra', was immediately suggested and readily accepted for this prospective entity is something to go by, one might say that what we now had before us was the hope of the immediate fulfilment of a long standing desire.

It will be recalled that the first time the Nigerian political atmosphere was dominated by the dark cloud of secession was in 1963, following the national census enumeration of that year, when the Eastern Nigeria Government took the strong position that the Northern-dominated Federal Government had manipulated the figures so as to give the North an undue numerical advantage over the rest of the country and particularly to the prejudice of the East. In consequence of that position the Premier of Eastern Nigeria and his ministers threatened to take the East out of the Federation, and in the end wise statesmanship on all sides prevailed to prevent the situation from deteriorating into a national calamity. But even

after that episode the East did not appear to have settled down to a complete reconciliation with the idea of the perpetual maintenance of the integrity of the Federation and of that of the absence in the Nigerian Constitution of a provision enabling any constituent region to secede from the whole if and when it might wish to do so. But now, arising out of an evil thing, a Northern-inspired and executed military coup, was the likelihood of the attainment at no distant date of the goal of independence and sovereignty, that is, a complete political break with the rest of the Federation, which the East through its politicians and leaders had set for itself since crude oil was first exported from Port Harcourt, in Eastern Nigeria, in 1958. It was a matter in respect of which they appeared not to have seen any virtue in silence and secrecy.

The 'Republic of Biafra'

Being new to the government of the region and having yet, if at all, to be drawn into politics, I could not, nor can, say whether the name 'Biafra' was the creature of the genius of that member of the Executive Committee by whom the suggestion was made or was the name adopted by the former politicians when they first threatened secession. But it is remarkable that soon, and significantly even after the hope that an independent State of Eastern Nigeria was going to be given to us as it were on a platter had become an illusion, all Enugu was talking about the 'Republic of Biafra'. On the 30th of July I was entirely with my cabinet colleagues. If the secession of the North from the Federation and the consequent disintegration of the remainder of the Federation into sovereign and independent nations based on the existing regions was the solution to the pestilence of periodic coups *d'etat* in the country I was all for it, but in present circumstances my duty was to urge the Executive Committee, as I had advised the Military Governor some eight weeks previously, to attempt to secure the solidarity of all the peoples of the region lest the same divisive factors responsible for the imminent collapse of the Federation tended sooner or later to the fragmentation of the East itself.

Reaction to Gowon's Broadcast

The hope of immediate independence by the common consent of all the component regions of the Federation was short-lived, for on Monday, 1st August, 1966, Lt.-Col. (as he then was) Yakubu Gowon announced in a radio broadcast that he had taken over the Government of the Federation of Nigeria. It was one indivisible Nigeria of which he thus became the Head of State. The immediate reaction of Lt.-Col. Ojukwu and his advisers, the core of whom were now (for the first time on the surface) some relatives of his and some other members of his clan group, to this 'take-over' of power by Gowon was the decision to take the East out of the Federation without further ado, and this was to be implemented on the same day, but as I was not immediately available to advise on the legal aspects of the Instrument of Secession, already drawn up, it was agreed that our final stand be deferred until members had had the benefit of my participation in the discussion on the crisis in the light of the new development and heard my views both generally and particularly on the legal aspects of the matter as a whole as well as the instrument itself.

That opportunity came both for them and for me on Wednesday, 3rd August, 1966. It was a meeting at which I was virtually the only speaker except for the Military Governor himself putting a number of questions to me. It appeared to me that the government of the region was all set to proceed with the declaration of independence. I had known long before now that it was the intention of the Military Governor to attempt to take the East

out of the Federation in furtherance of his ambition of becoming a Head of State of a sovereign and independent country, and it was clear to me that the present development offered him the pretext for doing so. I was convinced then, as I am now, that that was not in the best interest of the people of the region. Now this was my chance of demonstrating that the interest of the people was to be paramount. I knew I was in a challenging position; I accepted the challenge.

This is not the place to set out the argument with which I tried to dissuade him as well as my colleagues, but one thing I may say here and that is that I tried to leave Lt.-Col. Ojukwu in no doubt that if he attempted to secede no independent nation would accord his new regime diplomatic recognition. His reply at one stage of the discussion was that he was sure that two nations at least would recognize his new state. Who those two were we did not know, but I tried to show him that his hopes were resting on a very shaky foundation. It is not for me, and certainly this is not the place, to say whether or not I have been proved wrong by the purported recognition accorded the Ibo 'Republic of Biafra' by Tanzania and three other African countries some twelve or more months after the declaration of the birth of that inchoate republic, when its size had dwindled to less than one-third of that with which it started off.

One thing, too, I may say is that at the close of the meeting I appeared not only to have carried with me the other members of the Executive Committee, having regard to the expressions of gratitude with which they greeted me as we left the meeting chamber, but also to have convinced Ojukwu himself of the futility of his design and of the unreliability of the preconceptions upon which he seemed to have founded the hope of his getting away with the independence he sought to grab. In the end not only was the declaration not made that day but also no final decision was taken as to whether or not, and if so when, it was to be made. But after the meeting, as we were about to disperse, the Military Governor called me into another room and disclosed to me his plans for the raising, training and equipment of an army within a very short time, a plan in which, as he assured me, the Republic of Israel had agreed to play a leading role. Then I knew that I had not really succeeded in convincing him against secession; all I might claim to have achieved was the prevention of a precipitate declaration. And in this respect one factor which, as I soon realized, had operated to the advantage of all who thought along the same lines as I did was, ironically, the confusion arising out of the *coup* and pervading the general atmosphere for quite some time. At the time of that important meeting we were not certain as to what had become of General Aguiyi-Ironsi, and, the hysteria with which Lt.-Col. Gowon's announcement of the 'take-over' was received having died out, Ojukwu was astute enough not to risk a power struggle with the General in the event of the latter being yet alive lest, as his personal popularity stood at the time, General Aguiyi-Ironsi rather than he became the prime beneficiary of his seizure of independence. But as soon as it became clear, a few days later, that General Aguiyi-Ironsi had been killed he had his green light for proceeding with his plans towards an eventual declaration of secession, and a decision was expected any day.

Playing for Time

Realizing now that his will to take the East out of the Federation was inexorable, I adopted the tactics of advising him against making a declaration other than from a position of strength, that is, military strength, and urging him to play for time. My hope then was that if a hasty action were averted, in the intervening period some pressure might be brought to bear upon him by the reasonable, eminent and intelligent people of the region,

of which the region could, as I thought, boast many, to abandon the idea of a complete break with the rest of the Federation and to give more thought to that of going to talk with a view to securing adequate guarantees and an overall advantageous position for the East within the framework of a new federal constitution. Play for time in the end he agreed to do and did do, but submit to pressures tending to turn him away from his determined path he did not, but in this respect, I regret, I cannot say how much pressure was in fact brought to bear upon him, although I personally urged a number of leading Eastern Nigerians to do so.

During the first fortnight following July 29 one great restraining factor which, in addition to those which have been mentioned already, prevented the irrational assumption of such a risk as that to which the declaration of secession in those circumstances was tantamount was the presence of soldiers of Northern Nigeria origin in the Enugu garrison; these outnumbered those of Eastern Nigeria origin in the ratio of some four to one, and so, notwithstanding that the armoury was well secured and in the hands of loyal Eastern soldiers, we were all the time literally sitting on a gunpowder keg. But as soon as the threat posed by their presence was removed, pursuant to an agreement reached between representatives of the regional governments and those of the new Federal authorities on or about the 9th of August, in accordance with which all troops were to be repatriated to their regions of origin at the shortest possible time, the stage became set for Ojukwu to embark upon positive action not only in defiance of Gowon, whom he would not accept as his new chief, but also to demonstrate his determination not to get reconciled to the notion of the continued political association of Eastern Nigeria with the rest of the Federation.

