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## 5

## Coping with Diversity: The Nigerian State in Historical Perspective

*Abdul Raufu Mustapha*

### INTRODUCTION

The literature on the Nigerian state has tended, on the whole, to mirror the general pattern of analysis of the African state. This literature, in its implicit or explicit concern with the nature of the Nigerian state, maps both an intellectual and a political history, and can only be summarized here. In the 1960s, modernization scholars implicitly defined the Nigerian state in liberal-democratic terms of standing above society, mediating conflict, and engaging in "modernization" or "development." Central categories were constitutions, governments, institutions such as the traditional leadership and the military, and the consequences of ethnic differentiation and conflict.<sup>1</sup> By the 1970s, class analysis, particularly from the perspective of the dependency school, had gained ground. This radical trend was also reflected in the analysis of the Nigerian state which was seen as a tool of various factions of the bourgeoisie or petty bourgeois.<sup>2</sup> Within this broad school, there were some important shifts in emphasis. In 1976, Turner introduced the notion of a state run by a triad of state officials, middlemen, and foreign suppliers.<sup>3</sup> This "compradorial" theme was taken up by many other analysts.<sup>4</sup> For their part, Rimmer and Marenin emphasized the overpowering statism of Nigerian society and the intertwining of political and economic power<sup>5</sup>; state power leads to wealth, and wealth is essential in gaining power. The "ruling class" was seen as a creator, and a creation, of this deeply rooted statism. On his part, Ake contributed the notion of overpoliticization: "The salient feature of the state of the nation and the crux of the problem of Nigeria today is the overpoliticization of social life. The Nigerian state appears

to intervene everywhere and to own virtually everything including access to status and wealth."<sup>6</sup>

Beckman questioned the theorization of the state on the basis of dependency theory and its emphasis on the "comprador" nature of the state.<sup>7</sup> He placed emphasis on the long-run process of capitalist state formation and bourgeois class formation. Within this formulation, the Nigerian state was seen as the organ of capital in general, both foreign and domestic. The "ruling class" was characterized as both bourgeois and national in orientation. By the late 1970s, oil exports had acquired a determining role within the Nigerian state. Graf explored the notion of a rentier state based on oil rents, peripheral state capitalism, an "incomplete hegemony" and confronted by numerous contradictions.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1990s, following the economic and democratic collapse of 1982/3, Joseph introduced the notion of the "prebendal" state:

Politics . . . is fundamentally about the struggle over scarce resources. In some countries, that struggle is not focused in a continuous and insistent way on the state itself. Power, status and the major economic goods can often be procured through a variety of paths and from a multiplicity of sources. In Nigeria, however, the state has increasingly become a magnet for all facets of political and economic life, consuming the attention of traders, contractors, builders, farmers, traditional rulers, teachers, as much as that of politicians or politically motivated individuals in the usual senses of these terms. One important aim of this study, therefore, will be to elaborate a conceptual notion—prebendalism—which seems most appropriate for explaining the centrality in the Nigerian polity of the intensive and persistent struggle to control and exploit the *offices* of the state.<sup>9</sup>

Here we see the theorization of a state based on the struggle for individual and communal spoils. However, the external international dimensions of state formation are underplayed and the politics of non-hegemonic groups are ignored.

Bayart suggests that Nigeria is one of the African states that have graduated "from kleptocracy to the Felonious state."<sup>10</sup> It is claimed that the marginalization of Africa in most legal global market sectors, continuing dependence on the global economy, and intense internal disequilibria have led to the criminalization of politics. An intimate relationship is established between accumulation, power, and criminal activities at an unprecedented level, leading to the "felonious state":

The most interesting case is that of Nigeria. The US authorities have long been convinced, without ever being able to provide formal proof, that the armed forces, the political class and members of the government play a major role in Nigeria's drug trade. Prominent among the drug traders are Ibo networks, possibly working under the protection of various Northern groups. It is perhaps most likely that the Nigerian drug networks have maintained their relative autonomy and that the main factions which participated in the government of the country simply levy an unofficial tax or tithe on drugs which transit via Nigeria and charge the traders for various services, while drawing the greater part of their personal revenue from other sectors, especially oil. The drug trade is said to be viewed with disdain by the leading aristocratic families of the North which have

dominated the country's politics since independence, or at least by the older generations among them.<sup>11</sup>

To develop a full criticism of these theories of the Nigerian state would be an exercise in its own right and such an effort is not attempted here. Many components of the theories outlined above are clearly relevant to the understanding of the Nigerian state and drawn on in this analysis. Others are dated and have been superseded by theoretical, ideological, or political developments. The thesis of the "felonious state" remains unsubstantiated, based as it is on the reckless use of "perhaps," "probably," and such sleights of the pen to convert rumours and bigoted beliefs into "facts." It is largely based on self-acknowledged speculation, wild generalizations and an uncritical reliance on U.S. State Department sources which the authors themselves note are of dubious reliability. Importantly, the understanding of Nigerian political dynamic in this "theorization" is simplistic, dated, and deeply flawed. In some respects, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this sort of slipshod theorization is anything but racism and arrogance dressed up in pseudo-scientific garb.

Outside strictly academic discourse, Nigerian statehood and nationhood have been highly contested issues on account of the economic and political crises inflicted on the country by successive military regimes since 1983. Nigerian analysts are increasingly forced to ask the question: what is a nation?<sup>12</sup> This soul-searching is also reflected in the popular consciousness; in popular Nigerian parlance, the "national question" is a burning issue which continues to occupy much journalistic footage. Many continue to agonize on "Project Nigeria" with Wole Soyinka pointing out that "we may actually be witnessing a nation on the verge of extinction."<sup>13</sup> Others, on the other hand, proclaim the "non-negotiability" of Nigerian territorial integrity from the rooftops. At the heart of this search for a national meaning and direction are very conflicting perspectives on the nature and direction of the Nigerian state. Understanding the nature of the Nigerian state is both an academic and a political project.

Understanding the nature of Nigerian society and the Nigerian state must necessarily proceed by paying due attention to the two most crucial elements determining the character of the society; its size and its diversity. With over 108 million inhabitants and over 300 ethnic groups, Nigeria is one of the most complex societies in the world. In the context of this complexity, a comprehensive exploration of the Nigerian state must take account of the important distinction between long-run and short-term factors. Such an analysis must also be sensitive to structural and contingent characteristics. Two sources of historical and theoretical literature are useful for such an exploration. The first is Abdullahi Smith's work on state formation in central Sudan.<sup>14</sup> The second is Migdal's work on state in society.<sup>15</sup> The strength of Smith's position is that the history of state formation in Africa's past should constitute one of the resources for the construction and institutionalization of contemporary African states. Two crucial lessons can be isolated: the multiethnic nature of these pre-colonial states and

the central concern with the accommodation of difference. Implicit in Smith's analysis is the recognition of the difficulty of state consolidation in the particular context of these African societies.<sup>16</sup> This need for a "historico-cultural legitimacy" for the emergent African state was pointed out as far back as 1953 by the eminent Nigerian historian, Kenneth Dike.<sup>17</sup> This approach seems eminently more rooted and more productive than the approach by Chabal and Daloz who dismiss it by refuting the suggestion that "any relatively centralized political structure presiding over the destiny of the peoples of a given geographical area can be assimilated to a state. . . . The state is not merely the inevitable result of the evolution of a system for the regulation of power within the social order."<sup>18</sup>

Instead, Chabal and Daloz fix their gaze decidedly on the *institutional* matrix of the modern Weberian state, even as they assert that African political systems "are only superficially akin to those of the West."<sup>19</sup> Setting out with such a programmed mind-set devoid of historical context, it is little wonder that all they can find in contemporary Africa are "weak" and "vacuous" states.

