

# The Limits of Postcolonial Democratisation

*Decolonisation and the Persistence of Colonial Institutions in Nigeria*

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Thesis History of Politics and Society (GKMV17023)

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Submitted on June 20<sup>th</sup> 2022

13.684 words

## **ABSTRACT**

In the early 1960s, Nigeria was seen as an example of successful decolonisation, and when civil war broke out in 1967, the conflict was simplified and misunderstood as interethnic or religious violence. In reality, the failure of electoral democracy was the result of a complex history in which colonial legacy played a formative role. Using Wunyabari Maloba's concept of incomplete decolonisation, and source material consisting of colonial policy documents, correspondences and newspaper articles, this thesis explains how the persistence of colonial institutions inhibited the development of true and sustainable democracy in postcolonial Nigeria from 1960 to 1975.

Tracing political institutions, imposed by the British during the 1950s, this thesis analyses to what extent these institutions persisted during the first fifteen years of independence in Nigeria, and assesses how compatible they are with democratic values. The British paternalistic methods of "building democracy" seemed successful on the outside, but behind the façade of electoral democracy, colonial attitudes and institutions transferred to the First Republic. Some important traits of British colonialism that persisted in Nigeria include the flawed system of federalism, the intolerant stance against political opponents, and the disregard for public opinion. The political system had authoritarianism, tribalism and exclusion built in due to its colonial roots, which led to internal colonialism, and inhibited national unity and democratic party politics. The colonial institutions slowly tore the country apart, resulting in the devastating Biafran War and a vicious cycle of authoritarianism.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The decolonisation of African countries during the 1960s was a turning point in world history. As global empires came to an end, and ex-colonies gained their independence, new countries had to function as modern nation-states. However, many African ex-colonies were products of colonialism: a multitude of small kingdoms, made into a single colony by European colonisers, with arbitrary borders drawn to serve colonial interests. Nigeria is an example of such a country: the British colonised Lagos in 1861 and expanded into areas around the Niger river. When the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria were united in 1914, Nigeria became a single geographical entity that spanned a wide array of religious and ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup>

The period of decolonisation around 1960 was characterised by a hopeful atmosphere. It seemed as if newly independent African countries could start with a clean slate, free of the constraints of colonialism. However, hope quickly turned into disappointment as many of these countries' leaders resorted to authoritarian means in an effort to ensure stability. According to political scientist Claude Ake, this created a vicious cycle in which democratisation and prosperity became increasingly unlikely.<sup>2</sup> Today, many of the problems caused by the African postcolonial struggle for democracy still persist, but it would be too simple to assume that poverty and political instability are unsolvable problems, or that Africa is simply a backward continent. The assumption that postcolonial states started with a clean slate in the 1960s disregards the long history of colonial exploitation, and denies the possibility that the legacy of colonialism continued to inhibit democratisation of postcolonial states.

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Oladipo Ojo, 'Nigeria, 1914-2014: From Creation to Cremation?', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 23 (2014): 68–74.

<sup>2</sup> Claude Ake, 'The Unique Case of African Democracy', *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 69, no. 2 (1993): 240.

## 1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis aims to explore the concrete effects of colonial rule on democratisation in the postcolonial period of Nigeria. As Africa's most populous country and largest economy,<sup>3</sup> Nigeria gained its independence in 1960, after almost a decade of gradual decolonisation from Britain. However, the 1966 military coup d'état and subsequent civil war ended the democratic optimism,<sup>4</sup> and democratisation stood little chance in the period after. Today, more than a century after its creation and more than sixty years after independence, issues of poverty, corruption and political instability still haunt the country.<sup>5</sup>

This leads to the central research question of this thesis: "*Why has Nigeria struggled to develop a stable democracy in the period between 1960 and 1975?*" Due to the limited scope of this thesis, my research is focussed on the final decade of colonial rule, and the first fifteen years after the independence. This period covers the decolonisation and the hope for democratisation, the political instability around the end of the First Republic, and the period around the Biafran War. The sub-questions answered in chapters 2-4 respectively are the following:

1. Which political institutions shaped British colonial rule in Nigeria in the 1950s, and how compatible were these with democratic values?
2. In what ways did postcolonial political institutions resemble their colonial predecessors, and how did these institutions shape the political developments that led to the failure of electoral democracy?
3. How did the military coup of January 1966 lead to the escalation of the Biafran War, and how did this chain of events affect Nigeria's democratic potential?

