

# Exploring the Roots and Routes to Power-sharing in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

The task of this paper is to analyse the key historical features that gave rise to power-sharing in Nigeria. The paper examines the particular forms of interactions that shaped these features and determined the path through which the idea of power-sharing evolved in Nigeria. It also analyses the reasons behind the consensus to forge ethno-regional power-sharing in the country. My account is couched in terms of struggles for territory autonomy, equitable representation and distribution of material goods - the three axes of power-sharing which form the major parameters of institutional politics in Nigeria. This paper is organised into five sections. The paper opens with an introductory section. The second section sets the background of the paper, analysing the interactions between colonialism and ethnic diversity as well as the nature of political interpretations of ethnic diversity that emerged in Nigeria. The third section explores the process of state formation in Nigeria and its implications for the structural design of the Nigerian federation. The fourth section examines the nature of the political attitude that followed the establishment of the Nigerian state. In the fifth section, the paper concludes that two factors gave rise to the evolution of power-sharing in Nigeria: the flawed structural configuration of the Nigerian state and the attitudinal disposition to politics in Nigeria.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Power-sharing is one of the dominant features of contemporary Nigerian politics. Since the 1970s, the search for stable inter-ethnic relations among Nigeria's multiple ethnic nations has been characterised by emphasis on sharing of political power (Isumonah 2001:5). Elements of power-sharing also manifest in other aspects of Nigerian polity, including territorial compartmentalisation of ethnic nationalities and revenue distribution to the units of government (Mustapha 2004, Suberu 2001, Akinyele 2000, Agbaje 1998, Jinadu 1985, and Horowitz 1985). In the context of this study, power-sharing represents "a set of principles that when carried out through institutions and practices, provide every significant identity group or segment in a society representation and decision-making abilities on common issues and a degree of autonomy over issues of importance to the group" (Sisk 1996:5). In Nigeria, power-sharing reflects in federalism and creation of states, the adoption of centralised and proportional revenue allocation formula; zoning, rotation and federal character principles in office distribution; as well as distribution requirements in electoral and party systems.

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The aim of this paper is to analyse the evolution of the practice of power-sharing in Nigeria, focusing on the particular forms of interactions that shaped the process and determined the path through which the idea of power-sharing evolved. The paper concentrates on the analysis of two major historical features that induced power-sharing in Nigeria, namely: the structural configuration of the Nigerian state and the attitudinal disposition to politics in Nigeria. The paper is organised into four sections. This brief introduction is followed by a section which sets the background of the paper, analysing the interactions between colonialism and ethnic diversity as well as the nature of political interpretations of ethnic diversity that emerged in Nigeria. The second section explores the process of state formation in Nigeria and its implications for the structural design of the Nigerian federation. The third section examines the nature of the political attitude that followed the creation of the Nigerian state. In the concluding section, the paper claims that the application of power-sharing in Nigeria's federal system, the revenue allocation system, the office distribution system, and the electoral and party systems points to efforts to redress the flawed structural configuration of the Nigerian state and the attitude toward politics in the country.

## 2.1 COLONIALISM AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY: INTRODUCING FACTS AND POLITICAL INTERPRETATIONS

### A. *Pre-colonial ethnic complexity summarised*

Before the advent of colonialism, the territory that comprised contemporary Nigeria was constituted by a multiplicity of ethnic nationalities and state-systems, which have been variously described in the literature as empires, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city-states, village republics and a caliphate (Oyovbire 1983:6). Indigenous social and political structures in these societies were as diverse as other ties such as language, genealogy, and religion, which hold members of the ethnic communities together. Among all the elements that differentiated pre-colonial societies of Nigeria, language appeared to be the most significant. Scholars suggest that there are over 400 different language groups in Nigeria (see Antia and Haruna 1997:149, endnote 1). Language differences in Nigeria are so striking to the extent that within about twenty miles outside a particular communal homeland one is likely to encounter a different language (Nnoli 1978:128).

The use of assorted labels to describe Nigeria's pre-colonial communities alludes to the fact that analysts are yet to acquire a common understanding of the nomenclature of the ethnic and

language groups in the pre-colonial Nigeria. However, the division of Nigeria's pre-colonial societies into 'mini' and 'mega' states<sup>2</sup> offers a good analytical framework for understanding the pre-colonial polities (Olukoju 1997:13). The mega states were the extensive empires and kingdoms established by communities such as the Hausa- and Kanuri-speaking peoples of North-west and North-east, respectively; the Jukun, Igala, and Nupe of the North-central; and the Yoruba and Bini in South-west and South-south regions, respectively. In Northern Nigeria, the Kanem-Bornu Empire was one of the most prominent mega-states. Under the leadership of Mai (the King), the kingdom developed extensive political and social systems as well as large commercial networks. The kingdom also maintained a trained and well-equipped army in addition to a lively diplomatic relations with other states. The warm diplomatic relations between the Kanem-Bornu Empire and other states manifested in the visits to the Kingdom by emissaries from Egypt, Tunisia, and Mali as well as the visit by officials of the Kingdom to Mecca, Saudi Arabia on a pilgrimage around 1097AD (Ihonvbere and Shaw 1998:3).

The mini-states were the communities that were not able to establish political structures above the village level before the arrival of the colonialists (Olukoju 1997:13). These communities include the Igbos of the South-east (with the exception of peripheral kingdoms like Onitsha and Aboh), the Gwaris of the North-central, and the Ibibios and Ijaws of the South-south regions. G. I. Jones described the structure up of these mini-states as follows:

The whole (Eastern) region was, and to a large extent still is, divided up between a very large number of small local communities each virtually independent and autonomous. You can call these communities "villages" in the case of the Ijo and Ibibio, village-group in the case of Ibo...The Ibibio villages were joined together into large groups which you can call "tribes" (government reports refer to them as "clans"), so were Ibo villages in some areas – notably in the East. But except in the case of the smaller ones, these tribes were held together by ritual and cultural ties, rather than by any unifying political system (see Gana 2003:19).

Expectedly, the mini-states were more in number than the mega-states, as a result, they constituted a large proportion of the ethnic groups in the contemporary Nigeria.

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<sup>2</sup> This use of the term state in Nigeria's pre-colonial context is for analytical purposes and should not be construed in terms of modern statehood.

The nature of the relationships that existed among the pre-colonial communities in Nigeria is a matter of debate among analysts (see Iwaloye and Ibeanu 1997:56). One can discern two divergent perspectives from the debate. I will call the first viewpoint the *social distance thesis* while I will refer to the second opinion as the *social proximity thesis*.

B. *Interpreting ethnic complexity I: the social distance thesis*

The social distance perspective highlights the cultural distinctiveness among the pre-colonial communities that constitute the contemporary Nigeria. Lord Milverton's comment amply captures this position:

...it is only the accident of British suzerainty which has made Nigeria one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically...Socially and politically there are deep differences between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent different stages of culture (see Osuntokun 1979:99).

Alan Burns, one time colonial Governor of the Gold Coast (Ghana) also shares this view. According to him, "practically every village [in Nigeria] was independent, and so great was the isolation of each small community that the inhabitants of neighbouring village speaks in entirely different dialect" (Iwaloye and Ibeanu 1997:56).