'Total Disengagement'

The first step in this direction was the evolution and implementation of a policy of what he called *Total Disengagement*, announced to the Executive Committee at its first meeting after the repatriation of troops from other regions to their regions of origin. According to this policy there was to be the gradual dissolution of all the ties binding the East to the other regions and to the centre, and the very first thing to do, which was to be done immediately, was to ask all civil servants and other personnel of Eastern Nigeria origin working and engaged in other economic and other activities in the other parts of the country to return to the East at once. At that very meeting I confronted him with the practical difficulties which such a step would entail, such as the difficulty of finding them suitable or comparable employment in the East. After a moment's reflection he agreed with me that our financial resources could not stand the strain and ended by saying, '... well, let them stay.' Reason had prevailed but, as it turned out to be, not for long, for soon thereafter the call went out to all Eastern civil servants, etc., to return home, and many did respond to the call—to their ultimate disappointment. And then towards the end of September an order was issued obliging all Nigerians residing in the East other than those of Eastern origin to return at once to their regions of origin; they were given no opportunity of choice—many of them were reluctant to go, but not even the fact of their long residence in the East (in some cases for upwards of thirty years) could prevent their being forced out of the region. Justification for this move was offered by the unrealistic calculation that as they left their employments home-coming Easterners would take their places—in the Civil Service, in industry, and in personal professional employment. I had argued against the step on the ground that for every non-Eastern Nigerian leaving we would have on our hands no fewer than thirty home-coming Easterners (my figures might be wrong!) and that in the end we would only be creating incalculable hardship for our people, and the wisdom

in such an argument had been acknowledged. Happily for me, I had resigned my appointment when the order was issued, and reciprocally everything possible continued to be done to entice Eastern Nigerians everywhere to leave their jobs and come home.

Propaganda Programme

In the meantime we had embarked upon a programme of deliberate propaganda designed to canvass the woes of Hausa/Fulani domination, to inflame the feelings of the peoples of the region with published 'stories' of Northern atrocities perpetrated upon 'innocent Eastern civilians', and, *inter alia*, to inculcate in the minds of the peoples the theme that there could be no suitable alternative open to them to a complete break with the rest of the Federation. No sooner had we launched such a campaign than we began to receive positive seemingly approbatory results. Our principal propaganda organ at the inception of the campaign was the 'Nigerian Outlook', the official newspaper of the Eastern Nigeria Government, and soon in the pages of this newspaper, alongside our 'horror stories', were published 'open letters to Lt.-Col. Ojukwu' in which he was urged to action along his chosen path. In course of time the name 'Republic of Biafra' began to feature in the publications.

In the meantime, too, he had begun to recruit youngmen, almost entirely Ibos, for training for the prospective 'Biafran Army'. This exercise commenced almost immediately after the departure from the East of soldiers of non-Eastern Nigeria origin.

At the very inception of the crisis there came into prominence a caucus of trusted advisers who were readily available to the Military Governor for consultation; some of its members were the Military Governor's own clansmen, some of whom were admittedly close relatives of his. It is probably on account of this aspect of the matter that the rebel regime came in due course to be referred to as 'Ojukwu and his Nnewi clique' by many commentators. Before long this clandestine yet patently identifiable body came to all intents and purposes to replace the Executive Committee of the region as the principal policy making body on all matters relating to the crisis, and in this respect the Committee was reduced to the status of rubber-stamping decisions already taken by that body, that is, in addition to its ordinary role of deliberating on papers submitted to it by permanent secretaries on matters of routine administration. On the question of secession the Executive Committee did not appear to have been committed, but the said band of confidants and advisers was without disguise not only in complete agreement with the Military Governor that there remained nothing else for the East to do than to declare its secession from the Federation but was also urging him to do so without much ado and without further delay, and that quite against the note of caution sounded by his military and police advisers, notably Lt.-Col. David S. Ogunewe, then Commander of the 1st Battalion of the Nigerian Army, stationed at Enugu, Chief Patrick Okeke, the Commissioner of Police of Eastern Nigeria, and some of the senior army officers who had returned to the East following the July *coup*.

At about the same time the Military Governor drew the Roman Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria into the conflict—internally to whip up popular support for his plan among its followers in the Region, who amounted to more than half the Christian population of the Region, and externally to give the world the impression that what had just begun was a religious conflict between the Christian East and the so-called Moslem North. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Onitsha appeared to have welcomed this move which seemed to open to the Church the opportunity of evolving a Roman Catholic state in this part of Africa. About 1962 the Roman Catholic authorities in the Region had been involved

in some disagreement with the Regional Government over its educational policy. Now the prospect of creating a virtual Roman Catholic state offered the Church authorities the chance of achieving what they had failed to obtain from the politicians in or about 1962; they could not resist, so both the late Archbishop of Onitsha and the late Bishop of Enugu became regular visitors to Government House and the Military Governor's advisers on the conflict. Ojukwu claims to be a Roman Catholic.

1 Constitutional Conference

Towards the end of August preparations were going on in all the other regions of the Federation relative to the constitutional conference soon to take place in Lagos with a view to finding a new structural framework for the Federation and a way out of the current crisis. In other regions 'leaders of thought' meetings were going on with a view to the formulation of the particular regional stand at the impending conference. Suggestions were made by, *inter alios*, such a distinguished person as Sir Louis Mbanefo, then Chief Justice of the East, that a similar meeting be held in the East lest the region turned out in the end, as on some occasions in the past, to submit to a new constitutional formula 'by default', but the Military Governor was not inclined to summon such a meeting. The obvious reason for his disinclination at that time was that he had already taken his position on the national crisis, that is, secession, and that nothing in his line could be expected to evolve out of the *Ad Hoc* Conference in Lagos.

The other reason, less known perhaps, is that the lawyers among his caucus of advisers had found a spurious juridical basis for his policy of 'total disengagement' which was accordingly to be pursued with all vigour and inconsistent with which was any rapprochement with Lagos such as was necessarily inherent in Eastern participation in the Lagos talks. He disclosed this to me himself when he sought my views on the legal advice which he had been given on the matter. He had been advised, he told me, that Eastern Nigeria was now virtually independent and that there might in the end be no need for a formal declaration of secession. The argument in support of this thesis was that since January (1966), the constitution having to a large extent been suspended, the basis of the unity of the country had disappeared and that it was only the Nigerian Army which held the country together, but that since an army ceased to be an army as soon as it took up arms against itself the Nigerian Army, following the July *coup d'etat*, had ceased to exist and that therefore the one factor unifying the country had disappeared and accordingly the Federation had itself disintegrated, and the East was, like the other components of the Federation, now free to go its own way. To me this was fantastic, and I did not waste time in telling him that going on the same premises one could argue that the East itself had disintegrated and that as a result we were all thrown back to the position in the early 1880's when British consular agents were entering into the treaties of protection with the chieftains and other tribal representatives throughout what in the end came to be known as the Oil Rivers Protectorate, as they were doing in other parts of what came in course of time to be known as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Accordingly we would have not an independent Eastern Nigeria, by whatever name it might choose to be called, but an independent Bokiland, Bonny, Calabar, Kalabari, Onitsha, Owerri, and so on, and if the peoples of these various entities wished to come together to establish an independent country they would have to do so by means of a treaty the terms of which would be worked out at a round-table conference. It was only then that the realities of the situation dawned on him, but he and his advisers had gone too far with their commitment to the idea of secession and independence for him to begin to tread the path of realism.

However, in the end he was prevailed upon to arrange to send a team to the Lagos talks, but his agreeing to do so was not to be taken to indicate a shift in his position; if anything, it would enhance his strategy of playing for time. Pursuant to this superficial change of heart he summoned a meeting of some 'notable personages', hand-picked from the various administrative divisions of the region, whom he intended to organize into a deliberative body to be known as the Consultative Assembly (it is unnecessary to set out here the purposes which this body was, when the idea to set it up was first conceived, intended to fulfil), for Wednesday, August 31. The body duly met on that day and adopted certain Resolutions which were to form the basis of the stand of the Eastern delegation at the Lagos talks. Then on Wednesday, September 7, he summoned and addressed another meeting, this time of a newly constituted Council of Chiefs and Elders, which after 'due deliberation' adopted the Resolutions of the Consultative Assembly.