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<sup>3</sup> Aderibigbe Victor, 'Is Nigeria Still the "Giant of Africa"?', *The Guardian Nigeria News - Nigeria and World News*, 11 September 2017, <https://m.guardian.ng/opinion/is-nigeria-still-the-giant-of-africa/>, accessed on 4 December 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Gould, *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria: The Biafran War, 1967-1970*, International Library of African Studies 35 (London ; I.B. Tauris, 2012), 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Ojo, 'Nigeria, 1914-2014: From Creation to Cremation?', 90-91.

## 1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, HISTORIOGRAPHY AND RELEVANCE

The approach taken to answer the research question largely builds on the ideas of Kenyan historian Wunyabari Maloba, who argued that incomplete decolonisation explains the difficulties that postcolonial African states tend to face in the process of democratisation. Maloba speaks of decolonisation in the broadest sense of the word: this does not only include formal independence, but more importantly “the achievement of economic, social and political freedom.”<sup>6</sup> These freedoms are inhibited by the institutions inherited from the colonial period. While democratic institutions should be built to ensure growth, stability and freedom for citizens, colonial institutions were built for the purpose of oppression and exploitation of citizens, and the enrichment of a small elite. Maloba concludes that adherence to colonial institutions leads to authoritarianism, and the possibility to democratise depends on the gradual replacement of colonial institutions, with democratic ones.<sup>7</sup>

Before going any further into the theoretical framework, the seemingly obvious question of what constitutes democracy must be answered. Some kind of definition of democracy and democratic institutions is necessary in any research on the matter, but particularly in a postcolonial context. A general definition of large-scale democracy, as presented by political scientist Robert A. Dahl, puts emphasis on freedom of expression and association; free, fair and frequent elections of representative officials; and inclusive citizenship. These are the main components that make up democracy on a national level, and political institutions must be compatible with these ideas in order for a state to be considered democratic. In practice, Dahl emphasises, even the most democratic societies rarely meet these standards completely.<sup>8</sup> It must therefore be considered that democracy is not black and white: instead, it is more appropriate to ask *to what extent* a society is democratic.

To minimise eurocentrism and to fairly assess political institutions in Nigeria, we must also consider whether African democracy might look different from western democracy. In a case study on the Igbo people of south-eastern Nigeria, historian D.I. Ajaegbo argues that many

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<sup>6</sup> Wunyabari O. Maloba, ‘Decolonization: A Theoretical Perspective’, in *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya*, ed. W.R. Ochieng’ and B.A. Ogot (Ohio State University Press, 1995), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Maloba, 13, 21–22.

<sup>8</sup> Robert A. Dahl, ‘What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?’, *Political Science Quarterly* 120, no. 2 (2005): 187–89.

African societies have a long tradition of democracy, albeit on a smaller scale, based on family ties, and assemblies on local and regional levels. The main point of this argument is that democracy was not completely new to Africa, and that many of the elements listed by Dahl can also be found in traditional forms of political organisation. Therefore, measuring African democracy requires a focus on democratic *values*, rather than a simple comparison of African political institutions with western ones.<sup>9</sup>

Maloba is not the only scholar who has pointed out the impact of colonialism on postcolonial democracy. Political scientist M. Crawford Young emphasises the *principe autoritaire* that was built into the postcolonial state as a result of colonial legacy. When colonial oppressors left, western-educated local political elites still practiced the colonial idea that the country and its people had to be modernised and civilised in order to develop. The contrast between this modern, European nation-state ideal, and the reality of a culturally divided country with ethnic tensions and a lack of a single national identity led the first generation of politicians to employ authoritarian methods in an attempt to solve acute crises of poverty and disease.<sup>10</sup>

Ethnic tension was a product of colonialism in itself, according to political scientist Joseph Ebegbulem. The colonial borders were created with no regards to indigenous societies, but the distinct identities of ethnic groups did not disappear in favour of a single national identity. The unification of the Northern and Southern Protectorates was seen as highly problematic, and Nigerian scholars sometimes critically refer to it as the “amalgamation” or even “the mistake of 1914.”<sup>11</sup> Although there were many reasons for their critical stance, the most important objection concerned the vast cultural, economic and religious differences between the Hausa-Fulani in the north, and the Igbo and Yoruba in the south. Over time, this deep divide institutionalised into the political sphere in the form of ethnic nationalism and *de facto* segregated political parties. These tensions were the main cause of the Biafran War.<sup>12</sup> These developments will be addressed in more detail later on, where I will argue how ethnic conflict is one of the ways in which colonial legacy inhibited democratisation in postcolonial Nigeria.

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<sup>9</sup> D. I. Ajaegbo, ‘African Democratic Heritage: A Historical Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria’, *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 19 4 (2014): 17–20.

