CHAPTER EIGHT

SUCCESS BY NONINTERVENTION: NIGERIA

To understand the Congo crisis of 1960, or the Nigerian civil war (the Biafra war) of 1967–70, or the seemingly permanent Angolan civil war in which the United States intervened in the 1970s and threatened to intervene again in the 1980s—or to understand almost any other contemporary African crisis—it is necessary to go back to a series of conferences in Europe between 1885 and 1889. That is where the map of Africa as we know it was drawn. And not a single African-born person was present.

A bunch of white men from various European countries simply sat around a table and divvied up the continent. They were not, however, as they thought, drawing on a clean slate. There already was a map of Africa. None of the tribes, or nations, that occupied the map had explored far enough to know everything that was on it. None could have drawn a complete map, as the Europeans sought to do.

But it is important to understand that there was a map. The map that the Europeans drew was an overlay that ignored existing tribal kingdoms. Many of the kingdoms had been governing themselves for hundreds of years. The Congo (or Kongo) kingdom was only one. Thanks to oral history, young men in the Bini kingdom in what is now Nigeria can tell you as much about the oba, or king, of Benin in a given year in the sixteenth century as a British youth could tell you about the king of England in the same year.

The European kings in the 1880s rarely could erase the authority of an African king over his own people. But they did have power to overlay the local king's map and effectively erase his boundaries by enforcing new ones.

The colonial boundaries drawn on the map in Europe reflected the movements of a relatively few white explorers and troops. The lines on paper had little to do with the realities of African politics. Enemy tribes were lumped together in the same colony. Large, self-governing tribes were split, part going into one colony, part to another, part to a third. Fox example, if the Hausa-Fulani nation had been left intact, recognized for the loose confederation of a country that it was, it would cosntitute the largest country on the continent today. Instead, the Hausa-Fulani were split among Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Benin (formerly Dahomey), Togo, Ghana, Upper Volta, Senegal, Guinea, and Mali. In some countries, the Hausa-Fulani were a majority of the population (Niger), in some a plurality (Nigeria), and in some a minority (Togo).

To the European kings sitting around a table in Berlin in 1885, it meant no difference. It didn't matter that the Hausas in Niger were declared French, those in Nigeria English, and those in Togo German. The kings were playing Monopoly—not with Park Place, Marvin Gardens, and Boardwalk, but with the Congo, Kenya, and the Ivory Coast. The really big winners at the table got huge countries, Nigeria and the Congo, composed of literally hundreds of tribes, which couldn't talk to each other because they didn't speak the same language, and which had very different styles of life.

Western histories commonly refer to precolonial African nations as "warring tribes." They were indeed—as were the British, French, and Germans "warring tribes" during the same years. Colonial countries said they prevented bloodshed by policing Africa's disputants with superior power and suppressing intertribal wars. But they substituted wars of their own, on a scale far grander than anything the oba of Benin could have imagined.

Africans fought in World Wars I and II, both on and off the continent. African lives were continuously affected by hostilities among their foreign rulers. The net savings or cost for Africans in military casualties due to colonialism just isn't clear.

Colonial apologists say that economic advances in Africa justified colonialism. There's no doubt that exposure to European technology benefited Africans enormously. But this advantage was transmitted by example, not by power. Like anyone else, Africans, shown bicycles, preferred them to walking. Colonial *force* was something else.

The map drawn in Europe in the 1880s often didn't make good economic sense for Africans. Vertically shaped countries were created along the coast of West Africa, each governed by a different European power. So railroads were built with different-gauge track. Thus commerce between these artificial country-units was not facilitated but impeded. The Europeans didn't *want* their colonies trading with anyone but the mother country. British, French,

and German border checkpoints and customs duties suddenly bisected traditional tribal trade roads and halted the passage of goods.