The social distance perspective was championed mainly by notable non-Nigerian analysts such as C. K. Meek, Margery Perham, P. C. Lloyd, Simon Ottenberg and M. G. Smith. But over time, a number of Nigerian scholars began to challenge this view. One of the most vocal opponents of the social distance thesis is Okwudiba Nnoli. Nnoli (1978:107) condemned the perspective as unscientific based on its internal inconsistencies. He argued that the social distance perspective tends to treat socio-cultural differences within the same ethnic group simultaneously as major and minor differences, without providing consistent criteria for determining whether the differences among the groups are major or minor. Nnoli cited the case of the Igbo and Yoruba groups, where linguistic variations among the Igbo is treated as insignificant compared to the language differences between the Igbo and Yoruba. Perhaps, it was this sort of intellectual backlash that gave rise to a second perspective on inter-ethnic relations in pre-colonial Nigeria – the social proximity thesis.

C. *Interpreting ethnic complexity II: the social proximity thesis*

The social proximity argument emphasizes the cultural and ethnological commonalities and linkages between the different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Social scientists such as anthropologists, historians and political scientists have identified various integrative elements that existed in Nigeria's pre-colonial societies (Jinadu 2002:13). These integrative elements can be found in ecology, complementary networks of economic, political and socio-cultural exchanges. Other assimilationist factors include marriage, religion, and the land tenure systems (Nnoli 1978:108-110). Even in the bureaucratic circles, the British colonial officials acknowledged the deep ethnological and cultural affiliations among Nigerian communities. For example, a memo by a British colonial official described inter-ethnic relations in the pre-colonial Nigeria in these words:

Linguistically and culturally, it was argued, there was no part of Nigeria where a line can be drawn and it can be said here the North ends and the South begins. The inheritance of culture and ideas has been without exception through thousand years from North to South and East to West. Tribe has followed tribe, cultural conception followed cultural conception, but though the extremes visibly differ, there is a distinguishable woof running through the whole while the web is mainly varied by environment (see Iwaloye and Ibeanu 1997:56).

Several geographical and economic factors facilitated inter-ethnic interaction and cultural assimilation among the pre-colonial societies in Nigeria (Olukoju 1997:14). The geographical forces of integration include differences in the ecology between the forest and the savannah/Sahel which created a need for the exchange of goods. There is also a network of rivers which facilitated extensive interactions across cultural and political frontiers. The link between rivers Niger and Benue particularly offered a natural highway for economic, cultural and political relations. In addition to geographical factors, economic interdependence was a major source of integration in pre-colonial Nigeria. Trade facilitated inter-group relations as products of one region, which were not easily obtainable in other regions, were taken across frontiers to other places for exchange. The pattern of commercial interactions involved extensive contacts within and across ecological zones. For instance, the Ijaw of the coastal strip, whose territory is unsuitable for arable farming, depended on the Igbo of the hinterland for foodstuff supplies (Olukoju 1997:15). There were also commercial relations between groups such as the Igbo and the Benue Valley; the Yoruba and the Nupe. Trade also involved the establishment of trading Diasporas, such as the Aro among the Igbo and Cross River

communities, and the Hausa in the Central Sudan and northern savannah regions of Yorubaland. In addition, trade routes criss-crossed the landscape of the east-west and north-south areas of Nigeria. These routes linked the Yoruba with the north through Ilorin; the Bini with eastern Yoruba through Akure; the Igbo with Igala, Tiv and Idoma through Nsukka; the Hausa with Kanuri through Gumel (Olukoju 1997:15).

D. *Lessons from the above interpretations*

The foregoing survey of the debate on the nature of the relationships among Nigeria's pre-colonial communities has important implications for the analysis of the evolution of power-sharing in Nigeria. In the first place, it supports the view that the contemporary ethnicity in Nigeria is a recent social construction which did not exist in the pre-colonial period. In line with the constructivist view, the above discussion suggests that ethnic identities had undergone remarkable transformation and re-interpretation in the context of the colonialism that they have little resemblance to the initial ethnic formations. For instance, Osaghae (2001:19, fn 8) notes that the name Yoruba and the language by the same name, which is now being claimed by groups in South-west Nigeria such as Ekiti, Ijesha, Ijebu and Egba, each of which had claims of being distinct from the others, specifically belonged only to those from the old Oyo empire. However, through generalisation and extension of ethnic boundaries, language and cultures, new ethnic identities were constructed. The above case also relates to other ethnic nationalities such as the Igbo and Hausa-Fulani, which never existed as political entities or even as cultural units in the form in which they are known today. In fact, the Native Authority (NA) system through which the early colonial administration was run, recognised this state of affairs and ensured the autonomy of the various groups by governing them as separate towns or sub-ethnic nationalities such as Ijebu, Oyo, Egba, or Ekiti (Osaghae 1998:4, Olukoju 1997:17). It was the decision to regionalise Nigeria that tremendously transformed the ethnic boundaries in Nigeria (Nnoli 1978:35-63, Osaghae 1991:238-239). The point being made here is that if we accept that contemporary ethnicity is socially constructed then it follows that the frosty inter-group relations that have trailed this new social formation can be resolved through a social and political reconstruction process characterized by power-sharing. Thus, one can therefore argue that since modern-day ethnicity was socially created, inter-ethnic cooperation can also be socially and politically engineered.

The second and the more important point relates to the fact that this discussion reveals the impact of the above interpretations of inter-group relations on colonial policies. As a matter of

fact, the social distance/proximity arguments engendered a centralisation-decentralisation dilemma in the colonial administration. Perhaps, this dilemma was instrumental in the adoption of the contradictory policies of autonomy and amalgamation on one hand and regionalisation and centralisation on the other hand. The British colonialists were motivated to amalgamate the pre-colonial societies into a single political entity (Nigeria), first because of the economic benefits that ‘unity in diversity’ would generate, and also because they believed that there were some commonalities that could hold the people together<sup>3</sup>. These centripetal elements were the foundations upon which the principle of unity in diversity was based and that is why the colonial government tried so hard to preserve those elements. According to Oyovbaire (1983:8) “...as a social system, colonialism did not destroy completely the pre-colonial social relations of production, distribution and exchange, and of patterns of authority and culture. In fact, it erected a new geo-political basis and collective existence for these communities”. Jinadu (2002:13) concurred with this view, contending that the idea of social proximity among the pre-colonial communities “prevented the ‘balkanization’ of what is now Nigeria and led to the adoption, by the colonial administration in 1914, of what was in effect, in view of the size and cultural diversity of the country, a form of administrative federalism”.

On the other hand, the idea of social distance explains why the colonial government did not want to hand over a strong and centralized state to Nigerian nationalists (see Smith 2005:131-132). Nigeria’s former colonial Governor, Sir High Clifford dismissed the idea of forging a unitary Nigerian nation with the argument that:

Assuming...that the impossible were feasible – that this collection of self-contained and mutually independent Native States, separated from one another, as many of them are, by great distances, by differences of history and traditions, and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers, were indeed capable of being welded into a single homogenous nation – a deadly blow would thereby be struck at the very root of national self-government in Nigeria, which secures to each separate people the right to maintain its identity, its individuality and its nationality, its own chosen form of government; and the peculiar political and social institutions which have been evolved for it by the wisdom and by the accumulated experience of generations of its forbearers (see Coleman 1958:194)

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<sup>3</sup> I have mentioned some of them earlier in section 2.1<sup>c</sup>.

Hugh Clifford's comments reflected in the early colonial policy in Nigeria, which tried to keep the different communities in Nigeria as apart as possible. Indirect rule, administrative duality and regionalism were the hallmark of British colonial policies informed by the social distance thesis. The centralisation-decentralisation dilemma created a serious confusion in the colonial policies, which had an even more profound effect after the exit of the colonial administrators in 1960; the independent Nigerian state inherited fractured and fragile institutions, and an absence of a unified sense of Nigerian identity (Smith 2005:132). In the next section, I will explore in greater details the processes that led to the structural/territorial design of the Nigerian state and the implication of the Nigeria's political and territorial structure on the search for a viable power-sharing arrangement.