In the meantime he had set up a Constitutional Committee, with me as Chairman and with some of the region's leading lawyers, university dons and former politicians as members, to consider the various constitutional problems which the current crisis had brought into focus and against that background

'to advise on the type of constitutional arrangements which will safeguard the interests of Eastern Nigeria in the context of Nigeria as a whole'.

The Committee was also mandated

'to consider and advise on a Constitution for Eastern Nigeria, having regard especially to the form of political and administrative arrangements, which will satisfy the realistic wishes and aspirations of the different groups in this Region, lay sound foundations for solidarity and oneness, and establish mutual confidence, co-operation and interdependence beneficial to all'.

We were also to look into the 'minority question', and in this respect both in our terms of reference and in the letter under cover of which it was sent to me the Military Governor made admissions as to the neglect which for some time had been the principal feature of the grievances on account of which the peoples of the 'minority areas' had asked for separate existence, that is, from the rest of Eastern Nigeria but within the context of the Federation of Nigeria. In the letter he wrote:

'Secondly, certain sections, popularly if inaccurately often referred to as 'minority' groups, have deep-rooted and genuine grievances which have frequently rocked the foundations of unity, confidence and trust in this Region. It is not merely a question of the people wanting to have a fair share of the amenities which this Region can provide. The people do not want paternalism. They want to have a sense of involvement and of belonging. They want an opportunity of service and of direct participation in determining schemes of development which affect their daily lives.'

And in the Terms of Reference we were enjoined specifically

'to recognize and appreciate the fact that genuine fears and feelings of neglect and injustice do exist among certain groups in Eastern Nigeria, which fears and feelings must be urgently, if not immediately assuaged.....'

The outcome of the deliberations of our Committee, we were made to understand, was to be the basis of the stand of the Eastern delegation to the Lagos Talks, but as by our terms of reference we were limited to basing our advice and recommendations on the Resolutions and recommendations of the aforementioned Consultative Assembly we had to operate within a much too circumscribed ambit. However, we gave ourselves some liberties and in the end evolved what we considered to be an adequate formula both for the Federation as a whole and for Eastern Nigeria within the framework of a Federal

constitution. For present purposes it is relevant to state that we considered both the questions of secession and confederation and rejected both and agreed on a Federal framework, transferring many of the matters hitherto on the Exclusive List to the Concurrent List.

The *Ad Hoc* Constitutional Conference was to commence in utter darkness about the arrangements for the conference. On September 12, Ojukwu announced in a radio broadcast the members of the team for Lagos; I was not a member of that team, and I only learned its composition over the radio.

In the same broadcast the Military Governor stated that he had set up a constitutional committee to advise him from day to day upon matters raised at the Lagos Conference, as the conference was in progress. This, too, was news to me, and since I was excluded even from this committee I decided that I no longer had a place in the Government, so that morning I resigned my appointment and left Enugu at once.

As I did so I had only one regret; I knew that my country was dangerously poised on the edge of a precipice and that sooner or later it would be drawn into a civil war which I strongly believed could be avoided. I had in my humble position of Attorney-General tried to prevent it but failed.

Why I Resigned

I had, of course, given thought to resigning some time previously, first over the proposed appointment of a Director of Public Prosecutions in my Ministry in a very irregular manner, and subsequently on account of the fact that the Military Governor was leaning more on his clansmen and relatives, rather than on me, for advice on matters which were properly within my province.

I was soon after the event blamed for my resignation by a number of well-informed, knowledgeable and well-meaning Eastern Nigerians whose view was that my presence in the Executive Committee of Eastern Nigeria and the influence I tried to exert therein were the only bulwark the people of Eastern Nigeria had against the pressures of what, even then, had come to be known throughout the region as the 'Nnewi Clique' and that my continuing to play my accustomed role, for which the people at large appeared to be grateful, on the secession issue was the only basis of the hope that reason might prevail if I persisted. I regret that much as I concede the rationality of their indictment I could not arrive at the same conclusion as they did. Personal embarrassments apart, I had surveyed the situation thoroughly and realized that the will to secede was inexorable and that I had ceased to be in any position of influence with the Military Governor, particularly as Lt.-Col. Ogunewe and Police Commissioner Okeke, who like me had at the beginning been vocal in calling attention to the difficulties we would face if we were to attempt to go, had both been relegated to the background and would not be listened to any longer. So, all alone, I knew I could not achieve any sensible result.

But soon thereafter I was confronted with a more serious indictment, this time of treachery, for in a matter of weeks after my resignation the whole region came to be full of rumours that I had been forced to resign my appointment because I had been discovered to be in the habit of transmitting secret information from Enugu to Lt.-Col. Gowon (as he then was) by, of all the possible means, telephone. It was a fantastic allegation, but as it appeared to be gaining strength from day to day I thought it was necessary for a statement to be made by the Military Governor himself—to tell his people that the allegation was untrue. Accordingly I wrote to the Chief Justice, Sir Louis Mbanefo, to urge the Military Governor to make such a statement, but as no statement was made within such time as in the circum-

stances was reasonable I held a small Press conference in my home-town, Abonnema, to which I had repaired for a short rest after my resignation, and issued a Press release to the effect that the allegations were absolutely untrue and a malicious fabrication and that I had not been forced to resign.

I could not in the police-state atmosphere then prevailing in the East set out in that Press release the reasons for my decision to resign. Even now space and the fact that personal considerations must in the current context be subordinated to matters of wider and greater national import would preclude me from giving a detailed account of the factors underlying that decision. But a few things I may yet say, and the first is that I resigned because I thought it was dishonest for one man to wish to be king at the expense of the lives of millions of his countrymen. Ojukwu's determination to take Eastern Nigeria out of the Federation was not inspired by any love for the Ibos, less so for the peoples of the minority areas, but by the insatiable thirst for personal political power. Ibo irredentism has been used as a convenient instrument for achieving that end, and in this he has had the complicity of a number of self-seeking public servants and former politicians.

It is true that the master-tribe ideology, which has from time to time manifested itself in such statements by some eminent Ibos as that 'the Ibo domination of Nigeria is a question of time' and in boasts that the Ibo race was chosen to lead the whole of Africa out of colonial bondage, is one which every Iboman has at some time or other embraced and that the so-called common man has a stake in the outcome of Ojukwu's rebellion which, to many Ibos, is more a colonial war designed to earn them in perpetuity the mineral and vegetable oil wealth, among other resources, of what are now the Rivers and South-Eastern States of the Republic of Nigeria than a war of self-determination, and that it is only in that sense that they regard it as a war of survival. But I was convinced, as I still am, that the outcome of the rebellion, even were it to be successful, would not be in the interest of the ordinary people of the region but would enure to the benefit ultimately of a few self-seekers. My conviction was in due course confirmed by the views of practically all the members of my Constitutional Committee, and it was on that basis that the Committee decided against secession or Confederation. That is why I opposed the notion of secession at every opportunity and in the end resigned because I realized I could do nothing more to halt it.