As for the alleged rescue of all those primitives from their barbarism, this also is a two-sided argument. Barbarism was certainly around in places. Alexander Mackay, an Anglican missionary in Uganda in 1879, wrote of the torture and burning to death of as many as 2,000 persons in a single day. "Every day," his journal noted, "there is a wanton slaughter going on of innocent victims. It is dark about 10 P.M. All is quiet, the last drum heard being the executioner's across the small valley, announcing that he has secured his victims for the day, and will spill their blood in the morning. Suddenly a sharp cry in the road outside our fence, then mingled voices; an agonizing yell again, followed by the horrid laugh of several men, and all is still as before. 'Do you hear?' says one of our lads; 'they have cut that fellow's throat—hee, hee, hee!" and he laughs too—the terrible Baganda grin of pleasure in cruelty."

The British did put a stop to such affairs for a good many years, but after their departure, the Baganda began to reveal such cruel traits again. The bloody reign of Idi Amin, and Uganda's continuing problems cannot be divorced from the fairly barbaric history of the country's largest tribe.

Other tribes were quite different, however. And so were other colonialists. There is a particularly graphic description of Belgian colonial work available from the pen of John Gunther. It accords with other accounts, but is especially convincing because Gunther generally accepted establishment foreign policy, and certainly never invited a reputation as a mushy-headed liberal.* In his 1955 book, *Inside Africa*, Gunther wrote:

"The appetite of [Belgian King] Leopold's agents for rubber and ivory grew steadily more voracious and insatiable. African workers were made to fill quotas, and if they failed to bring in the required amount of rubber and ivory they were mutilated or shot. 'Development?' Competent authorities say that the population of the Congo was about 20,000,000 in 1900; today it is 12,000,000. Leopold's regime is believed to have cost, in all, between five and eight *million* lives [Gunther's emphasis]. That is certainly 'development' of a peculiar sort.

"Most horrible was the practice of mutilation. If an African boy [Gunther's word, probably meaning "man"] did not satisfy his bosses, a hand or foot—sometimes both—were cut off. Photographs of such amputations are part of the record, and may be scrutinized today if anybody wants to rake through the old documents. Africans themselves in the Congo had never used mutilation as a form of punishment. It was purely a European invention. To prove their efficiency in this business, the bosses of labor gangs brought in to their superiors baskets full of human hands. The right hand was always

*Gunther's long series of *Inside* books, produced under difficult conditions in a different journalistic era, make a fascinating resource now.

favored. To preserve them in the humid climate, they were sometimes *smoked* [Gunther's emphasis]."

By all evidence, Belgian rule was harsher and less beneficial to African populations than was British, French, or German. So it may seem unfair to use this description of Belgian practice as a focal point for a brief discussion of colonialism.

But the Belgian heritage is precisely the one that United States power has been most active in maintaining in Africa. Fear of offending our Belgian allies in NATO was a major constraint that helped set U.S. policies in the Congo on their long-term course during the 1960 crisis. So the example is perfectly appropriate. Besides, this sort of experience to some degree characterized most Third World colonialism.

IRONICALLY, as the countries of black Africa became independent from 1957 to 1964, they decided not to go back to the old national boundaries. They determined to make the colonial boundaries drawn in Europe permanent and in fact inviolable. African leaders have consistently maintained this principle, even when they found that its practical consequences were ideologically distasteful. Temporary Soviet or U.S. alliances have never been strong enough to persuade African leaders to override this regional axiom.

Despite nearly three decades of talk by U.S. politicians about "Soviet puppet states," no African country has allowed Soviet support of any leftist rebel group to interfere with the principle of national integrity in Africa. The only times the principle has been violated at all were when four countries recognized Biafra in the 1967–70 Nigerian civil war, and when Somalia supported (as it still does) the right of the Ogaden region to break away from Ethiopia as the Ogaden people wish. Both these decisions were unrelated to East-West considerations. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, a socialist, recognized Biafra although the primary weapons being used by the national government of Nigeria to fight Biafra were coming from the Soviet bloc. The positions of Somalia and Ethiopia on the Ogaden didn't change when the two countries switched sides in their East-West alignments.