The historical insights and approach derivable from Abdullahi Smith's work can be fruitfully augmented, for the contemporary period, by the state in society approach advocated by Migdal. Even when these can not be made explicit in this analysis, we should be mindful of the "the rich social drama that has influenced processes of social change in low-income countries" (Migdal, 1994, 3). Importantly, Migdal emphasizes the complex ways in which the state and society relate to and react against each other. He points out the need to dis-aggregate the different levels of the state and finally, he draws attention to the contingent nature of social power in the processes of state formation.

In looking at the Nigerian state, I try to combine these two perspectives. This analysis will seek to concentrate on the processes of state formation, the organization of domination and resistance, and the general ways in which the state has sought to establish its control, hegemony, legitimation, autonomy, and basis of revenue. The emphasis is on the process. More specifically, *three* structural and contingent elements are isolated, which, taken together, give a clearer understanding of the nature of the Nigerian state. These are, first, the deep ethno-regional divisions in the society which are also reflected in the structure and organization of the state. Second, there is the specific role of the military in Nigerian society and state, particularly between 1966 and 1999. Militarism and authoritarianism have become complicating factors in the process of state formation and consolidation. Third, there is the complexity posed by the reliance of the state on oil revenue and the distributive logic of a rentier state. These three themes are closely related, not least by nationalist rhetoric. In the following three sections, I isolate and analyze these themes from a historical perspective. In the final section, I attempt to recast the Nigerian state against the background of the themes and the previous attempts at theorizing the state.

## DIVERSITY AND THE BURDEN OF HISTORY

A central feature of Nigerian society is its fragmentation along ethno-regional lines. A grasp of pre-colonial and colonial histories, or the perceptions of them in the contemporary period, is crucial in understanding this fundamental element in Nigerian political life because these histories have created a "path dependence" for the process of state formation. In many ways, the ethnicization of power and politics is contrary to pre-colonial experience. Pre-colonial Nigeria was composed of a number of socio-political constellations whose history, structure, dynamic, and relationships cannot be fully covered in this submission. Briefly stated, there was the Sokoto Caliphate, established about 1804 when the Fulani Jihad overthrew the erstwhile Hausa states of north-central Nigeria. Also included in this extensive empire were the Nupe and the Ilorin Yoruba to the south. It stretched from Sokoto in the extreme northwest of Nigeria, to Yola in the central east; from Katsina in the north, to Ilorin in the southwest. To the east of the Caliphate, and historically opposed to it, was the rump of the Bornu empire around Lake Chad. To the south of the Caliphate was the ruin of the Old Oyo empire which was being propped up by the militaristic new state of Ibadan. Central to the rise and supremacy of Ibadan was the Yoruba Civil War which followed in the wake of the collapse of Oyo. The final spark which signified the collapse of Oyo was the revolt of the leading Oyo General, Afonja, based in Ilorin and the subsequent conversion of Ilorin into an Emirate under the Caliphate. To the east of what was Old Oyo lay the Benin empire. Along the coast, particularly to the southeast, rose a number of principalities and kingdoms, which grew out of their control of the slave trade. Between and betwixt these political formations of differing character lay many societies based on clan, village, or "stateless" systems of governance.

Virtually all of the state forms and some of the other communities were composed of people from different linguistic and even racial origins. Importantly, political organization did not overlap with linguistic boundaries and even large units with some linguistic unity were often politically divided and differentiated internally. The scourge of "tribalism" was not a natural state. On the other hand, the seeds of ethno-regional fragmentation in Nigeria can also be traced to the same pre-colonial period. The *potential* for conflict between the evolving identities which were later brought together under British rule existed even before the formal imposition of colonial rule. The pre-colonial period therefore has a dual and contradictory influence. The potential for discord apparent in the pre-colonial system was more than realized under colonialism which had the intended and unintended consequence of accentuating the divisions between different groups, and converting conflict from a mere potential to a reality of everyday life. The long-run divisions along ethno-regional lines have not only been enduring, they have also become systemic; the divisions

have been reproduced in the state itself, giving a lie to the notion of a state standing above society.

The nature of pre-colonial antagonisms; the sequence and nature of contact with European colonialism; the reaction and responses of various states, communities, and social groups to the intrusion of European commerce, missionary activity, and administrative domination; and the unintended consequences of colonialism itself all combined to generate the divisiveness which continues to characterize the Nigerian state.

### Nationalist Historiography and Ethnogenesis

Nationalist historiography in Nigeria, particularly the sorts of narratives produced in the 1960s, suggest very strongly that pre-colonial Nigeria was a nation-state waiting to be born. Tracing patterns of commerce, of population movements and mingling, of religious and political communities, of cultural and ideological networks, and of different patterns of inter-dependence, this nationalist historiography points in the direction of overlapping patterns of interaction and the potential for unification. In any case, it is suggested that the precise scope of colonial unification was itself a recognition of that existing potential. It has even been suggested that linguistic and archeological data from ancient times—15,000 years ago—suggest that all the peoples in the current Nigerian political space share the same cultural tradition and “collective heritage.”<sup>20</sup>

This nationalist narrative is not entirely without foundation. It certainly reflects *one* aspect of the pre-colonial dynamic and it is obvious why succeeding generations of nationalist historians and political analysts should emphasize that particular perspective. Equally important, but not so well articulated, is the way in which pre-colonial dynamics have had the contingent effect of undermining the cohesion of the *future* Nigerian state. Here, I pin-point only two examples. Ekeh points out that in pre-colonial times the communities of the coastal states in southeast Nigeria were able, through the monopolization of coastal trade and European firearms, to impose their will over their more numerous neighbours in the hinterland.<sup>21</sup> These groups later developed distinct ethnicities under colonial rule, the people of the hinterland evolving a pan-Igbo identity, while the coastal communities developed an Ijaw identity. These two groups found themselves in the colonial construct of Eastern Nigeria. Ekeh suggests that with the introduction of electoral politics in the 1950s, the pre-colonial history fueled a measure of animosity on the part of the Igbo against the Ijaw who were now a numerical and a political “minority.” And “minority” status is a central problem in the consolidation of the Nigerian state.<sup>22</sup>