## 2.2 COLONIAL LEGACY I: THE STRUCTURAL CONFIGURATION OF NIGERIAN STATE

The mode of British penetration and occupation of Nigeria was instrumental to the creation of an asymmetrical political structure in Nigeria. The British penetration into Nigeria as well as the creation and consolidation of the Nigerian state was accomplished through three major routes. First, the British officials captured Lagos and from there, they extended into the Yoruba hinterland in the South-west region of Nigeria. Secondly, there was penetration through Calabar into the South-east and the lower areas of the River Niger in the South-south part of Nigeria. Thirdly, penetration into Nigeria was completed when the British through the Royal Niger Company moved into the communities in Northern parts of Nigeria, and secured a trade monopoly. The British government later wrestled the Northern Nigeria from the hands of the Royal Niger Company around 1898-1900 (Osuntokun 1979:92, Oyovbaire 1983:9). Once the penetration and occupation of Nigeria was completed the British colonialists settled down to the task of creating the territorial structure of Nigerian state. The production of Nigeria's structural design passed through several stages. These include the stages of autonomy, amalgamation, administrative duality/indirect rule, regionalism, and federalism.

### A. *Stage one: autonomy*

The complex route through which the creation of the Nigerian state occurred precipitated two serious challenges to the British government. The first is the challenge of policy – how to govern the disparate and complex communities that constituted Nigeria, while the other is the challenge of logistics - related to problems of communication and acute financial/personnel shortages. The initial strategy adopted by the British colonial administration to overcome these challenges (and which was also in line with the colonial perception of the Nigerian

society), was to administer the different parts of Nigeria as independent and autonomous territories, and to do so indirectly through the existing local authorities. This strategy of British consolidation in the Nigerian colony formed the root of what later metamorphosed into Nigeria's regional and federal structure.

In 1898, when the British government decided to replace the Royal Niger Company as the administrator of Northern Nigeria, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, attempted to design a coherent policy of colonial development of Nigeria by appointing the Niger Committee, headed by Lord Selborne (Osuntokun 1979:92). The task of the Committee was to consider the future structural and institutional design of the incipient Nigerian state. This was the first major opportunity for territorial and administrative organization of Nigeria. The Committee suggested that it would be more economically and financially viable for the British government to unite the different parts of Nigeria once communication permitted. The Committee also recommended that it would be to British advantage to establish an administrative policy system in Nigeria, which would make use of existing African political institutions, so that the British can keep expenses in Nigeria to a minimum (Ballard 1971:334). Finally, the Committee suggested that the amalgamation of the 'Niger Territories' should be carried out in instalments (Tamuno 1998:15).

#### B. *Stage two: 'amalgamation'*

The British government continued to administer the colony of Nigeria as three separate units until 1906, when the first phase of amalgamation brought the two segments of Southern Nigeria (the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos) under a common administrative leadership. This action reduced the administrative components of Nigeria to two - the Northern Protectorate and the Southern Protectorate. The two separate territories of Nigeria were then placed under the leadership of Sir Frederick Lugard in 1912, with the aim of uniting the two Protectorates into a single Nigeria during the second phase of amalgamation that took place in 1914.

The reasons for the amalgamation of Nigeria are numerous and have been adequately treated in the literature, only a few important points deserve to be recounted here (Osuntokun 1979:93). Firstly, amalgamation provided a means by which the poorer Northern Protectorate could share with the South's custom receipts prosperity. Southern Nigeria was financially self-reliant while the British administration in the North was supported by the annual grant-in-

aid. The practical impossibility of maintaining artificial barriers between the South and the North was the second major reason for the amalgamation of Nigeria. People speaking the same language and sharing a common historical heritage, finding themselves on different sides of the North/South frontier naturally crossed at will to see relatives or transact business. Also, the British government thought that the two Nigerian Protectorates constitute a continuous stretch of British territory without any intervening foreign possession between them. Thus, Britain wanted to resolve the absurd differences in the policies being followed by the administration of each section of the country. Finally, there was the clamour by educated Nigerians for the unification of the country.

Once the amalgamation of Nigeria was completed and Fredrick Lugard installed as the Governor of Nigeria, the next challenge was to address the logistical difficulties of running a large colony such as Nigeria. Armed with the notion that Nigerians are separated from each other by wide social distance and with the desire to find the cheapest possible means of governing the colony, Lugard adopted the twin policies of administrative duality and indirect rule.

#### C. *Stage three: administrative duality/indirect rule*

The colonial government's policy of administrative duality led to the separation of the administrative units of the Northern and Southern protectorates, each virtually independent of the other (Jinadu 2002:13). This strategy was supported by the differential forms of administrative goals pursued by the colonial government in the two protectorates. The main goal of the colonial administration in Southern Nigeria was to build a commercial enclave, thus it focused primarily on the development of natural resources and trade. On the other hand, the major goal of the Northern Nigeria colonial administration basically to administer the local communities; as such, the administration was characterized by the making and implementation of 'native policies' (Ballard 1971:334). The period of separate administration of different parts of Nigeria was long enough to impart the communal groups with different traditions, characters and orientations that were hard to reconcile after independence, leading one scholar to refer to the two colonial protectorates as "two British tribes", due to the social and political differences and mutual ill-feelings that the colonial administrators had passed on to them (Afigbo (1991:20).

The amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 did not permeate deeply into the administrative structures of the colonial state (Osuntokun 1979:97). To a large extent, important political departments in the administrations of the Southern and Northern Protectorates were still kept separate after the 1914 amalgamation. Administrative officers were hardly transferred from one part of the country to the other. The result was that there were two separate Nigerian governments. Therefore, what emerged in Nigeria up to 1919 were a country and two different territorial administrations (Osuntokun 1979:97). The two colonial administrations were separate in structure and personnel, with the Governor-General of Nigeria as the only link. In the North, the Lt. Governor ruled in consultation with the Emirs while in the South, particularly in the Colony of Lagos, there was a Legislative Council established in 1886, which ruled along with the Lt. Governor (Oyovbaire 1983:10).

Administrative duality in Nigeria was reinforced by another colonial administrative practice called indirect rule. Indirect rule was first established in Northern Nigeria between 1900 and 1913. Then, it was extended to Benin and the Yoruba areas of Western Nigeria, between 1916 and 1919. From 1927 it was exported to Eastern Nigeria; and by 1937 it had spread all over Nigeria, except for the municipalities of Lagos, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano and Zaria (Nnoli 1978:113). Indirect rule was basically designed to overcome the problem of shortage of trained British administrators and limited funds. In 1906, for example, there was only one British officer to about 2,900 square miles of territory, and one to about 45,000 Nigerians in the Northern Protectorate (Okonjo 1974:27). Equally, there was a near absence of artisans, clerical and technical staff required by the colonial government to function. But in the midst of this challenge, Lugard discovered a comparatively well-established bureaucracy run by the Hausa-Fulani Emirs. The Emirs had an administrative system that extended over a vast territory with considerably large population, a tax collection system as well as a security and judicial system. Lugard smartly imposed his authority on the Emirs, adopted their personnel as agents of the British colonial government and used their established administrative framework to run the Northern Protectorate.