There are several explanations for this devotion to preserving the boundaries that were set in Europe. The leaders who took over the black African countries in the transition from colonialism to independence understandably didn't want parts of their countries to be allowed to secede, because that would diminish their own power. They backed each other up on this point, against all other considerations, out of a mutuality of interest.

But there was also sincere idealism in their desire to overcome tribal rivalries and build modern states. As a practical matter, maintaining the larger units was to most peoples' economic advantage by now. Rightly or wrongly, commerce had developed to fit the colonial administrative mold. Realigning economic institutions and reestablishing old trade patterns would

require a long transition of hardship. People generally preferred to just get on with nation-building.

In some cases, notably the Nigeria-Biafra war, one can fairly ask whether any principle or economic advantage is worth the cost in lives required to keep a country together. The word *idealism* becomes a parody of itself when million of people are killed in its service. On the other hand, if the redrawing of colonial boundaries began, there might be no end in our lifetime to the haggling and killing over where the new lines should lie.

THE Nigerian war is worth pausing a moment to recall. Its causes and resolution epitomize the problems bequeathed by colonialism and the agony inherent in overcoming them. And the war also illustrates the way a quiet U.S. stand on principle can produce a long-lasting diplomatic triumph for the American people that no amount of gunrunning could have matched. American restraint, and continued adherence to decent principles, even in the face of large-scale Soviet intervention, left the U.S. in position to become Nigeria's best overseas friend and trade partner—despite the fact that the Soviets intervened with pivotal help on the winning side of the war.

Nigeria is the most populous country on the continent, the home of one of every four* Africans. Its oil and gas make it the second-wealthiest African country (after South Africa), as well as the United States's second-leading foreign oil supplier (after Saudi Arabia). Of the thirty-nine independent black-run countries, it is by far the richest; $1 of every $3 of their income is Nigerian.

Nigeria also suffered one of history's most horrible civil wars.

No other African nation listened to the white man's line so devotedly as the Ibos, whose tribal homeland is in the southeast quarter of Nigeria. Ibos went enthusiastically to the white man's churches, schools, and workplaces. More than that, they accepted the fundamentals of the white man's philosophy, which was very different from the tradition of most African tribes: specifically, and partly because of their own unique tradition, Ibos accepted the notion that a person's position in life should be the product of his effort and accomplishment, not of his birth. The Ibos accepted universal education, equality of opportunity, job mobility, and reward by merit.

These precepts are hardly startling for Westerners. But most African tradition tends to teach that each person is born itno a certain station, and that as long as he doesn't abuse it, he shouldn't be dislodged from it. The capitalist syndrome of opportunity, accomplishment, and reward was a lump that hadn't passed the gullet of most Africans at independence, and remains unswallowed by many today. Personal ambition is not a valued trait.

No tribe held these traditional values more closely than the Hausa-Fulani,

*Or five, depending on whose statistics you use.

who inhabit the northern half of Nigeria. Numbering probably close to 30 million—five times the number of Ibos—they constituted a plurality of the country's population.* The Hausas held fast to the Moslem religion that had come to them centuries ago, and to the traditional tribal-religious hierarchy. They resisted any cultural inroads by the white colonizers. Western-style schooling was shunned by most people as a matter of principle. Groups of children (rarely boys and girls together) sat under a tree in the morning learning the Koran on slate boards, and that was considered all the education they needed. It was never expected that they would leave home.

At independence in 1960, the Moslem religious leader, the sultan of Sokoto (then Sir Ahmadu Bello) became the leading Hausa political leader, too. The Hausas were committed to traditionalism, male supremacy, and the economic rights of an aristocracy. Thus the colonial boundaries that threw the two divergent tribes together made some sort of Hausa-Ibo collision over the destiny of Nigeria almost inevitable.