False Hope of Victory

I had a hunch, too, that the preconceptions on which the hope of sustaining the imminent rebellion would when the time came falsify. The belief which Ojukwu himself expressed to me that 'Jac' (that is, Lt.-Col. Gowon, as he then was) 'won't fight', being a 'Christian', the concept of 'Southern Solidarity' which quickened him with the expectation that a declaration of secession by Eastern Nigeria would almost automatically be followed by similar declarations by Western and Mid-Western Nigeria and be supported by the people of the Federal Territory of Lagos; the hope of early international intervention which would force 'Nigeria' to 'let go the East'; the promise of help in military training and equipment on a massive scale by the Republic of Israel; the size of the Nigerian Army and the dearth of essential military equipment; the expected paralysis of the Nigerian public services and breakdown of law and order following the withdrawal of Eastern personnel, particularly policemen, from both the centre and the other regions; and so on—all these, to my mind, were an unwarrantable assumption upon which to found the hope of victory, so I warned him against miscalculations.

Of the other reasons for my decision to resign the one which may also be stated here is that I considered that I no longer had a place in the Eastern Nigerian governmental system

having regard to the character it had come to assume. I have stated that when I was appointed Attorney-General it was with a view to making my own little contribution towards the eradication of such ills of the country's public life in the former—political—days as tribalism, clannishness, nepotism, bribery and corruption, and so on. I regret to say that within the first few days of the crisis some of these monsters, on the surface tribalism, clannishness and nepotism, began to rear their ugly heads all over again, and I realized that the milieu in which I could have made the contributions, howbeit small, expected of me had disappeared, so I had to go.

Turning now to personal considerations for a moment I must say, categorically again, that I was not forced to resign and that the allegation that I transmitted secret or any other information to Lt.-Col. (as he then was) Gowon by any means whatsoever is absolutely untrue and a malicious fabrication. I did not need to transmit any information of any kind to Gowon. I believe that if I had had the inclination to do so I might have saved my country from the horrors and devastations and the economic disasters of a civil war, for then General Gowon (as he is now) would not have waited for the disillusionment following the *Munich* that was *Aburi* before taking his final position on the crisis and might have been impelled to strike a decisive blow that could take the East unawares and unprepared, and the ensuing conflict might not have attained the civil war proportions which have caused so much regret to the country as a whole and to the world.

If I was inclined to say anything my audience would properly have been the people of the former Eastern Nigeria. It is they I would have warned against the emergence of a totalitarian dictatorship and of the appearance on the political horizon of a one-clan hegemony. It is they, too, I would have warned that sooner or later they would be dragged into a civil war which they could not hope to win. What results I might have achieved I cannot say, but I believe that if a few Ibomen had in the light of the true position had the courage of standing up for the true interest of the people as a whole rather than for the gratification of the ego of one man and the consolidation of the personal and selfish positions of a few accomplices the people as a whole might have awakened to a rational appraisal of the situation and not allowed themselves to be led by the nose down a dangerous cliff, and then Ojukwu and his clique, denied the ostensible support of the masses which the stage-managed demonstrations purported, might have thought twice before taking the leap.

It has been nearly two years since my resignation. In the intervening period we have witnessed the bold step consisting in the announcement of the birth of the 'Republic of Biafra' and we have all been plagued by the horrors of an avoidable civil war, in the throes of which we still are. How it will end I cannot say, but if I were to base any prediction on the present trend I would boldly claim that I have been vindicated both as to the futility of the gamble and as to my decision not to be party to such ignominy.

After my resignation I was forced into virtual retirement in my hometown, and from there I watched with apprehension the fast deteriorating national situation and in course of time the outbreak of hostilities. And I lived there, in those dark days of tyranny of which all the inhabitants of the minority areas of the former Eastern Nigeria have had ample cause to complain, as much as possible detached from involvement in the raging conflict, for, having already been a bogey-man of the Ibos and the object of their vilification and hate, I thought that passiveness was my best policy. But I would not be left alone.

On February 24, 1968, pursuant to an address delivered by a Civil Commissioner in the 'Government of Biafra' to the people of Port Harcourt and to a plan for the systematic extermination of all the notable peoples of Rivers and South-Eastern States origin in and

around Port Harcourt drawn up by some well known Ibo professionals and businessmen, as a first step, the buildings and other properties of some twelve Rivers people and one South-Easterner in Port Harcourt were destroyed by mobs of Ibo demonstrators, in most cases by burning. As might be expected, mine led the rest: two of my buildings, one of them my residence in the city, with all their contents, including my entire law library, office equipment, a variety of documents, furniture, a motor-car, and various items of personal chattels, were destroyed. The reason: every Riversman or South-Easterner was *ipso facto* a *saboteur*—and yet we were all supposed to be ‘fellow-Biafrans.’

Then on the following day I was arrested at Abonnema and taken to Port Harcourt to which in the first instance my movements were thereupon restricted; then subsequently I was detained in what had become an army camp. To be a prisoner if only for a day is not a pleasant experience, and in circumstances in which one's crime is that one belongs to some ethnic group rather than to another in which for the time being power is vested is exasperating. But in this case I was not unduly agitated by my discomfiture because out of the certain adversity arose for me the opportunity of meeting Ojukwu once again, of saying to him something just short of taunting him with the fact that my prediction as to the probable outcome of his rebellion had been justified, of confronting him with the atrocities being perpetrated daily upon defenceless Rivers men and women everywhere by his soldiers and other agents, and of learning at first hand his current strategy for sustaining the rebellion now that the original sources of hope of victory had betrayed him.

Confrontation with Ojukwu

My first meeting with Ojukwu in these circumstances took place on Wednesday, April 3, 1968, at Umualia, and, according to the Provincial Administrator, Degema, who arranged it, its purpose was the effecting of a rapprochement between ‘His Excellency’ and me. ‘His Excellency’ appeared to welcome the opportunity of seeing me again and after acknowledging the obvious fact that the Rivers people were not behind his rebellion—that is, in these words, ‘I know that I have not been accepted by the Rivers people; I know that I have not made my influence really felt in that area’—he appealed to me to do everything that lay in my power to win the Rivers people over to his side. I was too surprised to offer any definite help even though I had much for which to be grateful to him and that is that he had prefaced his short speech with an observation which cleared my name of all the malicious allegations of treachery and sabotage. In my case, he said, it was *disagreement* and not *subversion*. When we left him I did so with a mandate for wooing the Rivers people for him, but I need only say here that nothing came out of that meeting.

A few days later I was physically detained in the army camp in which for some weeks I had had a sepulchre for a home. Then on Saturday, May 4, 1968, I was taken up to see Ojukwu again at Umuahia, this time taken there by two armed policemen as if I were a dangerous criminal. This second meeting, the purpose of which was for the ‘Head of State of the Republic of Biafra and Commander-in-Chief of the Biafran Armed Forces’ to pronounce his verdict on me, was less dramatic but more revealing than the former. On the case before him his verdict was that all the allegations against me which had been the reason for my detention had not been substantiated and that he had ordered that I be released. He then reiterated his earlier statement —‘disagreement, yes; subversion, no’—and went on once again to appeal to me to do everything possible to get the Rivers people to support him. That was my chance, and I took the opportunity of reminding him that I had warned him of the probable consequences of his intended course of action and that it did appear that I had been proved right by events. I then went on to say a few words about

marshalling the support of the Rivers people for him, and in this respect I was blunt in laying bare before him the atrocities which his soldiers and other agents had consistently perpetrated upon the innocent, defenceless people of the Rivers area as a result of which the people had if anything become bitter towards his regime. I mentioned a few of the atrocities of which I was personally aware, highlighting them with the public execution without trial of two persons, accused of taking food to Federal troops somewhere in the creeks, at Abonnema on Sunday, March 31, 1968. The Provincial Administrator thereupon remarked that the summary execution of suspects had been authorized by the highest authority in Umuahia but this did not draw any note of surprise or evoke any refutation from the 'Head of State'.