As I mentioned earlier, when Lugard became the Governor of Nigeria in 1912, he began to extend indirect rule to the Southern Nigeria, but in that region indirect rule was confronted by serious hitches. In the South-west, the Yoruba Obas were less authoritarian than the Northern Emirs and therefore could not get their people to accept the new regime the way the Emirs did (Nnoli 1978:113). In the South-east it was even a more disastrous scenario because of the

absence of one-man traditional authority as was the case in the North and partially in the South-west. The British district commissioner for Ikot-Ekpene district in the South-east, Mr. Patridge, recounted his predicament in a report he presented to the colonial government in 1907. According to him:

this district contains (approximately) 400 villages divided into (approximately) 1,200 quarters, each sub-divided into (approximately) 1,000 family compounds. The approximate population is 20,000. Every village is an individual community, and every quarter has its own chief and every compound its own headman; and these chiefs and their headmen with their respective followers, having never paid much regard to the control of the whole village community to which they belong, are therefore by no means easy to bring under the control of the British law and administration (Okonjo 1974:54).

In order to overcome the difficulties created by the absence of local chiefs in the South-east, the British colonial officials embarked on the exercise of creating local chiefs by law. This led to the emergence of a new class of local administrators known as the warrant chiefs. The creation of the warrant chiefs was a highly complicated process because of the absence of consistent criteria for the exercise. For instance, in Ikwo clan in Abakaliki Division in what is today known as Ebonyi State, Anyiogu Agwu was intuitively selected as the warrant chief of the area because he possessed strong physical features which the colonial officials considered useful in ruling a 'native people'. Also, in Oraukwu in Onitsha Division of the present day Anambra State, the colonial official appointed his warrant chiefs from among those who attended the initial meeting he summoned after he had disarmed the village (Okonjo 1974:55). Unfortunately, most of the warrant chiefs did not have any traditional claim to the responsibilities, which the colonial officials had bestowed on them. Expectedly, there was widespread popular rejection of the warrant chiefs. In one case, the resentment against the warrant chiefs resulted in one of the worst riots that occurred in Nigeria's colonial era – the Aba riots of 1929 (see Afigbo 1972:59-77).

#### D. *Stage four: steps towards regionalisation*

After Hugh Clifford succeeded Fredrick Lugard as the Governor of Nigeria in August 1919 he tried to reverse the tide of separatism in Nigeria. Within three months of his arrival, Clifford had toured Nigeria and put forward proposals for recasting amalgamation in an entirely new fashion (Ballard 1971:336). Clifford proposed to reform Lugard's administrative structure by

amalgamating the separate Northern and Southern departments and by co-ordinating administrative activities through an expanded central secretariat, with its Chief Secretary serving as the Deputy Governor. Clifford's proposed reforms came when the British Colonial Office in London was still extolling indirect rule as a great model of colonial government that deserves to be exported beyond Nigeria to the remaining African colonies (Okonjo 1974:83). Expectedly, the Colonial Office stifled Clifford's proposal to unify Nigeria. Instead, the Office suggested a federal solution to the dilemma of governing the disparate communities in the Northern and Southern Nigeria. A despatch sent to Clifford by the Secretary of State for Colonies, Lord Milner, contained a proposal, which states that: 'from the point of view of scientific decentralization it would be decidedly preferable if there were three or four, and not merely two, Lieutenant Governors' in Nigeria, indicating the division of Nigeria into more than two Provinces (Ballard 1971:337). In a response to this proposal, Clifford agreed that there should be three groups of provinces, with the South divided at the Niger and the new Eastern Provinces extended to the Benue River (Ballard 1971:337). However, this reform was not implemented and no change in provincial arrangement was effected until 1939.

Although Hugh Clifford failed to secure an endorsement to reverse Lugard's indirect rule, he succeeded in getting an approval for the restructuring of the administrative machinery of the colonial government. In 1921, Hugh Clifford replaced Lugard's uncoordinated secretariat with a new secretariat structure, which streamlined the technical departments and introduced a more centralized administration that were not envisaged by Lugard in 1914 (Okonjo 1974:125). Clifford's policy of 'real' unification of Nigeria came alive between 1931 and 1935 when Sir Donald Cameron was appointed as the Governor. Cameron opposed any measure tending to divide Nigeria into separate and divergent territorial units. But under the pressure of increasing centralisation of the colonial administration, the Northern Nigerian colonial officials tried to resist the intervention of colonial officials of the Southern Nigeria in the affairs of the North. To this end, they insisted that "it had been the policy goal of the Northern Nigeria to develop into a semi-autonomous state with a right to full powers of government and eventually to come together with the South in a kind of federation of internally self-governing native administrations" (Okonjo 1974:293).

By the time Bernard Bourdillon took over as the Governor of Nigeria in 1935, the relationship between the colonial officials in the Northern Nigeria and the Southern Nigeria had become so frosty that a popular maxim of the 1940s said that "if the Nigerians were to leave Nigeria,

the British would go to war with one another” (Ballard 1971:333). One of the most urgent tasks that faced Bourdillon was to reconcile the Northern colonial officials which preferred a more independent native administration in the Northern Province with the Southern colonial staffs that wanted a unitary Nigerian state. Bourdillon called a conference of Northern Provinces Residents in 1937 in an attempt to dispel the tension within the colonial public service. At this time, Bourdillon came to terms with the reality that the only condition on which the cooperation of the Northern Nigeria colonial officials could be secured was to grant them some concessions. Consequently, Bourdillon awarded the North some degree of regional autonomy under its own chief commissioner and also allocated to the Northern Provinces half of the seats in the central legislative council (Okonjo 1974:309). Bourdillon also undertook a further reorganisation of the machinery of the colonial government by splitting the Southern Provinces into East and West with Enugu and Ibadan serving as their administrative headquarters, respectively.

The main grounds for the divisions of the Southern Nigeria into two regions were differences in native administration and the problems of communication (Okonjo 1974:311). Between 1900 and 1926, the Yoruba provinces were administered by Residents or other political officers who were under the authority of the Lieutenant Governor in Lagos. However, in 1926, the office of Lieutenant Governor of the Southern Provinces was transferred to Enugu, to ensure an adequate supervision of the planned introduction of direct taxation in the area. Since the Lieutenant Governor needed to make repeated visits to the entire Southern Provinces as part of his duty, the colonial government felt that it was difficult to administer the Yoruba Provinces in the South-west from a place as far away as Enugu in the South-east. In 1938, therefore, with the approval of the Secretary of state, the Governor reorganised the Southern Provinces into East and West. The government mentioned the increased work of the chief commissioner of the Southern Provinces and the difficulty of postal communication between Enugu, Lagos and the Yoruba Provinces as the other reasons for the fragmentation of Southern Nigeria. The colonial government also insisted that “ethnographically the Southern Provinces do not form a satisfactory unit” since the area has been “fairly definitely divided ethnographically by the Niger” River (Okonjo 1974:311-313).

E. *Stage five: constitutionalization of regionalism/the emergence of federalism*

Bourdillon could not garner an official consensus to constitutionalize the administrative reorganizations he introduced before he retired in ill health in 1943 and handed over to Arthur

Richards. Arthur Richards, who just completed a new constitution in Jamaica, was determined to follow the same line of action in Nigeria. Arthur Richards was convinced that Nigeria falls naturally into three regions - the North, the West and the East, as a result, he quickly settled down to working out a constitutional framework for the administrative reorganisations Bernard Bourdillon had made in 1939 (Ballard 1971:346). After a rapid approval by the Colonial Office, the Richards draft constitution was pushed through the Legislative Council in 1945; it took effect the following year - 1946.

The Richards Constitution did not last long due to the severe criticism that trailed its enactment. The Constitution was rejected by Nigerian nationalists because of the unilateral way in which its proposals were conceived and adopted. The nationalist leaders were displeased with the Richards' Constitution because they felt that it was imposed from London, without any consultation with Nigerians. Also, the nationalists, particularly members of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), felt that constitutionalizing Nigeria's regions would lead to the disintegration of the country (Ihonvbere and Shaw 1998:20). The colonial administration, however, made some efforts at showing that contrary to the views of Nigerian nationalists, the intention behind the Richards Constitution was not to break up Nigerian unity but to build it from below (Ballard 1971:346).