For administrative ease, the British had divided their colony into three large regions, each dominated by one of the three main tribes in the country. In addition to the Ibos in the southeast and the Hausas in the north were the Yorubas, in the southwest quarter of the country. Of the two other tribes, the Yorubas most resembled the Ibos. There were 6 to 8 million Yorubas, compared to the more numerous Hausas. Both Yorubas and Ibos tended to be shorter and stockier and have more markedly negroid facial features than the tall, almost Aryan-looking Hausas. The southern tribes practiced rain forest agriculture, unlike the Hausas, who grazed their herds and farmed their crops on the northern savannah. And the southern tribes clung to African-rooted cultures and religion, which for the Hausas had long ago been supplanted by Islam.

Depite these Ibo-Yoruba similarities, however, when independence came, the Hausas began to court the Yorubas as allies against the Ibos. They succeeded.†

AS expatriates were replaced by Nigerians in bureaucratic and technical jobs throughout the country, the most qualified applicants to take over were usually Ibo. The Ibos' ranks included a grossly disproportionate number of college graduates and "been-to's" (people who had "been to" Britain, usually for advanced study). When Hausas left the country, it was usually to go to Mecca.

*Not only were the major tribes pitted against each other, but it's worth noting that in each region, many smaller tribes—Nigeria had 258 in all—were left unhappily under the domination of the one largest tribe.

†All these numbers are approximate. There still has been no accurate census, and the leaders of all the tribes have tried to inflate their population figures to increase their influence in the central government.

Moreover, the Ibos, following the puritan ethic, weren't afraid to leave home to go where the work was. So they flooded the federal capital of Lagos, and particularly the north, where few of the native Hausas were prepared to step into expatriate jobs. Even to the Yoruba-dominated regions they came. The Ibos were the craftsmen who would rise earliest and work latest to earn money. They were the managers that foreign-owned retailing and service concerns wanted to hire to run local outlets. If the electricity went out on a Sunday and people needed candles, it was likely as not an Ibo who had kept his shop open to make the extra sales, while Ibo engineers worked on the power plant failure.

The white expatriates thought the Ibos were wonderful. The other Nigerians began to resent them bitterly. This was an old story. Back in 1959, residents of the colony of British Cameroon had stunned the British by voting in a plebiscite to become independent as part of Cameroon (a relatively poor, French-speaking colony) instead of Nigeria (a better-off colony with a familiar language); the only issue was the voters' desire to get away from the "pushy Ibos" who dominated the region of Nigeria that they would have been part of.

What sealed the Ibos' fate in Nigeria was the military coup d'etat of January 1966—which had seemed like a good idea at the time. The government that had taken over Nigeria at independence in 1960 was rife with corruption, even at the pettiest levels. The postal clerks and people behind the window where you paid your water and electric bills wanted a "dash," or bribe, for service. In business, it was even worse. Schools, hospitals, every public institution was corrupt.

Government was ineffective. Because the Hausa leader, the sultan of Sokoto, could not by tradition reside outside his Islamic administrative area, he became governor of the Hausa-dominated northern region. He sent a Caspar Milquetoast to Lagos as prime minister. Without leadership from a strong federal figure, bickering among the regions brought parliament to a standstill. Gross fraud in the Yoruba-area regional election in 1964 led to rioting.

So a group of well educated young army officers decided to junk the system, and make Nigeria work like a modern country. They hailed from many tribes, but, as in everything else, a disproportionate share was Ibo. There was no real strongman, and the military government was run by a council of officers representing all the major tribes and others. But the head of the council, the chief of state, was an Ibo. Worse, the coup was accomplished by the murder not only of the prime minister, but also of the sultan of Sokoto, which was something the Hausas could neither forget nor forgive.

Under the military government, though, for six months, Nigeria had the best government it or any country in Africa probably ever had, at least from the standpoint of fair laws fairly enforced. Much corruption was wiped out, and the rest had to go underground. School teachers (the author was one)

suddenly noticed that the students with the best grades got their scholarships renewed (occasionally to their own amazement), and some chiefs' sons with poor grades failed for the first time to make the scholarship list.

Children were lined up to sing the previously little-sung national anthem each day before school, and absorb the meaning of its most ringing line, "though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand." The slogan "One Nigeria" was everywhere. Soldiers showed up at public buildings at the beginning of the work day and arrested civil servants as they straggled in customarily late. The tardy workers were marched to a public square, chastised by the military governor in front of laughing crowds, and warned of sterner punishment for repeat latecomers. Nigeria was being run under the puritan ethic.