Being aware of his indifference to human suffering, I was not altogether surprised by the complete absence of disavowal on the part of Ojukwu when I was cataloguing the atrocities. On the other hand he gave us a number of reasons as to why he thought the Rivers people were not with him and why in actual fact many of their leaders were defecting to the Federal side—through Bonny to Lagos. It was a matter of 'simple arithmetic', he said, and having regard to the fact that the odds were in Gowon's favour rather than in his they had chosen to go on Gowon's side rather than his. On this occasion I noticed once more something which to me is admirable in Ojukwu's personality, and that is his forthrightness in interpreting himself to people. I might have said it earlier that Ojukwu had during my short period of acquaintance with him left me in no doubt as to his political ambition. I would defend him against any accusation that he altogether concealed from his followers the real motive-spring of his secession; the truth rather is that he paraded his ambition before them although at the same time he pretended that the realization of his dream of empire would ultimately enure to their benefit. If they pretend not to have understood him they must blame their misconceptions not upon him entirely but on a natural group tendency not to examine, criticise and query; or else they must acknowledge their self-deception.

So, too, was it on this occasion. In his assessment of the general war situation he virtually admitted to us that he had lost the war but was at any rate trusting to some miracle which might yet bring about a reversal of fortunes; of miracles which had already taken place in some of the theatres of conflict he mentioned a few. And then, apparently to impress upon me that in spite of the reverses consistently suffered on the battle-field the hope of final victory was not lost and that it might not be futile for the Rivers people to turn to follow him even at such a time, he went on to tell us the current basis of his hope of sustaining the rebellion. That was some fortnight after his regime was accorded diplomatic recognition by the Republic of Tanzania. Upon this diplomatic 'break-through' now consisted his hope of victory, and he went on to say that he had been promised recognition by some four other nations (not named) the recognition by each of which was 'on the string' and that in the event of Port Harcourt not being lost to the Federal troops within the following fortnight or so eight others (also not named) would follow. On the strength of these promises, he went on, he had been advised by the Heads of the states concerned not to give in but to try to 'hold out' and if he did they would have had sufficient evidence of resistance and the will not to get reconciled with the Federal Government upon which to found justification for their decisions to recognize his regime. That was a day or so before the preliminary peace talks were due to commence in London, and on this aspect of the matter he said he had been advised eventually to break the talks, for that was the only way to have his own back on British diplomacy which was behind the sudden shift of position on the part of the Federal Government now willing to go to talks 'without pre-conditions'. He would go to talks alright, but nothing would come out of such talks!

As now I reflect on that meeting at which I earned my acquittal I cannot help wondering what sinister motives must be behind the policies of those foreign patrons of Ojukwu who ask him to continue to bear punishment in the hope of the reward of recognition and so continue to expose his people to all the dangers of the war. And what an irony that the people most vocal in condemning *genocide* are the very people urging Ojukwu to perpetuate it!

Public Executions

Yes, I confronted Ojukwu with the atrocities and molestations which the Rivers people everywhere were suffering at the hands of 'Biafran' soldiers and other official personnel. I have already mentioned the public executions to which I specifically called his attention. That was a crime against a people as heinous in quality as it was barbarous in mode of accomplishment. At about nine o'clock in the morning of Sunday, March 31, 1968, the head of the rebel army at Degema, a 'lieutenant-colonel', went over to Abonnema from Degema with his firing squad and with the two men condemned without trial and without any opportunity whatsoever of being heard. There were in fact three originally, but on the way to Abonnema the third man jumped into the river in a bid to escape to freedom and justice but was shot at immediately, and his was a watery grave. Then, having arrived at Abonnema, his lieutenants and men went into all the churches in town and drove thereout the congregations who had already assembled for morning service and sent them to the market square to see what example was going to be made of 'enemies of the state'. 'Biafra', he said, was a 'Christian country', but state security took precedence over Christian principles. And so, a crowd of some ten thousand, including the very old and the very young, having gathered in the market-place, he produced the two condemned men, accused them of having taken food to 'Nigerian' soldiers somewhere in the swamps not very far from Abonnema, and, notwithstanding their protestation of innocence, ordered his firing squad to open fire on them at once, and so they died. And then he went on to say that no longer did the 'Government of Biafra' require the co-operation of the people of Abonnema, and that on the slightest suspicion future 'culprits' were going to be dealt with similarly.

To the people residing in the Abonnema/Degema area the said public executions were only a public display of deliberate practices which had been going on at Degema, the divisional headquarters, under cover of darkness for a long time of which they were already aware. Languishing in the army cells there, as in other places throughout the so-called Ibo heartland, were hundreds of Rivers men and women arrested and detained for no other reason than that they were not Ibos or that they had not come out in open support of 'Biafra' even though they might not have been accused of anything savouring of subversion or sabotage. Then under the aforesaid 'lieutenant-colonel' grew the practice of calling out of their cells every night some four or five of such detainees and taking them to face the firing squad. Then on the following day their bodies would be found floating on the Sombriero River, and woe betide that man who offered to remove the body of a relative or friend for burial on land. In this way many well-known and well-connected Kalabari young-men, civil servants and policemen among them, met their violent ends. Altogether, prior to the aforesaid public executions no fewer than two hundred souls had perished through this process.

Unmitigated Atrocities

And when the area came to have its first crop of marine commandos recently passed out it got as well to witness a new mode of killing. The commandos had acquired new

techniques of killing and learnt some judo; in the detention cells in both Degema and Abonnema they had living sparring objects upon which to try out their newly acquired skill, and the result was many more deaths—of innocent and unprovoking Rivers people.

And all the time the rivers and creeks around offered gruesome real evidence of unmitigated genocide: competing for places on them with the bodies of persons disposed of in the manners already described were those of poor innocent fish traders plying up and down the rivers and creeks of the Rivers State in search of their daily bread in their traditional 'merchantmen' who had fallen prey to the greed or just sport of 'Biafran' soldiers patrolling such rivers and creeks. The usual manner in which these were disposed of was that their canoes were forced to stop with warning shots from 'Biafran' rifles; then they were boarded and the occupants thereof were either shot without much ado and thrown into the water or had their hands tied behind their backs before being thrown into the water; and in any event all the contents of the canoes were transferred into the patrol boats and the canoes were left to float unmanned on the rivers and creeks. Hundreds too did perish in this way.

These daily killings send to the background the lesser forms of molestation of which every town, village or fishing community in the whole of the Rivers State has had to complain. If killing offered an opportunity of sport or fun then beating offered even greater entertainment, and in this respect there was no class distinction in traditionally stratified communities. Old and young, man and woman, boy and girl, chief and commoner—all alike were victims of 'Biafran' barbarity: none was too big or too unimportant to escape the militiaman's whip or the butt of the 'Biafran' rifle. One nobleman, Chief Miller Dick Harry Braide, was in fact beaten to death, and there was no prick of conscience.

Then there was the seizure of money and foodstuffs from poor women traders in both the town markets and on their way from the occasional Ikwerre markets, the traditional sources of supply of foodstuffs for the Kalabari area. And from time to time the army officers in complicity with the administrative officers mounted blockades of certain towns (Abonnema suffered this fate on a number of occasions) so that the people were not allowed to go out to buy food or to fish and were left to starve, and if they complained they were reminded of the economic blockade which the Federal Government had imposed upon the break-away East under the weight of which all 'Biafrans' were writhing.

Then, too, were the cases of arson of whole villages and other communities. In the Kalabari area, for instance, the villages of Elem-Kalabari (the ancestral home of the Kalabari people), Elem-Ifoko, Sema, to name just a few, and the communities of Erisekiri, Lelekiri, and more than twenty fishing settlements were burnt down by 'Biafran' soldiers. And when their residents went home to their villages to seek other employment they were followed there, arrested on one pretext or another and taken away to detention camps or to face the firing squad. On Monday, 26th February, 1968, well over one hundred male persons from the villages of Angulama and Minama were removed from the said villages, taken first to Degema where they were mercilessly beaten by a number of rebel soldiers and by the 'Lieutenant-Colonel' himself, then removed to the detention cells in Rainbow Town, Port Harcourt, the site of the headquarters of the 52nd Brigade of the 'Biafran' Army, from which they were, it was later revealed, led to face the firing squad. They were accused of being infiltrators from the 'Nigerian' Army, but Heaven knows that they were poor, unsophisticated fishermen.