In 1948, John Macpherson was appointed to replace Arthur Richards as the Governor of Nigeria. Unlike Richards, Macpherson decided to engage in widespread consultation before amending the Richards Constitution. Consequently, he encouraged a nationwide discussion and negotiation of the form of the proposed Constitution of Nigeria. The debate initiated by Macpherson reached the grassroots and led to the convening of a Grand National Conference at Ibadan in 1950 with representatives from village to regional councils (Ihonvbere and Shaw 1998:20-21). It was at this conference that the initial push for ethnic power-sharing and self-rule began to gain roots. Delegates at this conference requested different levels of autonomy such as regional self-rule and the Nigerianization of the public service.

The debates and consensus reached at the Ibadan Conference gave rise to the Macpherson Constitution of 1951. The Constitution proposed a further decentralization of authority to the Regions and the creation of a central government with both legislature and executive. The Macpherson Constitution introduced what some scholars refer to as 'quasi-federalism' in Nigeria (Jinadu 2002:16). The 1951 Constitution transformed Nigeria's regions into a limited

form of federal units, with the British controlled central government still largely predominant, but the powers of the regions were considerably enlarged. As a matter of fact, the introduction of the limited federalism by the 1951 Constitution marked the first major step towards power-sharing in Nigeria.

Nigeria's tendency towards a federal power-sharing was not a surprising one. As early the 1940s, nationalist leaders such as Nnamdi Azikiwe (1943) and Obafemi Awolowo (1947), both of whom were later to become, together with Ahmadu Bello, the most prominent nationalists in Nigeria, put forward concrete proposals for a Nigerian theory of federal power-sharing, to reflect the significant geopolitical and ethno-linguistic configurations of the country. Thus, the combination of administrative duality and indirect rule as well as the shared views of the colonial government and the nationalist leaders on the desirability of a federal power-sharing shaped the trend of Nigeria's institutional and structural configurations. The shape of the post-colonial Nigeria was moulded around the conception of federalism as a constitutional mechanism which defines ethnic rather than geographical diversity as the major determinant of the territorial structure of the society. In this sense, one could rightly acknowledge that the period between 1945 and 1954 was critical in providing an ethnic mould for Nigerian federalism through series of constitutional devolution.

In 1954, a new Constitution was introduced to formalize Nigeria's federal power-sharing arrangement on the basis of a national central government and the three regions – East, West and North. The adoption of a full-fledge federal system of government in 1954 was based on a historic compromise reached between Nigerian nationalist leaders and the British colonial authorities. To arrive at the consensus, the Northern leaders abandoned their preference for a confederation of autonomous regions, by which means they hope to protect a traditional system of authority exercised by Muslim emirs. In return, the Eastern leaders withdrew their demand for either a unitary system of government or strongly centralized federation. On their part, the Western leaders ceded their control of Lagos, which was designated as a federal capital territory.

#### F. *Stage six: ambiguities of early federalism*

One unanticipated effect of the shift toward regionalism and federalism in Nigeria was the evolution of an ethno-regionalist party system which bolstered the hegemonic positions of each of the three major ethnic groups within the three regions where it was numerically

dominant (Jinadu 2002:17). Each of the three major political parties drew its electoral support from the major ethnic group in the region of its dominance. In this case, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) received overwhelming support from the Hausa-Fulani dominated North; the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was strong among the Igbo-speaking people in the East (although it was also popular in the Western Region); and lastly, the Action Group (AG) had its stronghold in the West, but also deriving considerable support from the Eastern and Northern minorities.

The tri-polar structure of the federal and party systems alienated the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, and thus, raised the issues of equitable representation, territorial autonomy, and access to state resources into the discourse of the national question. Interestingly, federalism in itself also provided the platform upon which ethnic groups sought to remedy the political and structural imbalance in the Nigerian federation. Within the framework of federal power-sharing, the minority ethnic groups sought for a remedy to the asymmetric federal structure through the mechanism of states creation. In the 1950s, the minority ethnic groups mounted pressure for ethnic accommodation through the creation of more states in Nigeria. As a response to the rising agitation for new states, the British government set up a Commission headed by Henry Willink to inquire into the fears of Minorities and means of allaying them. The Commission considered the requests of the groups and recommended against creating more regions/states out of the three regions. The rejection of the demands for creation of states by the Willink Commission did not put an end to further demands for states creation. In fact, 33 new states had been created out of the initial three regions since the Willink Commission submitted its report.

In addition to raising fears of ethnic domination among the minority groups, the structural imbalance in the Nigerian federation also created fears of Northern domination in the South. The striking imbalance in the numerical and geographical size of the Northern region vis-à-vis the Eastern and Western regions was the main basis for the fears of Northern domination. In numerical and geographical terms, the Northern region was bigger than the Eastern and Western regions put together<sup>4</sup>. Nigeria's parliamentary electoral system (1954-1966) which was based on first-past-the-post approach and which gave the Northern region a guaranteed

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the 1960 figures, the Northern region constitutes about 54 percent of Nigeria's population and occupy about three-quarters of its land mass. Subsequent census data, including the 2006 census figures, also agree with the 1960 statistics.

control of the federal parliament and the national government, due to its numerical predominance further compounded the fear of domination by the South. This obvious electoral advantage of the Northern region precipitated intense rivalry between politicians from North and South. Thus, in October 1960, the colonial administration inaugurated an independent Nigerian state which was beset by structural deficiencies and intense fears of ethnic domination and inter-group rivalry.

Besides structural deficiencies, colonialism imparted on Nigeria another important legacy which calls for institutional restructuring. This relates to the attitude toward politics in Nigeria. An examination of this historical feature of Nigerian politics is the subject of the next section.

### 2.3 COLONIAL LEGACY II: ATTITUDINAL DISPOSITION TO POLITICS

The post-colonial Nigeria inherited a particular system of political rewards which shaped the attitude of Nigerians toward politics. The literature on political linkage systems identifies two forms of political rewards. The first is a set of collective goods contained in the packages of programmes and policies that political leaders implement while in office. The second form of political rewards is the selective material incentives and private goods that political leaders deliver to specific individuals in exchange for their support (Kitschelt 2000:849-850). In practice, the delivery of collective and private goods by political leaders to the citizens is usually concurrent. Many political leaders strive to combine the supply of both private and collective rewards. However, it has been argued that it is difficult to maintain a clear balance between the supplies of the two forms of political rewards, because of the tendency for one to overwhelm the other (Kitschelt 2000:854).

The above observation is true with regards to Nigeria, where the provision of collective goods has been considerably subordinated to the supply of private political rewards. In Nigeria, political rewards are usually not perceived in terms of government policies and programmes, instead they are interpreted in private material terms. As such, many individuals and groups conceive state power as machinery for creating conditions for private enrichment. As one writer observed, “political and bureaucratic offices not only offered high social status and handsome salaries and perquisites, but also vast opportunities for accumulation through bribery, embezzlement, favouritism, and other types of corruption” (Diamond 1988:63). The

Constitution Drafting Committee that prepared the 1979 Constitution also alludes to this socio-political trend. According to the Committee:

Government in Nigeria...has tended to be pre-occupied with power and its material perquisites. Given the country's conditions of underdevelopment, *power offers the opportunity of a lifetime to rise above the general poverty and squalor that pervades the entire society. It provides a rare opportunity to acquire wealth and prestige, to be able to distribute benefits in the form of jobs, contracts, scholarships and gifts of money and so on to one's relatives, and political allies.* Such is the preoccupation with power and its material benefits that political ideologies as to how society can be organised and ruled to the best advantage of all hardly enter into the calculation (see Ekekwe 1986:104-105, emphasis in the original).