Then, in July 1966, came the counter coup, from within the army. The Ibo leaders of the first coup were murdered. A northern-born army officer (though a minority tribesman, not by blood a Hausa) was installed as head of state. Anti-Ibo rioting began throughout the north, and finally turned into mass killing. Often led by Hausa members of the Nigerian army, crowds would organize in the night and go from house to house killing Ibos of all ages. With first light, crews went around to shovel up bodies from the streets.

The long caravan of big, open-backed trucks filled with fleeing Ibos, carrying chairs, tables, whatever they had, began to wend its way south. It flowed throughout the fall, as new massacres were reported in new towns. If you lived on the main road from the northwestern quadrant of Nigeria back to the Ibo homeland in the southeast (as the author did) you could wait at a service station (as the author did) and hear blood-curdling tales from refugees. Many had fled through back doors or windows with children, while other family members were being gunned down or hacked to death with machetes. Some had no idea what had happened to relatives, and hoped to reunite with them back home.

By late fall, it became obvious that the Yorubas, by their silence, were siding with the Hausas. Ibos from all over the country headed home, a diaspora melting back into what was already the most crowded part of Nigeria. Separation and war were only a matter of time.

Tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands, of Ibos had been killed before the war started. But even more important historically was the shock to those who survived—the realization that tribal hatred was stronger than anyone's philosophy. The real problems of Africa were being written in blood over the platitudes and ideological cant that people had come to believe.

REUBEN was the best carpenter in Benin City, capital of the Bini tribe in the Yoruba-dominated southwest. As December 8, 1966, dawned clear and blue-skied, a typical Nigerian dry season day, Reuben was set to earn a hefty three pounds sterling from an expatriate who needed a shipping crate made

right away. And the Nigerian Tobacco Company was scheduled to pick up—and pay for—a large order of display boxes he had just finished.

But that morning a commotion arose in the city's central roundabout, a few blocks from Reuben's shop. About a hundred men were parading down the middle of the main street shouting for the Ibos to go home to the Eastern Region.* Reuben was an Ibo. The crowd appeared rowdy, but not violent. When they reached the marketplace, police arrested a few in an effort to disperse the remainder. That move backfired, though, and a larger crowd marched to the police station and demanded—and won—release of the prisoners.

After that, the police walked behind the crowds, but didn't try to stop them. By midafternoon, crowds had been up and down the streets visiting all Ibo traders, carrying signs telling the Ibos to get out of Benin, and roughing up the Ibos' property—knocking over a pile of canned goods here, or (in Reuben's case) a stack of lumber there.

The expatriate who ordered the shipping crate reached Reuben's shop soon after the crowds had left. The pieces for the crate had been cut and planed, but not assembled. Reuben, a slight, short man, was alone in the shop, trembling, with tears in his eyes. The crowds had warned him he would not be safe in Benin another night. He was sure they would destroy or steal the wood in his shop. The Nigerian Tobacco Company order was still waiting and now might not be picked up until the next day.

Reuben had sent his family home to the east several months before, at the time of the biggest northern massacres of Ibos. Now he would have to join them—he was frightened for his life—but he needed the money from the tobacco company order. He also felt an obligation, despite the expatriate's protestations, to complete the promised crate.

Tearfully, he poured out his shock and his grief. Why did everyone hate the Ibos, Reuben asked. He had come to Benin years ago, only to work his trade and live quietly. He had brought no harm to the Bini tribe, or to any other local people. He had been well liked. But now even the people he knew as his friends were saying around town that the Ibos should pack and go.

He pounded away at the expatriate's crate. His assistants, also Ibos, had fled in fear of the mobs. They were already miles away, on the road home to the east. As he finished the crate, a line of fifteen or twenty blue Land Rover trucks packed with armed police rolled into town from the west, from Lagos. They were reinforcements to help snuff out the demonstrations before blood was spilled as it had been in the north. But the police wouldn't be there to protect Reuben forever. He finished the crate, collected from the tobacco company, and took off.