My second example relates to what Peel refers to as Yoruba ethnogenesis.<sup>23</sup> Read in conjunction with Law, we get a complex and detailed cultural history of the emergence of a pan-Yoruba ethnic identity beginning in the mid to late nineteenth century, well before the Nigerian state was founded.<sup>24</sup> Certain elements of this complex cultural history clearly contradict the dominant perspec-

tive of nationalist historiography. The cultural work that formed the foundation of a pan-Yoruba identity from numerous other lower-level identities was the work of a local Christian intelligentsia whose very existence suggests the critical importance of contingency in the historical evolution of African societies. These were usually ex-slaves from the general linguistic area now called Yorubaland who still spoke a form of the language and had acquired western education and converted to Christianity in the New World or in Freetown where some former slaves had resettled. Indeed, Law suggests that the very idea of giving a generic name and common identity to speakers of these related languages might have started in the New World, where they were referred to as “Lucumi” and later, in Freetown, where they were referred to as “Aku,” with an Aku King. The Christian intelligentsia played a critical role in the fruition of that incipient New World identity in what we now call Yorubaland. Their cultural production, in English and Yoruba, has been described as “exceptional, if not indeed unique” amongst sub-Saharan African peoples.<sup>25</sup> Prominent leaders of this intelligentsia were the Johnson brothers, Samuel and Obadiah. They were of Oyo or “real Yoruba” background and were instrumental in the extension of that identity to the other sub-groups. Samuel Johnson’s *History of the Yorubas* has been rightly described as “still the most important single work on Yoruba history.”<sup>26</sup>

A spur for this cultural elite was the rising tide of colonial racism in Lagos in the closing years of the nineteenth century and their anti-racism has prompted nationalist historians to claim the activities of this cultural elite as part of the “origins of Nigerian nationalism.” (What is often ignored, however, is that this “project of unification” which sought to create a common identity for various related Yoruba groups, also contained within it claims of distinctiveness which tended to emphasize the *difference* between the emergent Yoruba identity and other identities in modern day Nigeria: )

The Yoruba claim to distinctiveness was based, not only on indigenous linguistic and cultural differences, but also, and critically, on their primacy in the process of conversion to Christianity, and more generally in the acquisition of European education and culture, which was implicitly held to have been prefigured by the high level of traditional Yoruba culture. . . .

The claim to Yoruba primacy in “civilization” was also linked to a claim of special relationship with the principal foreign purveyors of “civilization” to Africa, the British. This idea was explicitly formulated by Samuel Johnson, who claimed for the Yoruba a position of primacy among Africans comparable to that enjoyed by the British among Europeans.<sup>27</sup>

As the British colonizing enterprise extended beyond the limited confines of the coast, the role of the Yoruba cultural elite as “civilized allies” in the propagation of British Enlightenment came under increasing attack. One source of attack was the rising tide of colonial racism. Another was the integration of

other African groups into the British colonial machinery. In particular, the cultural elite reacted against the reliance on Hausa troops by the British:

It was the British government's preference for the use of Hausa troops (recruited mainly from former slaves) which alarmed Yoruba opinion, especially when British military intervention and rule extended into the interior in the 1890s. The practice was especially provocative, since it recalled the role which had been played by revolted Muslim Hausa slaves, in alliance with the rebellious Afonja of Ilorin, in the collapse of Oyo in the early nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

When the British decided in 1894 to leave Ilorin in the emirate system instead of returning it to the Yoruba fold, there was "considerable bitterness on both sides of the demarcation line."<sup>29</sup>

Contrary to the claims of nationalist historians, there was nothing inevitable about the exact scope of the territories unified to form modern Nigeria. If anything, integrative pre-colonial patterns of commercial, cultural, ecological, military, and religious interaction were often counter-balanced by perceptions of threat and difference. There is nothing to suggest that the groups forced into the borders of the colonial Nigerian state were realizing a "natural" unity. If anything, such perceptions of threat and difference continue to this day and have been given ample amplification since independence in 1960.

Glossing over the obvious internal tensions of the historical process, nationalist historiography sort to produce *one* "patriotic" and "natural" version of the historical dynamic of the societies that were later brought under the Nigerian state. In reality, however, much of this history involves some amount of contradictory movements or "seeing double."<sup>30</sup> It is not just that the relationship between different ethnic, regional, and social groups involved differing levels of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and rejection; even within each group, intra-group dynamic was far from settled. If again we take the example of the Yoruba, we see a continuous struggle against "tribal" sentiments within the group; this is in reference to the original sub-group identities from which the pan-Yoruba identity was created. Till today, the Yoruba tend to refer to themselves as a "race" and the struggle between the interests of the "race" and its composite "tribal" units continues to have serious local and national political significance. Then there is the complicating fact that at least 50 percent of the Yoruba population are Muslims, living with an ethnic identity and ideology that is so explicitly tied to Christianity and the Western Enlightenment. This has had implications for the definition of Yoruba identity—while the founding cultural elite were Christians trying to establish their Yorubanness, the contemporary Yoruba Muslims seem to be moving in the opposite direction by trying to assert their Islamic identity. In most Yoruba communities in contemporary Nigeria, politics has two "faces," one internal to the community, the other external, dealing with the wider state system.

The fractiousness of the contemporary Nigerian state must be traced to this

long-standing, but continuing history of inclusion and exclusion, unification and differentiation, accommodation and rejection.<sup>31</sup> This is the original template for the emergence of the Nigerian state.

### The House Lugard Built

Another reason for the fractiousness of the Lugardian Nigerian state was the deliberate, and sometimes unintended, consequences of colonial domination and state construction. This is the reason often advanced by nationalist commentators for the weaknesses of the Nigerian state. Here, we can briefly examine the divisive—and the integrative—forces unleashed within the Nigerian state and society by the colonial experience. (The colonial occupation started in 1861 with the declaration of Lagos as a crown colony.) To the east was the Oil Rivers Protectorate, declared in 1891 and covering the coastal areas between Benin and Calabar, with the exception of parts of the lower Niger which were run by the Royal Niger Company (RNC), granted a charter in 1886. Though its headquarters was in the southern town of Asaba, the RNC laid claim to the territories of northern Nigeria on behalf of the British Crown. In 1893, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was renamed the Niger Coast Protectorate. By 1900, Lagos colony had been untied with some of its hinterland to create the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos. In 1898, the Selbourne Committee was established to chart British policy towards the territories she was laying claim to in the region. It was this committee that recommended the eventual amalgamation of the territories currently covered by Nigeria. It further suggested that this "administrative federation" be divided into two provinces: the Sudan Province, which later became Northern Nigeria, and the Maritime Province, which became Southern Nigeria. This duality, which persists as an enduring fault-line in Nigerian politics and state, has its origins in this colonial suggestion.<sup>32</sup>

In 1900, the British proclaimed the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, made up largely of the RNC area of operation, and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, made up of the territories of the Niger Coast Protectorate and the Yoruba country to the north of the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos. In 1906, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos was merged with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was merged with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria to create the colonial Nigerian state. In 1939, the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was broken into two separate units, the Western and Eastern Provinces.

One immediate consequence of these series of amalgamations was the creation of a single economic and monetary space. The railway that was started in Lagos in 1898 was extended to other parts of the country, particularly to Kano by 1912. By 1950–1951, the railway network was carrying 5 million people per year, indicating a heightened level of interaction between the different regions and peoples.<sup>33</sup> In the 1950s, of the 31 million indigenous inhabitants of Nigeria, between 4 to 5 million were living in areas other than the ones to which they



were indigenous.<sup>34</sup> Land policy insisted on the preservation of "traditional" tenure leading to the discouragement of white settlers and even commercial plantations. Nigeria is reputed to have the lowest proportion of Europeans to Africans on the continent and this meant that the emergent economic space had some scope for African participation.<sup>35</sup> Summarizing the developments within this emergent space, Coleman points out their integrative significance:

In particular, the establishment of internal security, the development of communications and roads, and the imposition of a common currency permitted far greater mobility and social communication than had previously been possible. This in turn facilitated the growth of an internal exchange economy, transcending ethnic and political boundaries. . . .