Given the role of state power in the production of private material rewards, individuals and groups go all-out to gain control of the state in order to have a guaranteed access to the source of private material enrichment. Under this circumstance, as Claude Ake (1981:1162-1163) acknowledged that there is "a desperate struggle to win control of state power... since this control means for all practical purposes being all powerful and owing everything". The premium placed on the control of state power and extraction of private material rewards by political rivals draws political competition closer to warfare, transforming the game of politics to a matter of life and death. In this case, incumbents try hard to retain their grip on state power and to sustain the use of this power in advancing their personal economic prosperity and those of their followers. Thus, the possibility for opposition politicians to get into power is highly constrained, and in the Nigerian context, exclusion from power means that the opposition politicians and their followers are alienated from the source of accumulation of extremely needed material goods (Ekekwe 1986:109). Therefore, while the opposition politicians go all-out to seize state power, the incumbents often try so hard to retain their privileged position. For this reason, thuggery, arson and massive fraud often accompany electoral competition while impeachments, carpet-crossing, decampments, and expulsions follow thereafter.

The premium placed on state power has also dragged ethnic groups into unwholesome political rivalry. Nnoli (1978) lucidly demonstrated the dialectical relationship between ethnic conflicts and resource competition in Nigeria. Nnoli described how the struggle for state power had forced the political class to appeal to ethnic identity, which constitutes the

predominant form of identity in the country. Thus, besides the individual politicians, ethnic groups were also drawn into the struggle for the private material benefits offered by the control of state power. In other words, political competitions for state resources therefore occur at two levels – at the level of the individuals and that of the ethnic groups. The unfortunate incorporation of ethnic and even sub-ethnic groups into the struggle for the control of state power has transformed Nigerian state into what Richard Joseph (1987) characterized as a Prebendal state. Joseph observed that just like the politicians; individuals such as traders, contractors, civil servants, farmers, traditional rulers, and teachers, have also joined in the struggle to capture the state. He argued that with this development, the colonial state has metamorphosed into a Prebendal state, which is:

not only one in which the offices of state are allocated and then exploited as benefices by the office-holders, but also as one where such practice is legitimated by a set of political norms according to which the appropriation of such offices is not just an act of individual greed or ambition but concurrently the satisfaction of the short-term objectives of a subset of the general population (Joseph 1987:67).

There are four explanations for the advent of this kind of political attitude in Nigeria. The explanations include the people's perception of the modern state as amoral, the resource competition induced by colonialism, the mode of political class formation/competition, and the character of the post-colonial state. I will address these points in the following paragraphs.

A. *The perception of the modern state as amoral*

The first explanation for the attitudinal disposition of Nigerians toward politics is that many Nigerians perceive the modern state as amoral. A good way to express this point is to follow the analysis in a classic essay by Peter Ekeh (1975). Ekeh observed that colonialism introduced two publics - the primordial and civic publics - in post-colonial societies. He argued that the primordial public, which is constituted by primordial ties and grouping such as ethnic associations, is moral while the civic public, represented by colonial and post-colonial states (including popular politics and state structures such as the military, police and civil service), is amoral and lacks the generalized moral imperatives that operate in the primordial public realm (Ekeh 1975:92).

In the framework of the 'two public', the modern state (the civic public) is perceived by the colonized peoples as a symbol of foreign domination and exploitation which does not deserve

their loyalty and/or moral obligation. As much as possible, individuals from these communities strive to exploit the state in retaliation for their perceived dominance by a foreign power. In this context, the people expect to obtain benefits from the state without any moral urge to give back anything to the state. Rather than having a sense of duty to invest in the modern state, many individuals in the post-colonial states are more obliged to contribute to the sustenance of the ethnic communities (the primordial public) in which they are members. Ekeh (1975:107) noted that most citizens of the primordial public give out (usually in the form of informal taxes/levies) and ask for nothing in return; on the contrary, most citizens of the civic public would want to gain from the public but enjoys evading any chance to give back in return, even if they have the means. In fact, citizens of societies with two publics would perceive it as morally permissible to channel part of the benefits they extracted from the civic public to the primordial public.

In the context of a differentiated primordial public, individuals who gain access to state power (civic public) use it to extract benefits not just for themselves, but also the members of their ethnic communities (primordial public). They do this in order to gain support from among the members of the 'primordial public', so as to win moral toleration for corruption within the 'civic public'. In the final analysis, one can agree with Ekeh (1979:108) that most political elites in Africa are citizens of two publics in the same society. On one hand, they belong to a civic public (the state) from where they gain materially but to which they rarely give. On the other hand, they belong to a primordial public from which they derive little or no material benefits but to which they are morally obliged to give. A more recent study alluded to this idea of the amorality of the colonial state. Njoku (2005:107) analyzed how the colonial system of indirect rule destroyed the popular viewpoint that "power belongs to the people" in the South-east Nigeria. He showed how the Warrant Chiefs and other local officials of the native administrations accumulated the scarce modern resources through corrupt processes and therefore bequeathed on the people the impression that the modern state is the guaranteed means of acquiring wealth and prestige in the modern era.

#### B. *Colonialism-induced scarcity and resource competition*

Besides the amorality of the post-colonial state, the attitude toward politics in Nigeria was conditioned by the fierce resource competition that followed the resource scarcity introduced by colonialism through the destruction of the traditional economy and the introduction of the modern economy. Through this process, colonialism induced a shift in the mode of

production from the predominantly subsistent agriculture to the modern export-oriented agriculture supported by an expanded service sector. In the colonial era, the economy was dominated by foreign capital and this placed severe limits on the opportunities for the people to develop indigenous modern productive base. Consequently, the increasing number of Nigerians drifting from the rural to the urban center in search of resources and opportunities in the modern means of production was confronted by the scarcity of the modern capital. Nnoli (1978) demonstrated how this development increased the value of modern material goods, and also how it gave rise to ethnicity among the inhabitants of the colonial urban centres. According to him:

...scarcity was pervasive of the colonial order. It was evident in the economic, social, and political spheres of life. It affected employment, education, political participation and the provision of social services to the population. Under these circumstances, the competition for the limited resources and opportunities could not only be intense and destructive. Individuals had to rely on various useful devices [*such as ethnicity and corruption*] to gain access to the scarce goods and services (Nnoli 1978:87, emphasis added).

At independence, the state became available to the local elites as the major source of capital accumulation for investment and consumption. Since independence, the state has remained the primary locus of national wealth, which harbours all opportunities for acquisition of wealth and social mobility. Although the oil boom of the 1970s reduced resource scarcity in Nigeria by widening the resource base of the state, it also increased the appetite of the elites and created more opportunities for material accumulation; giving rise to a special form of accumulation which Sayre Schatz (1984) described as “pirate capitalism”. According to him,

“With the recent predominance of ‘government’ as a source for fortune, a new stage has been reached... For the most vigorous, capable, resourceful, well-connected, and ‘lucky’ entrepreneurs (including politicians, civil servants, and army officers), productive economic activity, namely the creation of real income and wealth, has faded in appeal. Access to, and manipulation of, the government-spending process has become the golden gateway to fortune” (Schatz 1984:55).

From Schatz’s analysis, we can deduce that the increase in the wealth of the state also brings the state to the centre stage of private material accumulation.