* * *

*The author witnessed the events of the day.

EUGENE earned an honors degree in physics at the University of Ibadan, the best in Nigeria. He set his sights on a teaching career, and won a scholarship to Oxford. He earned a postgraduate diploma in education there. A slight, soft-spoken, bookish young man who wore thick bifocals, he got a job teaching physics at Western Boys High School in Benin City. But he was an outsider, an Ibo.

Because his field was physics, Eugene could have sold his services in Nigeria even had he been a poor teacher. Probably more than any other subject, physics tended to be taught by Peace Corps volunteers and other expatriates. Trained Nigerians were scarce. Yet Eugene was generally regarded among expatriates as the best high school physics teacher in the city, and the best teacher on his school's staff, which included two expatriates.

When the 1965 school year ended, the principal left to take another job, and Eugene was appointed to fill his place. He moved into a modern apartment and drove a green Peugeot 404. He seemed on top of the world. But one evening over an orange soda—Eugene was one of very few Nigerians born without a taste for beer—he related the difficulties he was encountering trying to establish a system of admissions, grades, scholarships, and promotions unaffected by tribe and politics.

The school, like many in Africa, was owned and run by a proprietor as a money-making venture. While the proprietor sincerely tried to improve scholarship at the school, he felt pressures that don't exist at U.S. high schools. An important chieftancy in the Bini tribe had been bestowed on him by the council of tribal rulers, and he valued that. He also valued his seat in the regional legislature, which was assured him by the tribal chiefs' support. In return, the Bini power structure expected the proprietor to see to it that certain boys, perhaps the sons of chiefs, won admisson to the school and received grades high enough to maintain a government scholarship.

Eugene resisted stubbornly. Going to a high school at all, let alone a good one, was a luxury that few young people enjoyed. The stake was usually an office job for successful students, and a life of rubber-farming for those who failed. Eugene was making it as hard as he could for tribal aristocrats who were used to throwing their weight around, pulling strings for certain boys. If a competing applicant did better work, Eugene wanted that boy in school and the chief's son back on the farm. By and large the Ibos weren't fixers—with their abilities they didn't have to be—and that as much as any other single thing destroyed them.

With the riots of December 1966, Eugene remained in Benin City for a few breathless weeks, until all grades were turned in and the school year was over officially. Then he hired a lorry, packed his gear, and slunk back to the east, all in one day, telling no one.

Back home, he obtained a job as a school principal. Secession came, then war. Nobody outside Biafra could get in touch with him. He directed a refugee camp near Aba, the provincial center closest to his home village.

The camp's original inhabitants were refugees from the north, but later, as Nigerian troops gradually tightened the circle around landlocked Biafra, and the Russian and Czechoslovakian jet bombers and British long-range artillery took their toll on Biafran homes, new refugees flooded the camp.

Food arrived every week by truck from the airstrip at Uli. Catholic and Protestant charities—the people who had instructed the Ibos for years on the benefits of meritocracy—flew the food in. It was packed in bags marked, "Donated by the people of the United States of America." Whoever saw those words remembered them. Countless Ibos who had endured one refugee center or another mentioned it later to visiting Americans. Without the food, the people at the camps might have died, and they knew it.

But where was the U.S. recognition, and political help, they wanted to know. Where was American military aid to neutralize the Nigerians' overwhelming superiority of firepower, which was attributable largely to Soviet interference? Backed only by an occasional planeload of French small arms, the Biafrans could not hold out. Eugene and others still asked these questions long after the refugee camps, and Biafra, had fallen.

The Aba sector had collapsed first during the Nigerian army's fateful last push of December 1969. Eugene had retreated to his village, as Nigerian troops ordered. When word came that he could go to Owerri, another Ibo provincial capital, to seek a job in the reorganization of the region's schools, he took to the road with his armload of possessions—three cushions, to sleep on.