<sup>10</sup> M. Crawford Young, *The Post-Colonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960-2010*, Africa and the Diaspora: History, Politics, Culture (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 336–37.

<sup>11</sup> Ojo, ‘Nigeria, 1914-2014: From Creation to Cremation?’, 74.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Ebegbulem, ‘Ethnic Politics and Conflicts in Nigeria: Theoretical Perspective’, 2011, 76–79.

In answering the research question, this thesis tests Maloba's theory, using historical evidence from the case of Nigeria, and the theoretical framework laid out above. Continuities between the political institutions before and after independence could explain the lack of democratisation in postcolonial Nigeria. While such a historical analysis through Maloba's lens of decolonisation has not been done for the case of Nigeria, there is a rich historiography on colonial legacy and the period after the Nigerian independence. On top of the already mentioned work done by Ajaegbo, Crawford Young, and Ebegbulem, much has been written about the Biafran War and its place in Nigerian politics. Gould's<sup>13</sup> overview of the conflict provides insight on many of the political tensions already mentioned, and many of the concrete problems regarding democratisation and corruption in the country have been covered by Richard Joseph.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from its relevance with regard to this historiography, this research can be linked to the wider academic debate about African "underdevelopment" and the impact of colonialism.<sup>15</sup> As discussed above, contemporary Africa is still seen as backward, and the political and economic problems are widely misunderstood.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore necessary to analyse the historical processes that made the continent what it is today, and the undeniable impact of colonialism on this predicament. This thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of postcolonial development in Nigeria. Such an understanding is necessary not only in an academic context, but also in order to find solutions to the pressing political and economic issues that many postcolonial African states still face today. While larger comparative works, like that of Crawford Young<sup>17</sup> presents more generalised trends in African history, this idiographic account

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<sup>13</sup> Gould, *The Struggle for Modern Nigeria*.

<sup>14</sup> Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> V. Biju Kumar, 'Postcolonial State : An Overview', *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 66, no. 4 (2005): 935.

<sup>16</sup> In the particular case of Nigeria, the Biafran War is often reduced by Western scholars and media as an ethnic or religious conflict, implying that "the uncivilised Africans" fought each other out of ethnic rivalry or simple hatred. See: Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka, 'Blaming The Gods: Christian Religious Propaganda In The Nigeria—Biafra War', *The Journal of African History* 51, no. 3 (2010): 367–69.

<sup>17</sup> Crawford Young, *The Post-Colonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960-2010*, Africa and the Diaspora: History, Politics, Culture (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2012)

of Nigerian history highlights the nuances of the particular case of Nigeria, focussing on the details of political processes.

### 1.3 METHODS AND SOURCES

This thesis is structured as follows. In order to trace possible colonial institutions throughout the research period, it must first be determined which political institutions were actually in place at the time of independence. Chapter 2 analyses the final decade of British colonialism in Nigeria in order to take inventory of the institutions that shaped the political environment at the time of the independence. The National Archives in London keep an extensive collection of (non-digitised) colonial government reports and documents, and visiting the National Archives has been an essential part of the research for this chapter.<sup>18</sup> However, due to the colonial perspective of these sources, the archival material lacks a critical stance against colonialism. With little alternative source material available, we are largely limited to this British perspective, but Ann Laura Stoler's method of "reading against the archival grain"<sup>19</sup> emphasises how this can still be valuable. Reading primary sources not only for their factual information, but in order to learn about the author by analysing use of language, and considering what is, and what is *not* included in the text can provide historical context. I have analysed over eight hundred pages of archival material (see table 1) from the period of 1950 to 1960 about the way in which the British built new institutions, and compared this to secondary literature and the democratic values of Dahl.

Subsequently, chapter 3 moves onto an analysis of the changing political landscape of the 1960s, starting with the Nigerian independence. By making a temporal comparison between the political institutions before and after the independence, and by highlighting continuities and similarities, the chapter assesses the type of colonial legacy that was present in the early postcolonial state. Important sources include the Nigerian declaration of independence, and newspapers from the period 1960-1966. Due to incomplete digitisation of Nigerian newspapers from this period, the chapter also relies heavily on British sources. Articles used are

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<sup>18</sup> Due to my limited time at the archives, I have photographed all pages of the archival documents, and read them in detail later on.

<sup>19</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

predominantly from The Guardian and The Observer, which extensively covered Nigerian politics, and are digitally available through ProQuest. Nigerian government documents from this period have not been digitised either, so additional secondary literature has been necessary to make up for the lack of better source material. Although some journalists, such as the Observer’s Colin Legum took a critical, anticolonial stance,<sup>20</sup> the selection of primary sources offers a predominantly British perspective. Secondary literature from predominantly non-Western scholars (72%, see table 1.) has been used to counteract some of this bias.