### C. *Mode of political class formation and conflict*

The third explanation for the attitudinal disposition to politics in Nigeria points to the mode of elite class formation in Nigeria as well as the nature of conflicts that erupted among the political elites. It is commonly assumed that socio-economic factors such as high status occupation, high income, superior education, and ownership or control of business enterprise(s) were the major determinants of the political class (Sklar 1963:480-1). However, political class formation in Nigeria, and indeed, many other post-colonial societies, was not just a function of economic factors, rather it also included political aspects which Sklar (1979:537) referred to as 'relations of power'. In other words, the primary motor force behind the growth of the political class in Nigeria was more of political than economic factors.

The development of the political class in Nigeria owed much to the activities of the colonial state and the British commercial firms. The expansion of state bureaucracy and the administrative structures of the foreign enterprises encouraged the recruitment of Nigerians into the state and business institutions. In 1964, for instance, the state employed 54 percent of all wage earners while most of the remaining 36 percent were employed by foreign companies (Diamond 1988:63). However, although there was an early emergence of a class of administrators especially in the public sector, there was no corresponding early growth of an indigenous class of entrepreneurs in the private sector (Ekekwe 1986:60). The indigenous businessmen that emerged later were those who depended mainly on local commerce. Many of the local businessmen raised their initial capital through apprenticeship in the large foreign commercial establishments or through commissions earned from foreign enterprises that encouraged many of them to enter into commerce in areas where those enterprises were seeking to reach (Ekekwe 1986:61).

Another factor that enhanced the development of Nigeria's governing elite is the regional structure of Nigerian federal and party systems. Nigeria's three-region federal and party structure provided an expanded resource mobilization base for emerging political class as well as rich grounds for the 'fusion of elites' (Sklar 1979:537). The regions brought together wealthy businessmen, senior administrators in private and public sector organisations, leading politicians, learned professionals, and prominent traditional rulers. In fact, Richard Sklar (1965:204) saw the regional parties and governments as a "veritable engine of class formation for the indigenous politicians, administrators, traditional rulers, businessmen, and professionals". From 1951, the indigenous political class in Nigeria began to expand and to

establish its dominance over the three regional governments through the firm control of the political parties.

The Nigerian political class tried to consolidate politically and economically. Efforts towards political consolidation reflected in the intensification of the nationalist struggles. The incipient political class were able convince the colonial government to make several concessions such as the granting of regional self-government in 1954 – six years before the national self-government (Nafziger 1973:507). Also the Nigerian political class secured British approval for the policy of ‘Nigerianization’ of the public service in the 1950s. The extraction of these and other political gains by the indigenous political class led to a considerable decline in the strength of the central government and on the contrary, a substantial increase the prominence of the regional governments and the indigenous political class.

Although the indigenous political class prospered politically, attempts by this class to consolidate economically encountered serious difficulties due to the absence of an indigenous economic base for capital accumulation. The space for upward economic mobility for indigenous private enterprises was greatly constrained by the colonial administrators. The colonial government established a firm control over the most lucrative sources of revenue in the country – agriculture, mining, petroleum, shipping, electricity and telecommunication etc. (Diamond 1987:573). The statutory agricultural marketing boards controlled the export of cash crops while indigenous mining activity was restricted by the colonial government. State monopolies were established to run many sectors of the economy, thereby eliminating indigenous private enterprises; there were also expanded government parastatals that managed sectors such as transportation and other public utilities (Diamond 1988:63).

In the face of these economic constraints, the political class turned to the regional governments for the badly needed capital for their economic consolidation. Akeredolu-Ale noted that:

Expatriate domination of investment opportunities and sources of capital accumulation inhibited re-investment of capital by indigenous entrepreneurs who lack the resources to compete with vertically integrated Multi-national Corporation. Consequently, indigenous entrepreneurs became compradors (i.e. intermediaries between expatriate and indigenous polity and economy) and/or turned to the state as a source of capital (see Anikpo 1985:46).

Once the political elite captured the Regional parliament and co-operated to form a governing coalition at the Center, it was able to control the system of distributing a wide range of political rewards such as positions and employment in government service and public corporations, licenses for market stall, permit for export of agricultural products, and land allocations for private and commercial use (Nafziger 1973:509). The regional governments “created elaborate systems of administrative and commercial patronage, involving ‘the liberal use of public funds to promote indigenous private enterprise...’” (Sklar 1979:534). In the course of the attempts to widen the opportunities for economic accumulation and consolidation, the members of the political class became engulfed in fierce struggles to capture the regional governments, which was the resource base.

By 1951, ethnic and regional sentiments were introduced into political struggles. The majority ethnic groups in the three regions hijacked the regional governments through the ethnicization of political parties. In the Western Region, the section of the political class from the Yoruba ethnic nationality through the Action Group (AG) dominated the regional government. In the Northern Region, the traditional Hausa-Fulani elite secured the control of the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and used the party to dominate the politics of that region. In the Eastern Region, the educated Igbo elites took control of the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and that of the region. This development ruptured the cohesiveness of Nigeria’s political class and plunged it into a fierce intra-class struggle that was coated with ethnic colours. The struggle among Nigeria’s political class took place at two levels – the national and regional levels. At the national level, the three major ethnic groups under the platform of their parties squared up against each other in a fight for the control of the national government. The Kano riots of 1953, in which 36 people were killed, were directed against Southerners, partly because many Northerners were worried about their economic well-being under an independent government that was likely going to be controlled by the Southerners (Nafziger 1973:526, see also Anifowose 1982:47-50). At the regional level, fractions of the political class from the minority ethnic groups engaged in contest with political elements from the majority groups. The former, protested the monopolization of political power and the rewards of power by the latter. This led to intense political struggles within the regions.

#### D. *The character of the post-colonial state*

The last explanation for the attitudinal disposition toward politics in Nigeria is the character of the post colonial Nigerian state. The post-colonial Nigerian state is characterized by a

limited autonomy of the state (Ake 1985:9). This means that the state is institutionally constituted in a way that it enjoys little independence from the social classes. The limited autonomy of the Nigerian state is the product of colonial legacy of statism. The colonial state which metamorphosed into the post-colonial state in itself lacked autonomy; to all intents and purposes it was synonymous with British economic interests (Ake 1973:358). As a matter of fact, the colonial state in Nigeria began as a commercial concern – the Royal Niger Company - and a tool of colonial capital accumulation (Ake 1985:10). Thus, since the colonial state in itself was a tool of British capital accumulation and lacked autonomy, its off-shot - the post-colonial Nigerian state inherited the same weakness; but this time it became a tool of the dominant indigenous social groups.

At its birth, the dominant social groups that took over from the colonial administrators quickly took control of the Nigerian state and employed its power as an instrument of political and economic consolidation. In view of this, the capacity of the post-colonial state to mediate the struggles among competing social interests and groups was greatly weakened. Some political scientists characterize the Nigerian state, and indeed the state in many other post-colonial societies, as ‘weak’ partly because of its inability to perform the mediation function (Ake 1995, Whaites 2000). A weak state leaves vacuums of power, which are readily and easily filled by the dominant social groups. In the case of Nigeria, the state was hijacked and used at different times to satisfy specific ethnic, religious, class, and other special interests (Ekekwe 1986, Joseph 1991, Ibeanu 1999).

The character of Nigerian state has some profound political implications some of which are related to this discussion. In the first place, the absence of autonomizing mechanisms in the post-colonial state creates the condition for personalization of the state’s resources. Here, individuals in political positions tend to privatise the state, blurring the relationship between them and the state. In this case, acquisition of state power gives the individuals unlimited access to physical coercion, opportunities to manipulate institutions, information, ideological symbols, and recruitment into political positions (Post and Vickers 1973:53). The loss of state power, on the other hand, entails the loss of all the rewards that are associated with the control of state machinery. Under this condition, the state power represents the most important political good, as such the individual needs to pursue it by all means. This is why political differences and struggles in weak states are very difficult to mediate, since the state itself is an instrument in the political struggles by those who want to control it.