Shortly thereafter all the males from the age of about twelve years of the village of Kala-Dekema, a few miles from Degema station, were removed therefrom, first detained at Degema, and then taken to the Rainbow Town detention centre, from which subsequently

many were taken to face the firing squad. Their sin: their village is well known for its strong Christian leanings and preoccupation; it used to be the site of a devoted, well organized 'prayer group' whose head was a young woman well respected for her powers of healing and vision. To the meeting place often resorted people from all over the Kalabari area and beyond requiring special prayers, and so on. Then sometime word reached the notorious 'lieutenant-colonel' that the prayer group was not saying prayers for the success of 'Biafra' in the raging war but was in the habit of saying prayers for 'Nigeria'. In consequence the village was raided and everybody found therein arrested; later the women, including the leader of the band, were released after having been beaten up sufficiently, and the men were removed to Port Harcourt as already narrated. Eventually the prayer house was set on fire, and they were enjoined not to hold prayer meetings any longer. In a similar manner other prayer houses in the area had been closed. And 'Biafra' is a 'Christian country'!

Organized Barbarity

Apart from such atrocities as were matters of daily occurrence there were the organized ones which took place in waves. I have already mentioned the cases of arson. Early in February, 1968, two strategic villages on the New Calabar and Sombriero Rivers, commanding the approaches to Abonnema/Degema from Bonny, fell to Federal troops. Soon word went round that a majority of the troops who displaced the rebel soldiers therein were Rivers youngmen, predominantly Kalabari. As a reprisal the towns in the area were to be punished. This is what both the Provincial Secretary, Degema, and the notorious 'lieutenant-colonel' told me, a few days before I was arrested and taken away. As a result the entire population of Bakana, one of the three principal towns of Kalabari, amounting to some ten thousand persons, was removed therefrom and sent to various places in the Ibo hinterland—to such places as Umuahia, Owerri, Abiriba, Ozuitem, and so on—where no provision was made for their housing and feeding. Some died in the process and a number managed to find their way back to the Port Harcourt area where friendly Ikwerre villagers found them accommodation. But all the men of military service age were taken away, and up till the liberation of the Port Harcourt and Degema areas by Federal troops nothing had been heard of them. That was towards the end of February.

At about the same time a number of prominent chiefs and gentlemen were arrested and taken away from the towns of Buguma and Abonnema, detained first at Degema and then at Port Harcourt, where a few were on health grounds allowed to be taken on bail by close relatives on the one condition that they did not move out of Port Harcourt. Fortunately such persons were physically liberated by Federal troops when they took Port Harcourt. These were followed shortly after by the arrest and removal of about one hundred of the leading male citizens of Abonnema; these are now languishing in concentration camps at Umuahia, Owerri, in some Mbaise villages, and so on. Heaven knows how many of them are still alive!

There can be no end to a catalogue of 'Biafran' atrocities in the Rivers area. Those I have set out are those of which I have first-hand knowledge; of some I was an eyewitness. All these happened in the Kalabari area, but every other area in the Rivers State has its own stories to narrate.

Shocking News

At the time I was confronting Ojukwu with the atrocities there must have been no fewer than six thousand detainees from the Rivers State in various concentration camps throughout Iboland. And there were the innumerable thousands of Rivers people seeking refuge from the depredations of Ojukwu's soldiers in various refugee camps in the Mid-

Western State, not to mention those who had been able to get to Lagos. From subsequent indications, I believe the number of Rivers' detainees in Ojukwu's concentration camps has reached the ten thousand mark.

After my own arrest and removal to Port Harcourt, I was kept under surveillance during the period preceding my actual physical detention, and during that period like other Rivers people in Port Harcourt, I was shocked by news of the treatment of the Rivers State villagers of Bolo and Ogu in Okrika Clan and Onne in Eleme Clan. On or about March 27, 1968, after what came to be known as the 'Battle of Onne', all the inhabitants of those three villages were taken to the Rainbow Town headquarters of the 'Biafran' 52 Brigade, in Port Harcourt. The men were separated from the women; what happened to the latter I did not hear, presumably they were sent to 'refugee camps' in Iboland. The men, upwards of three hundred, I saw at Rainbow Town myself. They were detained there, accused of having offered facilities for military operations in the area to Federal troops. But soon they became 'Hausa soldiers', and before long all Port Harcourt was talking about the 'Hausa soldiers' whose bodies floating in a crude oil pit in an Ikwerre village, not far from the city, had offered entertainment to credulous Ibo men and women in and around Port Harcourt.

Shameful Events

These atrocities did not evoke any feeling of remorse or shame in the ordinary Ibo man or woman. To them every person of Rivers or South-Eastern State origin was by that very fact a 'saboteur', for whom there was only one law and one punishment. True, these people were part of a tyrannical system which was preoccupied with the suppression of a 'colonial revolt'. But what in 1968 must evoke in every Nigerian—and indeed every African—a sense of profound shame is the pride with which the ordinary Iboman walked into an eating-house or low-class restaurant in Port Harcourt and asked for 'win-the-war-meat', that is, the flesh of a slaughtered Rivers person or South-Easterner, and the equal pride with which the eating-house owner offered him his ordered delicacy. I could well understand the indignation of one of my guards, an Ibibio police corporal, during my detention when he refused to take his lunch one day because he had discovered in the soup what was unmistakably a human ear and pieces of meat of a kind that was not readily identifiable. He was the leader of the guard, so the others followed suit.

And it was not only the men who frolicked in these sadistic escapades. For instance, female 'Biafran' civil defence workers were just as ruthless as their male counterparts in the punishment of recalcitrant Rivers people. And on Wednesday, May 15, and Thursday, May 16 (just a day before Federal troops entered the city) several Ibo women demonstrators were proudly parading the streets of Port Harcourt with the limbs of slaughtered minorities people and chanting tribal war songs.

That was barely four days after the Rivers and South-Eastern States residents of Port Harcourt and the surrounding area had escaped 'Operation Wipe-out'; that was the name for the intended extermination of all such persons, a pogrom from which they were saved only by the proximity of Federal troops and the panic caused by the sounds of Federal guns.

Ojukwu and the Minority Areas

This is the background against which Ojukwu appealed to me to woo the Rivers people for him. These are the Rivers people presumably included in his newly found terminology of 'disputed areas'. If only he and his people knew how insulting the term is!

First of all, why did not Ojukwu and his clique conduct a plebiscite among the people of what are now the Rivers and South-Eastern States before he purported to take them

away from Nigeria whose history, they might rightly claim, to a large extent began with them? He would not, for he knew that the result would be a resounding defeat for him, for he was well aware of the reception which his emissary, Sir Francis Ibiem, had wherever he went in the Rivers area in late 1966 and early 1967 to canvass the notions of secession and solidarity.

At Degema at a meeting with chiefs and other representatives of the people he was left in no doubt that the people wanted a State of their own, and nothing else would satisfy them. At Okrika it was worse than that—he was stoned, like a true 'Christian missionary', and he left with what would have been an unprecedented humiliation for an Eastern dignitary had his characteristic self-respect, as at the time, not retrieved his personal dignity. At Yenagoa and everywhere else he went it was one story: the people had had enough of Ibo rule!

He knew, too, that the grievances of the minorities peoples were many and genuine. I have set out hereinabove parts of the terms of reference of my constitutional committee and of the covering letter forwarding them to me. They were a cheated people; what has he done in the interval to make them wish to change their positions? What has he offered them other than blood and incalculable hardship and molestations?

And then, too, was his confession to me and others on April 3, 1968, and May 4, 1968, that the Rivers people had not accepted him. That was barely a fortnight before Port Harcourt was liberated and that was followed shortly by the liberation of Degema and Yenagoa Provinces. What makes him think that they would be willing now to compromise their newly acquired freedom, freedom acquired at the cost of pain and suffering?