Chapter 4 elaborates on the Biafran War that followed the coups of 1966, and its effects on democratisation. The reason that the war is so relevant for the research topic at hand is that the conflict was a result of the colonial legacy has inhibited Nigerian democratisation and decolonisation. The war must therefore be seen as a colonial conflict, even though it took place after the independence. This is the main argument of the chapter, which will be supported by connecting the previous chapters’ findings to further newspaper research and existing secondary literature on the Biafran War. Due to the important role of the oil industry in the war, and the effect of oil revenue during the 1970s, special attention will be paid to this industry.

<b>TYPE OF SOURCE</b>	<b>QUANTITY</b>
<b>Primary Sources</b>	
Newspaper articles	73
Archival documents	846 pages
Other contemporary articles	6
<b>Secondary Literature</b>	
Western authors	12
Non-Western authors	31

**TABLE 1:** Overview of the types and quantities of sources used.

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<sup>20</sup> A. B. Akinyemi, ‘The British Press and the Nigerian Civil War’, *African Affairs* 71, no. 285 (1972): 424.

## POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE

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This chapter examines the final decade of British rule in Nigeria, which set the stage for the events of the early postcolonial period. By analysing colonial sources such as parliamentary debates, reform policy documents and correspondences between colonial officials from the period of 1950 to 1960, it becomes clear what type of political institutions the new Nigerian Federation inherited upon its independence, and how compatible these institutions were with the democratic values as described in the introduction. With that colonial inheritance in mind, it becomes possible to assess how postcolonial institutions resembled their colonial predecessors. This chapter will therefore answer the sub-question: “*Which political institutions shaped British colonial rule in Nigeria in the 1950s, and how compatible are these with democratic values?*”

The 1950s are a particularly important decade, due to the significant colonial reforms that were enacted in most British colonies in Africa. While decolonisation had not been a priority before this time, World War II had spread ideas of self-determination in the international community, and a wide range of nationalist movements became more prominent throughout these colonies.<sup>21</sup> Nigeria was no exception in this respect, with organisations such as the Nigerian Youth Movement and grass-roots organisations such as Lagos Market Women’s Association taking collective action against the colonial government.<sup>22</sup> It is in this context that the political action and broadly shared sense of anti-imperialism created the need, but also political support for gradual reforms<sup>23</sup> that would eventually make up the institutional inheritance that this chapter aims to describe and analyse.

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<sup>21</sup> Crawford Young, *The Post-Colonial State in Africa*, 88–89.

<sup>22</sup> Tajudeen Abdulraheem and Adebayo Olukoshi, ‘The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism: 1945-1985’, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 37 (1986): 64–80; Cheryl Johnson, ‘Grass Roots Organizing: Women in Anticolonial Activity in Southwestern Nigeria’, *African Studies Review* 25, no. 2/3 (1982): 137–57.

<sup>23</sup> Crawford Young, *The Post-Colonial State in Africa*, 89–91.

## 2.1 CONTROLLED NATIONALISM AND ANTI-RADICALISM

Historians have debated the mechanisms that underlie the reform processes in British colonies in Africa in the 1950s extensively. As we have seen, some authors ascribed the newfound focus on reform and gradual decolonisation to the anti-imperial *zeitgeist* in the international community and more liberal attitudes of colonial officials after World War II, while others emphasise the resistance against oppression from within colonies.<sup>24</sup> In reality, both played an important role in Nigeria, and the reforms of the 1950s were shaped by the responses of colonial officials to nationalist movements in Nigeria. Liberal colonial officials such as John Macpherson, Governor of Nigeria from 1948 to 1953, started working with Nigerian nationalists in order to guide gradual decolonisation.<sup>25</sup>

The gradual nature of reform, and the way in which the colonial government worked with Nigerian nationalists, was still unmistakably colonial, in the sense that the British were in power, and reforms were enacted on British terms. Although decolonisation was seen as inevitable, the Colonial Office sought to control the process. More than anything else, this control was characterised by the idea of anti-radicalism. The global context of the Cold War, and the emergence of communist groups throughout several African colonies led officials such as Macpherson to work closely with moderate nationalists, in order to ensure that Nigeria would transition into a liberal democracy. Leaders that were considered radical were imprisoned, while moderate leaders were embraced as symbols of decolonisation and Nigerian unity.<sup>26</sup>

This idea of anti-radicalism is present in reform policies throughout the entire 1950s. Colonial officials often spoke in terms distinguishing between the uneducated, illiterate masses, and the politically active nationalists, who consisted of radicals and moderates. Moderates were seen as an opportunity, and radicals as a threat to Nigeria's future.<sup>27</sup> In a 1953 correspondence between Chief Secretary A.E.T. Benson and the various regional Lieutenant-Governors discussed the implications of regional self-government, as a step towards decolonisation. In

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<sup>24</sup> John Flint, 'Planned Decolonization and Its Failure in British Africa', *African Affairs* 82, no. 328 (1983): 389.