The use of state instruments in political competition by the dominant social groups means that the rules that govern political competition and other aspects of social life do not have adequate guarantee of their impartiality (Ake 1985:10). The state which is supposed to be the arbiter in political competition is dragged into the contest by those who control it, thus eroding the assumed impartiality of the state. In a situation where there is a lack of confidence in the state's mediation role, the resultant effect is recurrent claim of marginalisation by various social groups. Each group feels short-changed in the scheme of things, claiming that the state operates in favour of the other groups.

In Nigeria, claims of marginalisation have centred around four major issues, namely, the control of the central government, distribution of political and bureaucratic positions, leadership of state owned firms, and revenue allocation (Ibelema 2000:212-213). This feeling of marginalisation and lack of confidence in the state's mediation and distributive roles foments a deep sense of mutual mistrust among the political elites. Under the condition of fear of domination, security lies in the acquisition of state power. Each group ensures that it is not short-changed in the allocation of state power. However, to avoid plunging themselves and the entire society into a consuming power struggle, Nigerian political class has taken steps to regulate conflicts within its ranks. These steps involve the establishment of power-sharing institutions to address the identity and distributive conflicts in Nigeria. I will briefly highlight the features of these power-sharing institutions, since they have been treated in details elsewhere (Orji 2007).

#### 2.4 THE SEARCH FOR A NEW POLITICAL ORDER: POWER-SHARING AS THE INTERVENING ELEMENT

The lessons of political history have taught Nigerian political elites that asymmetric political structure is incompatible with the divisive nature of the country's politics. Earlier on, I indicated the nature of structural asymmetry in Nigeria as follows: (1) the disparity in the numerical and geographical size of the regions and ethnic groups; and (2) the preponderance of the three major ethnic groups in the Regions in relation to the several minority ethnic groups. The imbalance in the political structure of the pre-1963 Nigeria relegated the political elites from the minority ethnic groups to a position of permanent minority/opposition. In the face of a blocked access to the highly prized private accumulation of state resources, political elites from the minority ethnic groups were frustrated by the realization that it was almost

impossible for them to capture state power since this would entail the difficult task of displacing their rivals from the majority ethnic groups. Consequently, they changed their approach to the power struggle.

The new approach focused on demanding for the fragmentation of the bases of state power and resources. This strategy reflected in their demands for territorial autonomy through the creation of new states. In 1963, a rift within the Yoruba dominated Action Group, opened the opportunity for the creation of the first minority state – the Mid-west region. On the eve of the Nigerian civil war in May 1967, the military elites from the Northern minorities used the power which they captured via a coup in July 1966 to divide Nigeria into twelve states. Since then pressures for the proliferation of Nigeria's territorial units have continued. More states were created in 1976, 1989, 1991, and 1996, leaving Nigeria with the present political structure of 36 states. Today, creation of states has become an important component of inter-ethnic bargaining and a major element of ethnic power-sharing in Nigeria. For instance, during the National Political Reform Conference in 2005, the delegates from the South-east zone (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states) expressed their readiness to support the demand for increased revenue allocation to the oil producing states in exchange for the states' support for the creation of addition state in the South-east (Aluko 2005:1). This is an example of the terms with which inter-ethnic relations are negotiated in Nigeria.

Besides the fragmentation of Nigeria's federal system through the creation of states, Nigerian political elites have ensured that other forms of power – political and economic - are also shared. One of the geniuses of Nigeria's power-sharing strategy was the adoption of a proportional office distribution system. This measure reflects in various practices such as zoning of political and bureaucratic offices, and crystallized under the broad framework of the federal character principle. In Nigeria, the term 'federal character' connotes the inclusive intent of Nigerian political elites. The institution of federal character, which was introduced as part of the 1979 Constitution, seeks to contain the combustibility of the struggle for state offices by ensuring that the segments of the society get a share of the offices. In specific terms, the principle requires equitable representation of states and ethnic groups in the federal government so as to "promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in ... [the federal] government or in any of its agencies" (Sklar 2004:13).

The political elites also extended power-sharing to the revenue allocation system. This reflected in the tendency towards proportional allocation of the national revenue to all states. The principles of equity and fiscal centralisation have ensured that almost all the financial resources accruing to Nigerian federation are pooled together in a 'Federation Account' and redistributed to the federal and state governments on one hand and among the state governments on the other hand. Although there are objections to this method of fiscal power-sharing, yet it has enjoyed considerable support from many Nigerian political elites, particularly those from the Northern parts of the country.

Not satisfied with power-sharing at the governmental level, Nigerian political elites have also tried to introduce elements of power-sharing in the electoral and party systems. Thus, beginning from 1979, the Constitution contains clauses which compel politicians to satisfy stringent proportionality requirements in order to register as political parties or to be adjudged the winner of governorship or presidential elections. In 1999, for instance, political associations were required to win five percent of the vote for local councillors in 24 of the 36 states in order to qualify to be registered for subsequent elections at the state and federal levels. For a first ballot election to the presidency, a candidate with the overall highest tally of votes would also be required to win 25 percent of the votes cast in at least two-thirds (24) of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. These requirements were incentives for politicians to reach out to groups other than their own for support and encourage cross-group coalitions. Again, they strive to make the elected president to be more of a national figure than the representative of his ethnic group.

Furthermore, the distributive requirements in the party and electoral systems have encouraged the political elites to adopt some informal institutions such as zoning and rotation of political offices. Since 1979, it has become a norm for the political parties to zone various political offices to different geo-political zones of the federation in order to ensure that the governments are ethnically inclusive. The hallmark of the practice of the informal institutions of zoning and rotation of office was in 1999 when there was a consensus among the political elites for 'power shift' from the North to the South. In the past, political elites from the Northern states dominated the leadership of Nigeria, however the political bargains that ushered-in the transition from military to civil rule in 1999 included a Northern concession of the office of President to the South. In this case, the major political parties decided to

nominate only candidates from Southern Nigeria to run for the presidency. This political gesture was reciprocated in 2006 when the major political parties also nominated their candidates from the Northern states. There is no gainsaying that the practice of power-sharing is becoming a regular feature of politics in the post-independent Nigeria. The challenge therefore is to explain the mechanisms that are driving its continuity.

## 2.5 CONCLUSION

I have argued that there is a relationship between the colonial interpretation of ethnic diversity in Nigeria and the nature of colonial policies in the country. The colonial administration in Nigeria offered contradictory perspectives on the nature of the country's ethnic diversity and inter-ethnic relations. This led to ambiguities in the colonial state building project in Nigeria, leaving the post-colonial Nigeria with weak institutions and incoherent identity. The results of the institutional frailty included state weakness and recurring pressures to reverse or amend state institutions. The above issues are the roots of power-sharing in Nigeria. But the routes that the political elites have taken to arrive at power-sharing are also complex and rigorous. Noting that two issues are important when considering the need for power-sharing in Nigeria (structural and attitudinal issues), the political elites have moved from steps towards addressing the structural deficiencies to efforts aimed at dealing with the attitudinal issues. The result has been the extension of power-sharing from the territorial dimension, involving federalism and creation of states, to areas such as office distribution, revenue allocation, and electoral and party politics, where efforts are being made to regulate the attitudinal disposition of Nigerians towards politics. It is not within the scope of this paper to assess the success or failure of power-sharing in Nigeria, but what can be said is that it might be more meaningful to construe the entire process of power-sharing and institution building as a work in progress.

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