Soldiers stopped him on the road and threatened to relieve him of these. But he begged them not to, and they laughed and moved on. Once they threatened to break his glasses, which in a way symbolized Ibo superiority. A soldier threw the glasses to the ground and waved his boot over them. Eugene begged again, and the soldier laughed and moved on.

Eugene found the job he had been assigned, and a small room to share with two other men. Several months after the Biafran collapse, no money had been injected into the fallen region. No one was paid. Ibos had exchanged their Nigerian currency for Biafran, but now the government collected the Biafran money and gave nothing in return. Even if you found something to buy and had a shilling to buy it with, the seller wouldn't have enough pennies to make change. Ibo engineers had prepared plans to restore electricity and running water, but Lagos refused to fund these simple and relatively cheap projects.

Every evening a young boy brought Eugene a pail of water from the nearest creek, as he worked late under a small kerosene lantern. But Eugene's long labor accomplished little more than that of Sisyphus. The Biafran government had kept the schools open whenever the fortunes of battle permitted. Now, in preparation for reopening the schools, the occupation government had assigned Eugene to itemize the equipment that had existed in them prior to Biafran secession, but that was now missing.

The simple and obvious answer was that everything was missing—the Nigerian troops had systematically looted and destroyed schools as they went. They took every chair, blackboard, book, and doorknob. What they did not want to bring home, they burned. Had the government meant business, it would have reopened schools where the population had moved since the war—almost everyone in the region was a refugee by this time—and it would have distributed whatever equipment was available.

Nevertheless, Eugene compiled his lists dutifully for two months, and delivered them to the Ministry of Education in Enugu, the regional capital. The ministry officials, sent in from Lagos, didn't discuss the lists and in fact may never even have examined them. They merely informed Eugene that his appointment, and that of other workers in his office, had been illegal, and that all seven were being dismissed without ever having been paid.

That very night, an American visitor* slept in the open air on the roof of a government building with Eugene and hundreds of other men and women, presumably government employees who had no place else to go. On the hillsides around them they could see the fires of the families camped there under pieces of corrugated tin roofing that had been bombed off buildings during the war.

The visitor brought news: after having talked to the new principal and others at the school in Benin City, he felt sure that Eugene could have his old teaching job back. Eugene needed the money, and his family needed what money he could send home. Surely, the visitor said, enough talent was wasting away in the Ibo state, and the people would be better off if men who could find good jobs elsewhere would take them.

But Eugene would hear none of it. The spark extinguished so painfully could not be rekindled so easily. Someday Eugene might again venture out from the Ibo homeland to make his life, but the day would not come soon.

ON a trip to Nigeria in 1980, the same visitor couldn't locate Eugene. But he spoke with many others from among the millions who had endured similar experiences. Ten years had passed since the final, starving remnants of Biafra were overrun by well-supplied federal troops.

The Ibos still hadn't fully recovered economically. But the modern way of life they went down fighting for had become the country's official policy. And the political rearrangement the Ibos had sought had been accomplished by Nigeria's new constitution. The vast, Hausa-dominated north had been split into many equal states, so that the Hausas couldn't continue to dominate national politics by controlling the largest subunit.

With millions dead, it could hardly be called an Ibo victory. But the ideas were succeeding where the thinkers had failed. A Hausa elite of educated

*The author, who was present at much of what is recounted concerning Eugene.

young government administrators was even working with older tribal and Islamic leaders to enforce the newly mandated ideas on their fellow Hausas. Two-thirds of all Hausa boys and one-third of the girls were reported attending modern (as opposed to Koranic) schools. While interviews suggested that these figures were exaggerated, and they fell far short of compliance with the new mandatory universal education law, they still represented a revolutionary improvement. A decade earlier fewer than 5 percent of Hausa children went to modern school.

One of the young Hausa elite was Sani Ibrahim Tanko, minister of information in Zaria, an ancient Hausa slave-trading capital. "There are still some tendencies to resist among the parents who aren't used to Western ways," he said. "We go to the villages, and we campaign. We show films, and in between we talk about the value of schools."