All these new patterns of economic intercourse have contributed to the growth of integration and of interdependence, as well as the emergence of economic—and latterly political groups tending to support a territory-wide political system.<sup>36</sup>

Some even suggested that these integrative tendencies were a sufficient basis for the development of a unitarist, as opposed to a federalist, Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> In reality, however, the impact of these economic developments were not unambiguously integrative. Differences in geography, history, entrepreneurial opportunities and skills, cultural inclination, and history of contact with the European expansion meant that different ethnic and regional groups responded differently to the developing colonial economy, or were confronted with specific advantages or disadvantages at the same time as they were integrated into the economy. Central to the development of the colonial economy, therefore, was a profound process of *uneven* development which tended to generate *conflicting interests*, conflicts over resources, and even separatist tendencies. In this regard, the most salient division was between the Northern, Western, and Eastern Regions. Table 5.1 suggests the dimensions of the problem by the 1950s.

More importantly, the integrative effects of the economic system was consistently offset by the divisive consequences of colonial *political, social, and administrative* policies. Since the 1880s, the protectorates had been developing different political administrative systems, partly because of lack of overall coordination, but also because of the different outlooks of colonial officials on the spot. By 1912, the North and South were administered so differently that "they seemed more like the products of the influence of different ruling powers than the off-spring of the same Secretary of State, brought up by the same ministry, the Colonial Office."<sup>38</sup>

In the North, Lugardian Indirect Rule sought to develop the hierarchical emirate system into "native authorities." The emirate Northern populations were cast in the role of the "noble savage." Every effort was made to insulate the native authorities from external "modernist" influences that would destroy the "natural order" of emirate society. At play here were two principal tendencies. One was the nostalgic attempt to re-create, in places like colonial India and Northern

**Table 5.1**  
**Regional Differences in Agricultural Export Production and Per Capita Income in Nigeria<sup>39</sup>**

Item	Western Region	Eastern Region	Northern Region
<i>Agricultural Export Production</i>			
Value in Million pounds.	11.4	7.3	9.75
Value per capita in pounds.	2.8	1.4	0.72
Value per square mile in pounds.	249.0	159.0	34.0
<i>Per capita income</i>			
Value in pounds.	34.0	21.0	17.0

Nigeria, sentimental ideas about the rural ideal and a hierarchical social order which was fast disappearing in England itself. Secondly, there was the differential perception of Southern and Northern Nigeria by colonial officials. In the colonial mind, Southern Nigeria was often seen as pagan and barbarous. The early contact with Europe also meant a faster rate of socio-economic transformation through Christianization, the spread of western education, and western commerce. Colonial officials were often scathing in their condemnation of these "detrified" Africans, their "pretenses" of equality with the white man, and their "rowdy modernism." To create a political unit that could evolve a common identity, the amalgamation of 1914 had to bridge the political and administrative gulf that had already opened up between the Southern and Northern Regions as a result of this colonial perception and experience. This did not happen.

Quite rightly, Eleazu describes the amalgamation of 1914 as "a farce" calculated only at relieving "the British Treasury of the onus of having to finance the administration of Northern Nigeria."<sup>40</sup> Some central departments like the Medical, Public Works, and Agriculture were extended to the North, but the Lugardian system of indirect rule through native authorities remained intact and insulated, as much as possible, from any Southern influence. The same hostility to any Southern presence in the North continued. The Northern provincial system and its native administration was extended to the South, but the objective was administrative uniformity rather than the unity of the new country. The legal system in both regions remained separate. The land tenure system remained separate, with Southerners discouraged from holding land in the North. Clearly, amalgamation did not end separate development in colonial Nigeria; it continued to be seen as "a marriage of convenience between two incompatibles." According to Afigbo:

To such an extent did this dualism condition the outlook of the two teams of British administrators serving in the North and South, and to such an extent did it act as an irritant in relations between them that it became a standard joke in the 1930s that but for the Nigerians, the two teams would go to war against each other.<sup>41</sup>

by improved competition

This bifurcation in colonial political and administrative practice had important social repercussions. A serious gap opened up in the rates of socio-economic development between the North and the South. As Coleman points out, though the Northern Region had 54 percent of the population, by 1947 it had only 251 students in secondary schools.<sup>42</sup> This was 2.5 percent of total secondary school enrollment. In the same vein, in 1952, of the total population over seven years of age, 8.5 percent were literate in the roman script in all Nigeria, 16 percent in the Eastern Region, 18 percent in the Western Region, and only 2 percent in the Northern Region. Within the North itself, the so-called "pagan provinces" of the lower North had a literacy rating of 3.3 percent while the Moslem emirate far North had only 1.4 percent. Southerners living in the North continued to be restricted to the *sabon gari* or new towns specifically created for "native aliens." These strangers' quarters, because they were inhabited by a composite "native" population, could not initially be subjected to any "custom." They therefore fell under the jurisdiction of the European station magistrate, while the native authority was under the Political Officer. The attempt to insulate the North from the South was carried over into the relationship between the indigenous quarters and the *sabon gari*. In 1925, the governor of Nigeria had to lament the situation:

So jealous of one another's [Political Officer and magistrate] rights and powers were these two authorities that the Government police stationed in the township were required to abandon the pursuit of a burglar the moment he crossed the boundary into the area under the charge of the Native Administration . . . and vice versa.<sup>43</sup>

Lugardian Nigeria was built on this central opposition between the Northern and Southern halves of the country. When the Western and Eastern Regions were created in 1939, a similar, but relatively less intense, polarization also took place between both regions. Naturally, these colonial divisions have compounded the fears and apprehensions derivable from the pre-colonial dynamic. Prejudices and stereotypes have multiplied, leaving a deep mark on the political psychology and process. It is this essentially Lugardian legacy which lies at the heart of the fractious nature of the Nigerian state. Ethnic politics does not just indicate a lack of integrative political leadership and vision, it is also a reflection of fundamental and historical divisions within society.

By 1946, the three administrative divisions were being touted as the "natural" constitutive units of the country by the colonial governor, Sir Arthur Richards, who then went on to give them further constitutional backing. Significantly, each region was closely tied to one of the three majority ethnic groups in the country: the Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Christian Igbo in the East, and the religiously mixed Yoruba in the West. Nigeria moved towards federalism, not so that erstwhile autonomous units could come together, but because the ethno-regional blocs wanted sufficient "elbow room" for their divergent aspirations and interests. The politics of ethnic differences was central to the party formation processes, the nature of party programmes, and the style of political

leadership.<sup>44</sup> The three "different colonies" produced three "different nationalist movements" with no unifying icon. Nigerian decolonization did not produce an Nkrumah, instead, each ethno-regional bloc produced its own cultural hero. Between 1946 and 1958, Nigerian constitutional development revolved around the efforts of each of these political blocs to consolidate its hold on its home region while simultaneously capturing power at the federal center. The result was an unsteady triangulation—and eventual strangulation—of the political process and the state. Communalism and clientelism became the major levers of the political process, with the majority ethno-regional blocs the main beneficiaries. The minority ethnic groups, found in all the regions, were the first to bear the brunt of this development. Having secured their regional fiefdoms, each ethno-regional bloc struggled to secure a role at the federal center, which quickly became a continuing zone of contention between the different blocs. The unsteady system lurched from one crisis to another between independence in 1960 and 1966 when the military intervened in the political process.