And if other index of the Rivers peoples' disposition were required I would refer him to the fact of the rate of enlistment by Rivers youngmen in the Federal Nigerian Army to fight for the liberation of their homeland. I gather that there are thousands of them, but that is not the point of their heroism. What is more striking is that many did so regardless of the risks involved in their journeys to enlist at Bonny. It is not just that they wanted to be soldiers; if it were that it would have been very easy for them to enlist in the 'Biafran' army, for in such a case it would have cost them only three shillings to go from, say, Abonema or Buguma, and sixpence from Bakana or Okrika to Port Harcourt to enlist. But they preferred the hazardous journeys to Bonny through creeks guarded by 'Biafran' patrol boats at the risk of certain death should they be discovered, quite undaunted by the fact that many of their near relatives and friends negotiating the same creeks for the same purpose had been killed or, in a few cases, just captured, by rebel soldiers on patrol. Theirs is an embodiment of the spirit of freedom from Ibo rule which is the same as has caused many a Rivers man or woman to languish in concentration camps in Iboland.

Yet the rebel regime of the East-Central State now wants to determine by plebiscite the question of separate identity for the hitherto neglected and defrauded peoples of the 'minority areas.' I think it is highly presumptuous of them to expect the verification of their much vaunted and publicized assertion of solidarity behind their so-called Head of State, and unless it be to browbeat an already beguiled world I cannot imagine the purpose behind this new position. Maybe they think that the Rivers and South-Eastern States peoples will have forgotten so soon the relentless atrocities of which they have lately been, and to some extent still are, the undeserving victims.

Or do they think that as under their occupation the peoples of the areas could not express their resentment of Ibo rule for fear of immediate sanctions in the form of death or detention they had voluntarily opted for the so-called 'Republic of Biafra' in preference to continuation in the Federal Republic of Nigeria? 'Fear and terror,' it has been said, 'are

shaky bonds of love; once removed, those who have ceased to fear will begin to hate.' I may add that it is only those who do not know the Rivers people, for instance, that would take their seemingly voluntary submission to authority for the acceptance of perpetual servitude.

Stooges and a few chieftains who owe their incumbencies to government patronage apart, I am sure that I would be expressing the positions of the Rivers people at large if I stated that for them the alternative to their continuation in the Federation of Nigeria is not 'Biafra' but the fragmentation of the country as a whole and of the former Eastern Nigeria in particular and their return to the conditions in which they were in the pre-protectorate treaty days. That would be a shame for history, for in a patently anti-colonialist era there is at least one thing for which grateful people may yet pay compliment to colonial associations, and that is the welding into organized, collectively governed and twentieth century-oriented political entities of hitherto culturally diversified, often antagonistic and at times warring little communities all the world over. To take Africa back to the pre-Berlin Conference days: this is the threat posed to both African unity and civilization by Ojukwu's rebellion. If it is Nigeria's misfortune to disintegrate today (and God forbid!), who knows whose turn it may be tomorrow?

And if the basis upon which secession from Nigeria by the former Eastern Nigeria is sought to be justified is that there is no common consciousness binding the Ibos to the Yorubas, Hausas, and so on together, then one may confront the Ibos themselves with the fact that there is no such common consciousness binding them to the Ekois, Efiks, Ibibios, Ijaws, Ikwerres, Ogonis, etc. And if self-determination is the platform, then it must be the same for the Ibos as for the other formerly minority groups of the former Eastern Nigeria. Speaking for the Rivers people once again, I would say that their rejection of perpetual Ibo rule is founded not upon a mere attachment to history nor upon sentiment but on the practical experiences derived from many years of contact and also induced by a genuine fear of ultimate extermination in which direction certain trends, crystallizing into definite government policies as far back as 1962, have become noticeable.

I am sure, too, that I would be speaking for the Rivers people at large if I stated that the idea of a plebiscite at this time is obnoxious to them. If a plebiscite is desirable I would boldly say that it is desirable in those parts of the East-Central State still under rebel occupation. I am convinced that if one were held there it would result in a shattering defeat for Ojukwu and his fellow separatists. I say this because I know that the majority of Ibo people were opposed to secession, and even now many of their intellectuals, no matter what pretences they might hold out in public, are not altogether reconciled to the notion of 'Biafra', and so, too, are most of the ordinary people now writhing under the full weight of the economic blockade and the rigours of war. This accounts for the fact, which may not be generally known outside the Eastern States, that many eminent Ibo men and women, known for their opposition to the concept of 'Biafra' if not to the Nnewi hegemony, are like many minorities people languishing in concentration camps here and there. Even many who at the beginning were enamoured of the new, free 'Ibo homeland' nation with the minority areas as appendages of a far-flung empire have become totally disillusioned. I know this because having lately come from the East I could assess the feelings of the people from the statements they were constrained to make in confidence, that is, even before my confinement and, of course, before the capture of Port Harcourt by Federal troops.

The Grip of Fear

The Ibos are now a frustrated people, but the difficulty facing them is that they are

under the sound grip of fear—fear not so much the one induced by 'Biafran' propaganda that if the 'Nigerian vandals' were allowed to enter their towns and villages they would be massacred to a man but that of rebel sanctions should they be vocal in bemoaning their misfortunes and miseries and call openly for an end to hostilities in any event. Ever since the public execution of Major Ifeajuna and others, the first so-called 'saboteurs', the residents of the entire area still, from time to time, under rebel occupation have always trembled at the possibility of the extension to them of the stigma of 'saboteur', so they have always kept their feelings to themselves except in cases where they think that there is nothing else to do than speak one's mind, that is, to one who may rightly be taken into confidence.

I sympathize with the expatriate Pressman visiting 'Biafra'. He would of course say that morale is still very high among the Ibos and that they are still solidly behind the rebellion. Such a misconception springs from a misunderstanding of what one may call the African's psychology; the criteria by which the mental disposition of, say, the Englishman may be assessed is a most inadequate yardstick for assessing that of the average Nigerian, particularly in circumstances such as the people of the former Eastern Nigeria have been faced with for the past two years or so.

Again, foreign observers have always construed the manner in which people flee or are forced to flee their home areas for the centre of the so-called Ibo heartland on the approach of Federal forces as an indication of the will not to get reconciled with the Nigerian federal authorities. This is just one more way in which the suffering of their people has been used by the rebel authorities for seeking political advantages. Wherever they create a desolation they call it resistance. They often force the people to flee their areas long before the approach of Federal troops lest the people should remain behind to be liberated and so begin to compare their lots under 'Biafra' and under 'Nigeria' once again. Similarly they intimidate those willing to return to their homes now in Federal hands upon the pain of certain death. They have tried this not only in the Ibo areas but also in the minority areas. I saw the hordes of Ogoni and Eleme 'refugees' being sent out to the Port Harcourt area some days before the Federal troops came to the area. And from reports now reaching us here, as from the 21st of June, 1968, they began to evacuate the entire population of Abonnema with a view to admitting the Federal troops to a desolation indicative of rejection of 'Nigeria'. Another report is that thereafter they intended to set the whole town on fire, and this version is strengthened by the discovery of several drums of petrol with which the job was intended to be done on the premises of one of the 'Biafran' stooges in the town. Let the motivation alone, what is important is that they had actually evacuated some five thousand of the town's twenty-five thousand or so inhabitants and might have completed the job had not Federal troops moved in to take the town on the second day of the operations. Resistance de luxe!

Time for Reason

The present phase of the Nigerian conflict must be one of reason and realism both for Ojukwu and his clique and for world public opinion. Ojukwu's prime preoccupation is with becoming the head of state of an independent country, regardless of the cost. He has said himself that self-determination is a more decisive consideration than viability in the matter of attaining national sovereignty and independence. He wants an empire to rule, and it does not matter how many people are left in such an empire and what resources and facilities remain to sustain it.