Boys were offered special classroom hours to allow them to continue their Koranic schooling as well. Coeducation was rare, especially above the primary level. "For many parents, it goes against their grain, against their religion," said Dahiru Kajuru, another government official pushing the program. "But the girls must be put into school till they want to get married. You may not even choose a husband for the girl, and that's a big change," he said.

Only a small minority of northerners speak English, the national *lingua franca* commonly used in the south. But even in tiny northern villages of round, thatch-roofed huts, some farmers talked of sending their children to school to learn scientific agriculture, which would require English. Many parents had been taken to court and threatened with jail if they didn't send their children to school. Most chose to obey.

The emir of Zaria, the traditional king of the Zaria region, had recently been called on to judge the case of a girl from the tiny village of Zangon Kataf who had run away to attend technical school and avoid an unwanted marriage. The emir had surprised and impressed many people by ordering her father to let her stay single and attend school.

Throughout Nigeria, ways were being found to soften the long-standing contentiousness between civil authority and traditional rulers like the emir. Local kings, or chiefs, were delicately left with certain powers that were particularly important to them, always subject to overruling by political authorities under the constitution.

Some Ibos had begun circulating around the country again, but they generally kept a lower profile than before. Their homeland, cleared of the rubble of war, functioned normally, but was still behind other parts of the country in road improvements and commercial construction. Ibos complained that they were shortchanged on funds for schools and development (which the government denied, of course). And Ibos bore the pain of seeing businesses they once owned in other parts of the country, which were confiscated without compensation, now being operated by new owners from other tribes.

For that and other reasons, the main tension in Nigeria seemed to be between the Ibos and the Yorubas, rather than between the Ibos and the Hausas. As Gunter Grass noted, writing about the end of World War II, betraying friends are often more vicious than acknowledged enemies. It was the Yorubas, the Ibos' southern rain forest neighbors, who inherited most of the technical, high-education jobs the Ibos formerly held, and took over many of their businesses.

Yorubas and Ibos constantly warned visitors to watch out for theft and violence when around members of the other tribe. "They are not like we are," each side would say. Yorubas and Ibos could often be observed taunting and being discourteous to each other. Ibo hotel operators sometimes refused accommodations to Yoruba visitors, and Yoruba transport operators sometimes refused to carry Ibos.

Ibos were even in a loose political alliance with Hausas, who just a decade earlier had slaughtered them. Nigeria's president, Shehu Shegari, a Hausa, ran on a ticket with an Ibo vice-president. Ibos claimed that the Yoruba political leader, Obafemi Awolowo, had devised the strategy of siege and starvation that eventually won the Biafran war at the cost of a million or more civilian lives. Awolowo narrowly lost the election to Shegari, and became the government's toughest critic (he had been elected governor of the Yoruba-dominated region from the time of independence, a veteran of the old-style corruption system).

ALSO in 1980, the United States, which had resisted appeals from both sides to intervene in the civil war, had become Nigeria's closest friend outside the continent. The U.S. Constitution had served as a model for the new Nigerian constitution, which in 1978 had brought the country back to democracy after thirteen years of military dictatorship. The reason for that is simple: the U.S. system had been more appropriate all along to Nigeria's basic problems than was the British system that had been thrust upon Nigeria in 1960.

The British parliamentary system was designed primarily to deal with class differences; but the differences between rich and poor weren't what tore Nigeria apart. People had never resisted dealing with chiefs. The problem was *which* chiefs. Like many African countries, Nigeria suffered from regional conflicts, which was precisely what the U.S. Constitution was aimed at resolving, with its two houses of legislature that gave regional equality equal weight with popular equality. Nigeria has gone beyond even that, with a clause requiring a president to obtain one-fourth the vote in at least two-thirds of the current nineteen states. This required the formation of national parties, campaigning nationally on national issues—an attempt to get away from tribe-oriented politics.

The problems aren't over. The system came within a whisker of collapsing at the outset when the leading presidential candidate, Shegari, collected the