#### FORCE IN THE NIGERIAN STATE SYSTEM

The divisive and unsteady nature of the Nigerian state has been further complicated by military intervention. When the military intervened in January 1966, it claimed to be a national and patriotic force out to correct the ills of civilian politicians. But the military was soon caught up in the divisive tendencies of the Nigerian state. Part of the reason has to do with developments within the military institution.<sup>45</sup> Others point in the direction of the penetration of the military by pressures deriving from the wider socio-political system. The result was another coup in July 1966 and Civil War in 1967. These developments had two serious consequences for the nature of the Nigerian state. Firstly, they unleashed an enduring authoritarian streak, which found its highest expression in the brutal and banal Abacha dictatorship of 1993 to 1998. First the collegiate officer corp, and subsequently, individual generals like Babangida and Abacha, seized control of the state machinery, subjected it to their whims and caprices, and deformed the normal evolution of the political process. The end product are the process of "transition without end" and intense socio-political crises. It is only with the limited democratization of 1998/99 that this authoritarian edifice is being gradually transformed. The second consequence of the military occupation of the state is the way the militarized state has been assimilated into the rivalry between the various ethno-regional blocs in the country. Increasingly, the military is identified with Northern political interests and it has been accused of using its hierarchical structure to undermine the autonomy of other ethno-regional blocs and foist on them a northern hegemony.

It is this explicit and widespread identification of the military institution with particular ethno-regional interests that has intensified the unsteady nature of the Nigerian state. In a sense, people were only waking up to an ethnicized logic that had characterized the military institution from the start. Right from their

origin in the second half of the nineteenth century, the units that later became the Nigerian army were marked by clear racial and ethnic characteristics. For example, at a point in its history, the Royal Niger Constabulary, which later became part of the Nigerian Army, had five British officers, two "native" officers, and 404 men. Yet the annual expenditure on the five Europeans was 10,000 pounds sterling, while the 406 "natives" attracted an expenditure of only 7,700 pounds sterling.<sup>46</sup> Such was the racial domination of the army that it was the last colonial institution to be indigenized. By Independence in 1960, 83 percent of the officer corp was British; a British officer remained head of the army till 1965. Even at the level of non-commissioned officers, British NCOs had higher salaries, separate facilities, and better conditions relative to their Nigerian counterparts.<sup>47</sup>

Even more striking was the ethnicized nature of the various fighting units. The Lagos Constabulary, established in 1865 by Glover, was made up exclusively of runaway Hausa slaves; it was variously referred to as "Glover's Hausas" or the "Hausa Force." The second unit of the yet-to-be-established Nigerian army was the Royal Niger Constabulary, established by the RNC. Though this unit was used mainly in the Niger Valley, it deliberately recruited its troops from African groups from outside the area. The bulk of the men were Fante from Ghana, Yoruba, and Sierra Leoneans. It was much later that Hausa, Nupe, and Igala recruits were included. The Tiv, who remained implacable enemies of the Company, were refused. Furthermore, there was a conscious policy of ethnic organization within the Constabulary:

From the beginning, the Fante, Yoruba and Sierra Leonean recruits were organised into separate sections and companies. This system was also adopted when most of the men were recruited from within Nigeria from among the Yoruba, Hausa, Igala, Nupe and other groups. The advantage in this system was that by exploiting their ethnic differences and antagonism it was easy for the few British officers to exercise effective control over them. In times of crisis, for example, it was easy to isolate the group affected and to use one ethnic group against the other.<sup>48</sup>

A third component unit was the Niger Coast Constabulary, which was so notorious that the local inhabitants of its area of operation in the lower Niger Valley nicknamed the force the "Forty Thieves." Here also, we find the deliberate use of recruits from outside the area to engage in military subjugation: "The strength of the force employed was sixteen officers and four hundred and fifty men, ninety-five percent of whom were Yorubas."<sup>49</sup>

By the time these forces were constituted into the Nigerian Regiment of the West African Frontier Force in 1898, this ethnic pattern of recruitment, organization, and deployment had been firmly established. Distinctions were made between the "martial" ethnic groups who were encouraged to join the army and the non-martial groups who were liable to "bolt in panic" during military encounters. If colonial prejudice acted as a differentiating *pull* factor, the differ-

ential experience of colonial occupation acted as a differentiating *push* factor. In some areas, opportunities were opened up through the availability and spread of western education, the cultivation of export crops, and avenues for commercial entrepreneurship. Poor pay and conditions and the perception of soldiers as runaway slaves and people of similar low status tended to reinforce the resistance of groups with other opportunities. As Miners points out, military recruitment tended to be concentrated amongst particular ethnic groups; the Zuru area of Sokoto province, the minority groups of the Middle Belt, the area around Bornu, and the minority areas of eastern Nigeria. Particular attention was paid to the areas in the North to the almost total exclusion of the areas in the South.<sup>50</sup> By the time of the first coup in 1966, estimates suggest that Northerners constituted about 80 percent of the "other ranks" of the army and about two-thirds of this was drawn from the Middle Belt and the Zuru areas; Easterners predominated amongst the "tradesmen," since those positions required some level of western education and modern skills.<sup>51</sup>

This ethno-regional structuration of the military institution was further complicated in the terminal colonial period when attempts at indigenizing the preponderantly British officer corp started in earnest. Contrary to the rapid indigenization of the civil service and the police, the pace within the army was very slow. As Miners argues, this was partly because the Nigerian army remained part of the British army till very late in the 1950s. This meant that British army standards of recruitment were applied and this tended to favour the better-educated Southern "tradesmen" who were promoted from the NCO ranks and given full commissions. Between 1949 and 1954, the majority of Nigerian officers, 71 percent, were former NCOs. After 1955 this percentage dropped as better educated recruits, usually school certificate holders from the high population density areas of Igboland, joined the officer corps. As a result of rapid, but late, indigenization, the percentage of British officers in the army had dropped from 83 percent in 1960 to 11 percent in 1962.<sup>52</sup> And most of these Nigerian officers were Southern "tradesmen" promoted from the NCO ranks or educated Easterners. Increasingly, the officer corp was dominated by people of Igbo ethnic origin; by 1960, 61.3 per cent of the Nigerian officers were Igbo speaking,<sup>53</sup> creating a situation in which the "other ranks" and the officer corps were dominated by distinct and different ethno-regional groups.