After all, he would argue, there are many countries in Africa with populations far

less than that of the Ibo 'nation' and even with populations less than the number of Ibo people now crammed into what is left of the East-Central State in rebel hands. So he believes he still has a good enough nucleus for an empire, and as long as the hope persists of being allowed to rule this alone he will go on bearing punishment. The world must step in and make reason prevail.

When Ojukwu began the struggle it was from an ostensible position of strength. 'No power in black Africa can subdue us', he said. It was not that he thought he was in a superior military position to that of the Federal Military Government; it was only that he based his hope and consequent boast on some preconceived notions which would paralyse the Federal attempt at 'conquest of the East'. When these ideas failed him he found new hope in the diplomatic recognition accorded him by some misguided African countries and in the promise of further recognitions should he continue the senseless struggle. Now, that too appears to have come to naught.

But the struggle goes on and with it a new strategy: to use the starvation and sufferings of his people as a bait for world sympathy, support and, possibly, diplomatic recognition. And a deluded world is unwittingly strengthening him in his defiance of reason and making him more and more callous in his utter disregard for the lives and miseries of his people.

This is the time for the world, particularly his patrons, to have the courage to tell him to call off what has been a most disastrous adventure. This is the time for them to tell him that the salvation of his people lies in his own hands and that the only road thereto is for him to realize that it is at times honourable to acknowledge defeat. That is the one way in which Ojukwu's most vocal sympathizers may acquit themselves of the possible accusation that they, out of political or other motivations, urged him to the senseless gamble and are attempting to sustain his futile struggle. That is the way in which those who profess that their sympathy and support for him have been prompted by humanitarian considerations can acquit themselves of all possible insinuations of complicity in the furtherance of a neo-colonialist system in Africa.

One may make concessions to Ojukwu's foreign backers and supporters in that they do not understand the personality of the man they regard as the *Messiah* of his people. It is from close personal knowledge of him that I say that as long as the world appears to show sympathy towards his stand, no matter the reverses on the battle-field and the plight and miseries of his people, he will continue to hope for ultimate victory and will not give in. And as long as the world continues to make a noise about the supply of arms to the Federal Government of Nigeria and to wrangle about 'mercy corridors' rather than tell him, on humanitarian grounds, to give up a lost cause so as to save his people from starvation and all manners of hardship the hope of ultimate victory, of diplomatic recognition, and of the maturity of his inchoate republic into full nationhood will continue to be alive in him.

And in many more ways than may be apparent or conceivable to it the world is strengthening his determination to defy reason and perpetuate the most publicized 'pogrom' and 'genocide' which have for some time been the platform upon which he has sought sympathy and support. For instance, after he announced the birth of his 'young republic' his new regime was often referred to by the world radio and press, except by a few exposed accomplices, as "the breakaway Eastern Region of Nigeria which calls itself 'Biafra'". But now it is referred to everywhere as 'Biafra' *simpliciter*, and where a qualification is intended it is 'the breakaway East—Biafra'. He has interpreted this to mean that the world has already accepted the notion of 'Biafra', that he has already obtained 'de facto' recognition by even those nations which on the surface avow their recognition of the Federal Government as 'the only legitimate government' in and over the whole of Nigeria, and that its maturity

into a full-fledged sovereign nation is only a question of time. And so the fight continues!

Again, by his recognition of 'the Republic of Biafra' as an independent and sovereign nation, announced on Friday, March 15, President Nyerere of Tanzania unwittingly and unintentionally prolonged the suffering of the Ibos (and others) for whom by that very act he hoped to provide a permanent homeland for a supposedly persecuted and rejected people. For, towards the end of February virtually all the persons residing in those parts of the Eastern States still under rebel control, the Ibos more so, began to be enlivened by a very strong rumour that if Onitsha did fall to Federal troops that would be a signal for Ojukwu to flee the country and into his place would step 'Major-General' (substantive rank in the Nigerian Army—Lt.-Col.) Effiong who would without further ado renounce secession. I cannot say whether or not the rumour had any foundation, but everyone was talking about it, and the extent to which it seemed to have brought relief to the people generally was remarkable, for they appeared not to be interested in the outcome of the war any longer or in " 'Biafra' coming to stay or not"; what raised their spirits was the mere prospect of the war coming to an end soon. And rumour appeared to have picked the winner when on Thursday, March 14, 'Radio Biafra' announced that 'the Head of State, etc.' was going on a 'Lenten Retreat' for a week and that in his absence 'Maj.-Gen.' Effiong would administer the government of the 'republic'. Hopes were raised and people began to talk more freely than they were accustomed to doing under prevailing conditions, and almost immediately rumour began to point a finger at Sunday, March 17, as the day for the all-important announcement. Short-lived as this turned out to be it was, however, replaced by a more soothing hope: it was no longer the hope of peace in any event, that is, with or without honour, but the hope of peace bringing with it the acceptance of their so-called republic by the world community and of its taking its 'rightful' place in the councils of the world. For such had been the misapprehension of the people that they believed that as soon as the regime was recognized if only by one foreign nation 'Nigeria' would be obliged to accept a *fait accompli*, and 'Biafra' would have won the war. Thus was it that when Tanzania announced on the aforesaid day that she had accorded diplomatic recognition to 'Biafra', with such a new development entering the conflict, they now had something to celebrate rather than the anticipation of the renunciation of secession.

This is no inquest on a friend. It is a humble attempt to do some service to humanity by laying bare before its eyes the facts of a situation about which it has been considerably misled. It is unconscionable that whilst he, a purported 'head of State', continues to enjoy his champagne and brandy, and whilst his closest collaborators keep going from one world capital to another enjoying all the good things of this life and pretending to be successfully projecting the image of the so-called 'Republic of Biafra' and sending him the dispatches by means of which his hope of final victory is sustained, the ordinary people whom he and they purport to be leading, denied even the barest necessities, are dying in countless numbers. I am therefore taking this opportunity first of appealing to my friend, Emeka Ojukwu, in the name of the Almighty and for the sake of humanity, to see reason and approach the issue with realism. He has attempted but failed; he must now eschew self-deception and appreciate the honour in the acknowledgement of defeat. I know that he has had some apprehensions about his own personal safety, but he will himself have realized that he has mobilized enough world sympathy to be now assured of his own safety. He knows more than I do the magnanimity of that 'Jac' (Gowon) about whose Christian upbringing and attitudes he used to tell me. He must now think of the safety of those of his flock that are now left. He knows as well as I do that they are now absolutely fed up; this is the time for magnanimity on his part.

I must also take this opportunity of appealing to Ojukwu's patrons and the world at large not to lose their sense of judgment in the apportionment of blame and in finding a solution to the Nigerian conflict. They must have the courage to tell him that enough is enough. I should appeal in particular to the World Council of Churches and to its Roman Catholic counterpart and to the International Red Cross on behalf of the thousands of Rivers men and women in concentration camps all over the Ibo hinterland. They should bring pressure to bear upon Ojukwu to release them forthwith and let them go to their homes. If he wants sympathy he must show sympathy, let alone the fact that these people have nothing to warrant detention. They must insist on 'mercy corridors' for these people to return home. Now is the time!

Finally, I should say a few words to the unhappy inhabitants of those parts of the East-Central State that are still in rebel hands. This short account has not been inspired by bitterness but by the desire to bring about an end to the unnecessary sufferings of millions of innocent men and women who, I have every reason to believe, are disenchanted with the concept of 'Biafra'. Their salvation lies to a large extent in their own hands. I appreciate the difficult conditions under which they have had to live these past two years or so. But I think that the time has come for them to rise as one man and tell Ojukwu that they have had enough of it. They are Nigerians, and back will they come to a Nigeria waiting to receive them.