The ethnic composition of the officer corp was cause for concern to Northern politicians. Some, like Abdullahi Magajin Musawa urged for equal regional representation on the floor of the House of Representatives.<sup>54</sup> These moves were resisted by the then Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who insisted that merit should continue to be the criteria for recruitment into the officer corp. With increasing Igbo dominance of the corp, the perceived threat by the largely Hausa-Fulani political establishment heightened, leading to the reversal of Balewa's position and the introduction of regional quotas in 1962 by Mohammedu Ribadu, the defense minister. The quota stipulated that 50 percent of the intake should be from Northern Nigeria, while the West and the East had 25 percent

each. This quota system had the effect of further complicating the ethnic and regional composition of the officer corp:

By 1962 when the quota system was introduced, of the 157 Nigerians who had got their commissions, roughly two-thirds were from the Eastern Region. . . . The rationale and effect of the quota system are perhaps best shown by contrasting the distribution by rank and region of those recruited into the commissioned ranks between 1955 and 1960 . . . and 1963/64. . . . Of those recruited in the former period, who by 1965 had risen to the ranks of Lieutenant-Colonel and Major, 36 percent of the former category were from the East, 14 percent from the West, 21 percent from the North and 29 percent from the Mid-West. Among the rank of Major, 66 percent came from the East, 22 percent from the West and 6 percent from the North and the Mid-West respectively. In contrast, of the 163 commissioned in 1963/64 and who were Second-Lieutenants by 1965, 25 percent were from the East, 19 percent came from the West, 42 percent from the North and 14 percent from the Mid-West.<sup>55</sup>

Dudley further points out the pattern and implications of the process of ethno-regional structuration of the army:

The rate of its career liberalization and the effects of the quota system emerged a pyramidally structured army. . . . At the top of the pyramid, the level of Colonel and above, Westerners, mainly Yoruba, predominated. They were followed . . . by Easterners, who were mainly Ibo, occupying the ranks of Lieutenant-Colonels and Majors. At the bottom . . . in the ranks between Second-Lieutenants and Captains, came the Northerners, in the main of "Middle Belt" . . . , the same group who also filled . . . the rank and file. From this relative "fit" between strata and region . . . we might expect two possible outcomes should the military be unable to maintain its organizational boundaries: first, that the military was unlikely to be capable of acting collectively . . . secondly, and conversely, that the different strata would react differently to the stimulus making for boundary fragmentation.<sup>56</sup>

When the first coup took place in January 1966, the impact of the regional and generational tensions within the strata was clearly felt. Most of the coup makers were Igbo Majors from the second layer, and most of their victims were particularly Northern and some Western officers from the first layer, leading to an ethnic interpretation of the coup. In the counter-coup of July 1966, most of the victims were Igbo officers of the first and second layers, while their killers were Northern officers mainly of the third layer. The Civil War was to see to the total elimination of Igbo officers from the army as most of those who survived the July counter-coup joined the rebel Biafran army. From the end of the Civil War in 1970, the officer corp has been largely dominated by Northern, and to a lesser extent, Western officers. Importantly, however, the Northern officers have tended to dominate the most sensitive sectors of the military institution: artillery, intelligence, signals, armoured corp, and infantry while Western officers tend to dominate the support corps such as the medical, education,

and training corps. Most COAS—chief of army staff—in direct operational control of the army have been from the North; the only three non-northerners to have held the post are Adeyinka Adebayo (1964), David Ejoor (1971), and Alani Akinrinade (1979). Since 1979, the 13 COAS have been from the North. It is instructive that Ejoor had occasion to complain that his tenure as COAS was not being recognized by the military establishment who have tried to remove pictures of him from the gallery of past COAS. On his part, Alani Akinrinade advocated the possible succession of the Yoruba from Nigeria in the face of what he perceives as Northern domination under the Abacha dictatorship.

Even the political control of the military has largely been in the hands of Northern politicians. For virtually all of the country's independent history, the minister of defense has always come from the North. Even Akanbi Oniyangi, the Yoruba minister of defense under Shagari, is a northern Yoruba from the emirate of Ilorin. It is obvious therefore that there is a clear ethno-regional dimension to the composition and control of the military institution. In the later part of Babangida's dictatorship, and more so under Abacha's tyrannical rule, this aspect of the military institution increasingly impressed itself on the popular consciousness of the junta's opponents in the South. Under military authoritarianism, it was virtually impossible to establish the sorts of compromises that are sorely needed to begin to address the problems of the Nigerian state. If anything, the nature and composition of the military institution itself became one of the most divisive issues in Nigerian politics.

The military factor in the state formation process has had a number of tangible effects. Firstly, by successfully containing the Biafran bid for secession in 1967–1970, the military established a major psychological barrier to future attempts at fragmentation. The state may continue to be divisive, and its component units and communities may continue to squabble against each other and against the state. All know, however, that there is an intangible line beyond which nobody is *expected* to cross in pursuit of fragmenting the country. And this expectation, in my view, is generally held in the country, and has been sorely tested under the Abacha tyranny, particularly in the southwest and in the Niger Delta. Secondly, the military has been central to the constitutional development process. Though much of this effort can be rightly described as "constitution-mongering without constitutionalism," they nevertheless represent efforts at evolving a groundnorm of sorts for the political community.<sup>57</sup> As Kirk-Greene ponts out, these are largely "constitutions of remedy" trying, in different ways and with differing degrees of success, to remedy some of the ills of the past. It is also noteworthy that the only generally accepted national icon Nigeria has is General Murtala Mohammed. On the negative side, the military factor has unleashed an authoritarian streak that has embedded a mentality of impunity within the system. Secondly, the military institution itself has been drawn into the promotion of personal and communal interests, further complicating the divisive tendency within the state. Thirdly, the structural disjuncture between the military and civil society created problems for democratization and state consolidation. In the post-

1983 period, the main antidote against the military usurpation of the state is a civil society that has, for historical and structural reasons, been based in the South, particularly the Southwest.<sup>58</sup> The perception of a Northern military against a Southern civil society fed into the extant cleavages and fears within the system, making democratization a difficult process. Fourthly, the military initiated the failed programme of state capitalism in the 1970s, ending up instead with a highly disarticulated and corruption-ridden economy.

### PATRONAGE, RENTS, AND GOVERNANCE

The nature of the Nigerian political economy has also influenced the process of state formation. The mercantilist nature of the colonial economy relied on peasant production of agricultural exports in exchange for consumer goods traded by European commercial firms. Attempts by lower level Nigerian entrepreneurs to find a foothold in the commercial system was one of the factors that fueled the nationalist movement starting from the 1930s. In the 1940s, the colonial administration established the Marketing Boards through which peasant surpluses were directly extracted by the state for "development." With self-government in the 1950s, nationalist politicians saw the boards' funds as a veritable source for their projects of personal, class, and national advancement. In this process of squeezing the peasantry to meet other ends, the nationalist inheritors of the state were simply following colonial precedent. In exchange for political support, individuals and whole communities could be expected to benefit from government projects, grants, scholarships, and contracts. Conversely, opponents could be denied the same. The government also controlled trading and import licenses, the allocation of government land, and the power of bureaucratic employment. With partial decolonization from the 1950s, the institutions and processes through which the colonial administration serviced the needs of European commercial firms and promoted "development" were deployed in the construction and consolidation of patronage networks by the nationalist elite. Patron-client relationships developed, tying individuals and whole communities to particular politicians or political parties. Ethno-regional fissures meant that politics quickly became the scramble by various communal groups for a "proper share" of the "national cake." Much of what has been characterized as the "prebendal" nature of the post-colonial Nigerian state have their roots in the colonial state.

In the period after 1970, the military government of Yakubu Gowon, backed by oil boom petro-dollar and an interventionist bureaucracy, sought to carry out a national capitalist transformation of society. Efforts at industrialization and national infrastructural development were made. This effort at state capitalism soon lost steam, intensifying the reliance on oil revenues and accentuating the rentier and distributive nature of the post-1970 state. Revenue from oil has seriously transformed the nature of the Nigerian state. Though prospecting for oil started in 1908, it was not until 1956 that the first commercial oil find was

**Table 5.2**  
Nigerian Crude Oil Production, 1958–1992 (Thousands of Barrels Daily)<sup>59</sup>

Year	'000 b/d	% share of World Total	Year	'000 b/d	% share of World Total
1958	5	0.03	1976	2,065	3.44
1959	10	0.05	1977	2,095	3.34
1960	20	0.09	1978	1,920	3.04
1961	55	0.23	1979	2,300	3.50
1962	70	0.27	1980	2,055	3.27
1963	75	0.27	1981	1,440	2.42
1964	120	0.41	1982	1,285	2.25
1965	275	0.87	1983	1,235	2.18
1966	420	1.22	1984	1,385	2.39
1967	320	0.87	1985	1,475	2.57
1968	140	0.35	1986	1,465	2.44
1969	540	1.23	1987	1,290	2.15
1970	1,085	2.25	1988	1,365	2.18
1971	1,530	3.01	1989	1,635	2.56
1972	1,815	3.39	1990	1,780	2.75
1973	2,055	3.51	1991	1,895	2.95
1974	2,260	3.86	1992	1,850	2.90
1975	1,785	3.21			

made, exports starting in 1958.<sup>60</sup> However, it was not till after 1970, after the Civil War, that oil revenue began to have a decisive influence on public finance (see Table 5.2). The failure of state capitalist transformation meant continued reliance on oil.

Before 1966, each region tended to rely on its agricultural exports, guaranteeing a measure of fiscal autonomy and fiscal federalism. After 1970 oil production and receipts increasingly dominated public revenue, creating a centralized "national cake" and weakening regional fiscal capabilities based on a diminishing agricultural income. The scramble for individual and communal accumulation now took on a frenzied turn. Fiscal centralization also exacerbated the winner-take-all tendencies engendered by ethno-regional cleavages. Projects of class and regional accumulation were supported by sectarian political mobilization. Oil revenue also constitutes the basis for the mindless mismanagement and corruption that is evident in Nigeria. Fiscal irresponsibility and mismanagement continues to characterize the Nigerian state. The impact of expanded production on oil revenue after 1970 is shown in Table 5.3.

Nigeria has been effectively transformed into a centralized rentier state in the process, with the resultant decay of the erstwhile agrarian bases of the state, based on semi-autonomous regional production. This fiscal centralization was achieved through the abandonment of the principle of derivation in revenue allocation and the assertion of federal supremacy under military fiat. This centralization should also be understood against the centralization implicit in the military hierarchization of the state, and the fragmentation of the country into numerous mendicant states reliant on federal favours and handouts.

**Table 5.3**  
**Oil Export Revenues and as Share of Total Export Receipts, Various Years**  
**1970–1992 (in \$ Millions and Percent)<sup>61</sup>**

Year	Oil Export Revenues (Millions \$)	Oil Revenue as Share of Total Export Receipt %
1970	724	58.01
1973	3,054	84.67
1974	9,006	92.87
1975	7,761	93.18
1979	15,702	93.44
1980	24,933	96.14
1985	12,564	95.80
1986	5,667	94.21
1987	7,011	92.92
1988	6,286	91.14
1989	7,469	94.90
1990	13,180	97.01
1991	11,781	96.14
1992	11,642	97.94

For the purposes of this analysis, however, the most important implication of the rise of oil revenue is referred to as “rentier psychology” which has become ingrained in the workings of the Nigerian state. First, rentier psychology has heightened the communal and clientelistic struggle for access to resources. This has raised to a new pitch the struggle over the division of the proverbial “national cake.” It has also encouraged the emergence of political entrepreneurs whose sole political purpose is the manufacture of difference between and within communities as a basis for “constructing” their own “constituencies” and staking claims, for themselves and their clients, to portions of the “national cake.” This is the divisive logic behind the incessant demands for more and more states, even when the existing states are clearly not viable. And military despots like Babangida and Abacha have been quite willing to co-opt these demands for their own ends. Second, “rentier psychology” is closely connected to what Jane Guyer poignantly describes as “representation without taxation” in rural Nigeria.<sup>62</sup> When state revenue was derived from peasant agriculture, the rural populace had a stake in checking taxation levels and related state excesses. Especially in Northern and Western Nigeria, specifically peasant forms of politics emerged to contest state demands and promote rural interests. With the rentier state, the need for rural taxation has virtually disappeared; local governments make feeble efforts at raising some local revenue. Instead, rural populations are often called upon to participate in the politics of “transition,” leading to the phenomenon of representation without taxation. This has a tendency to monetize the electoral process, turning politics into a business. It has also accentuated communalist and clientelist trends as different blocs of political entrepreneurs jostle for office. The third implication of “rentier psychology” is that

it frees the Nigerian state from any need to justify itself and its programmes to a constituency that could be expected, ultimately, to foot the bill for these programmes. There is no compelling need to consult or seek compromises. Instead, oil revenue gives military authoritarianism the muscle to indulge itself in all manners fiscal and economic. Freed of this local “tether,” the Nigerian state, particularly from 1983 to 1999, has truly gone “ballistic” in its relation to its society.

### CONCLUSION: RECASTING THE NIGERIAN STATE

I have tried to draw attention to the most critical constitutive elements of the Nigerian state; its deep ethnic and regional divisions, the militarization of the state and the consequent distortion of its federalist foundations, and its rentier nature. In this concluding section, I return to the question of the stateness of the state; that is, its ability to exercise control and hegemony, its legitimation of its role in society, its ability to extract revenue, and its potential for autonomy. It is important to emphasize that the Nigerian state, indeed all post-colonial African states, should be properly seen as “works-in-progress,” given their short history. Within the context of some enduring structural features, these states have also been evolving. Either by force of circumstance, or as a result of deliberate choice, the Nigerian state has tried many experiments at “nation-building.” Many have failed, but all have left a tangible legacy of stateness. In recasting this trajectory, I attempt to connect it to the “theories” which sought, at different times, to explain it.

Starting from the colonial state, we can see a highly fragmented, mercantilist administrative state which created a single socio-political space but at the same time kept its constitutive units apart. This colonial template was reinforced by the processes of identity formation in pre-colonial and colonial society. The traditional rulers, integral to the Indirect Rule system, became the custodians of sectarian communal tendencies within the state. It was not really that these traditional rulers and their communities were defending “tradition.” As Mamdani points out, “native administration” was not just a *form* of administration, it became the *essence* of the colonial state.<sup>63</sup> Any community wanting to access the state had to speak the language of chieftancy and community. The colonial state set the pace when, in the 1920s, it sought to create “warrant chiefs” in areas that had no tradition of centralized authority. This logic has become so internalized in the Nigerian context that no self-respecting community will fail to create its own chieftancy. Even where there are established pre-colonial chieftancies, as in the emirate north, there is no shortage of sub-groups and sub-chiefs trying to break away from established suzerainty in order to create their own independent place in the sun.

This vibrant politics of chieftancy, which continues today, is as much about the imagination of “tradition,” as its preservation. Above all else, it is about the allocation of status and power at both the “internal” (community) and “external”

(state) levels. But the proper emphasis should not be placed on chieftancy as such, for the chiefs have been effectively emasculated in the constitutional and administrative reforms carried out since the terminal colonial period. The emphasis should be squarely placed on the maintenance or even "invention" of communities, a process which ensures the enduring nature of ethnic and communal cleavages in the state's administration and politics.

It was also the colonial state which created the institutions and patterns of resource extraction and distribution which forms the bedrock of the patron-client networks that have become endemic in the Nigerian state. Communalism, extraction of peasant surpluses, and the politics of patronage can be said to constitute the central features of the colonial and post-colonial states up to about 1966. The irony of the modernization perspective was that it expected this state, deeply embedded in the politics of communalism, to carry out the task of moving from "tradition" to "modernity."

In most of colonial Africa, the nationalist movement threw up a major iconic figure. This did not happen in post-colonial Nigeria. Nigeria has no Nkrumahs, no Kenyattas, and no Mandelas. Instead, each ethno-regional bloc produced its own cultural heroes; Sir Ahmadu Bello in the North, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe in the East, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo in the West. The only person who sought to speak for all, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, was generally regarded as weak. Though the post-colonial state continued to maintain the essential features of the colonial state, it fundamentally transformed the distribution of power within state and society. Decolonization was a "double movement" which not only transferred power from the colonial administrative machinery at the center to the nationalist elite, but also denuded various local authorities of their substance by continually transferring power and resources from local communities to the regional and federal centers. Power was therefore transferred to this nationalist elite from "above" and from "below." Ultimately, the effective hold of local communities has weakened relative to their grip in the high noon of the "native authorities." But this did not necessarily weaken extant communal ideologies, prevent the emergence of new ones, or terminate the cultivation of the politics of difference by political entrepreneurs.

The post-Civil War period from 1970 saw the emergence of the oil boom and the attempt at capitalist transformation. Nigeria clearly evolved into a rentier state, with all its implications for the processes of class and state formation. Most theories of the bourgeois state or the compradorial state derive from this experience. Though the attempt at capitalist transformation was an inchoate and incomplete business, it still left a deep mark on the nature of the state. Firstly, the profile and reach of the state greatly increased. The control capacity of the state was enhanced, and this was attenuated by its reliance on oil revenues and not peasant surpluses. This increased fiscal autonomy was further used to weaken regional and local power sources. But the state failed to transform itself beyond the existing logic of ethno-regional power calculus. It also failed to create an alternative productive base outside of oil production. Its statist orien-

tation replicated parastatals and bureaucracies which were often not efficient. These institutions also increased the attractiveness of the state as a political resource to be fought over by individual office-seekers and by groups held together by particularist ties. In the circumstance, hegemony continued to be a problem, leading to the weakening and fragmentation of political authority. The bureaucratic administrative system was also weakened by this logic. Many important oppositional political forces—trade unions, the students' movement, some peasant groups, and some ethnic groups—remain largely outside the ambit of the state apparatus. Bourgeois class formation continued apace, closely tied to state revenue. Corruption became a distinctive feature of the state.

Both radical and neo-liberal analysts have often emphasized some of the negative characteristics of this rentier state, dismissing it variously as compradorial or prebendal. What they often fail to point out, is the way in which the state formation process continued, even under these difficult circumstances. For example, it was in this period that a uniform three tier administrative structure was developed in the country. It was also the period in which a uniform electoral system was also developed. Before 1979, the electorate and political parties were structured strictly along regionalist lines. Furthermore, women did not have the right to vote in Northern Nigeria. The post-1970 period also saw the strengthening of genuinely pan-national institutions such as the trade unions, the students movement, and various professional organizations. Furthermore, the Nigerian state of the 1970s was a much stronger institution than its immediate post-colonial equivalent. The control capacity of the state increased, even as its administrative capacity and hegemony continued to be problematic.

From 1983, the Nigerian state entered a different phase in its evolution. This phase saw the intensification of economic crisis and the emergence of personalistic power. Because of their experiences of diversity and regional autonomy, most Nigerians had thought that their country was immune to the personalization of power apparent in many African states. The emergence of the "imperial presidency" first under Babangida and then under Abacha signalled a new centralization and personalization of power. The central features of this "presidential authoritarianism" remain in place, despite the return to civil rule in 1999. This period also saw the intensification of corruption, even as efforts were made to reduce the statist grip on the economy. The logic of petro-dollar rentierism overrode that of economic liberalization. The continuing centralization of the state, the emergence of personal "presidential autocracies," and the conflict over access to economic and political opportunities seriously exacerbated extant ethno-regional, religious, and inter-communal conflicts. On the whole, this has been a largely negative period for the state formation process. Administrative capacity has been weakened by personal rule and entrenched corruption. Political order broke down in many places, only to be maintained by naked force. The legitimacy of the state was seriously weakened, and its limited hegemony further threatened. This period also coincided with an intensified crime wave, including participation in the international drugs trade and international scams

locally known as "419." Is this a justification for the "felonious state" thesis? I don't think so. It would be equivalent to calling Belgium a "pedophilic state," just because some of its citizens, with some official complicity, have recently engaged in high-profile pedophile activities. We would sensibly refer to Russia as a "transitional state" and not a "mafia state."

But even the deplorable circumstance of the post-1983 period has had some redeeming features. It was not until 1991 that people of one ethnic origin could stand as candidates in areas to which they were not "indigenous." Increasingly, "non-indigenes" are being accorded due political recognition in many parts of the country though the ethnic basis of state citizenship remains unchanged. We have also seen the emergence of pro-democracy organizations and a fearless press, both committed to checking the excesses of the state and returning it to the path of rectitude. If there is one lesson from this period of Nigerian state formation, it is that the society has been able to generate, within itself, forces capable of standing in the way of a state that seemed at times to have taken leave of its senses. Many foreign analysts fail to appreciate the vitality and ingenuity of this civil society. As Nigeria returns to democratic governance, the creativity and resoluteness of this civil society will be a priceless resource. In many respects, the region-bound political dynamic of the 1950s has given way to a wider, more inclusive pan-Nigerian citizenship. But this citizenship continues to be highly contested.

The Nigerian state and society have also shown a remarkable capacity to grapple with problems of constitutional reform, creative constitution-making, and the elucidation, under African conditions, of the philosophical and institutional requirements of federalism. Though communalism and distributive politics remain at its core, the Nigerian state has shown the capacity to cope with the difficult problem of size and diversity, be it in the lack of triumphalism after the Biafran war, or in the more recent compromises which led to the Obasanjo presidency. It is also a state which takes very seriously its pan-African and global responsibilities; Nigeria is one of the countries with the longest and the most varied experience of peace-keeping under the banners of the UN, the OAU and ECOMOG.

There are many lessons to be learned from the history of the Nigerian state, but to my mind, the single most important one is about handling internal differences within the African state system. In this sense, Nigeria is both a negative and a positive example; a negative example in how not to entrench differences in the political process and the state structure, and a positive example in the sense of learning how to cope in the event of such an unfortunate development.

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