<sup>25</sup> Olakunle A. Lawal, 'From Colonial Reforms To Decolonization: Britain And The Transfer Of Power In Nigeria, 1947-1960', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 19 (2010): 39–40.

<sup>26</sup> Lawal, 40–42.

<sup>27</sup> 'Implications of Self-Government', 1958 1953, FCO 141/13370, National Archives.

these letters, the distinction is explained clearly: “rabid nationalists of the young and untutored kind” would not be able to understand the complexities of self-government and the need for gradual change, while “the sober-minded, clear-thinking Nigerian” understands how complicated self-government would be.<sup>28</sup>

Another clear example of this anti-radical attitude can be seen in a letter written by the District Officers of Onitsha, in the Eastern Region, later that year. They emphasise that the masses are uneducated in politics, and make a general claim that “the African is a shrewd observer of human behaviour”. This would make “the mass of people who live in the bush” susceptible to the loud minority of educated Nigerians who want self-government as soon as possible for their personal gain, even if this would harm society at large. The officers emphasise that the colonial government should work with the minority of “responsible and educated Africans genuinely interested in the welfare and progress of their country,” in order to win support for the gradual approach to decolonisation.<sup>29</sup>

In reality, these distinctions were not as clear-cut. Groups who were considered radical at first would later become important parts of the more moderate parties that would come to dominate Nigerian politics as decolonisation progressed. The most prominent example of this is probably that of the Zikist Movement, named after Dr. Nnamdi “Zik” Azikiwe. This movement had organised strikes and other anticolonial protests in the period between 1945 and 1950 and was considered radical, leading the colonial government to declare the organisation illegal in 1950, imprisoning many of its members.<sup>30</sup> Being pragmatic however, Zik became the leader of the more moderate National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC, founded in 1944), which would become one of the three most important political parties once the scope of self-government expanded in Nigeria throughout the 1950s.<sup>31</sup> In this role, he was seen as a founding

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<sup>28</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’, 1953-1958, 8–9, FCO 141/13370, National Archives.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’, 1953-1958, 8–9, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: ‘Statement Agreed by District Officers Of The Onitsha Province At A Conference Held At UDI On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1953.

<sup>30</sup> Lawal, ‘From Colonial Reforms to Decolonization’, 40–41; Abdulraheem and Olukoshi, ‘The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism’, 66.

<sup>31</sup> The Zikist Movement was considered a radical socialist movement, and it’s affiliations with the moderate NCNC were limited to Azikiwe’s presence in both. The NCNC denounced the Zikist Movement as a ‘party within a party’, an undesired radical faction. As a result of British anti-radicalism, Azikiwe distanced himself from the Zikists, favouring the moderate NCNC for the pragmatic reason that the NCNC had British approval,

father of Nigerian nationalism, and was admired by fellow Nigerian politicians,<sup>32</sup> as well as by British MPs and colonial officials.<sup>33</sup>

Although reality was much more complicated than the letters of colonial officials suggest, these letters reveal how colonial officers saw the political landscape of Nigeria in the early 1950s, and this vision shaped British policy during the decolonisation process. Colonial Officials saw opposing political groups of radical and moderate nationalists, and thought it essential that the moderates would be in charge of the country when the British left. During the reforming process, the Colonial Office organised media campaigns in order to encourage discussions about self-government, in the hopes of convincing the “uneducated masses” of moderate nationalism and gradual decolonisation, rather than the radical nationalism of those who advocated for independence in the short-term. In 1953, Governor Macpherson and other colonial officials gave several speeches on the radio to encourage citizens to discuss what self-government would entail. These speeches emphasise that independence would not bring forth a “state of utopia”, but would require goodwill and hard work, and listeners were warned against the naivety of radical nationalists.<sup>34</sup> Like the correspondence between colonial officers, these campaigns show that anti-radicalism was an essential element of colonial policy during the 1950s, which allowed the British to keep control over the process of decolonisation.<sup>35</sup>

Around this time, the Colonial Office also discussed the extent to which Nigerian media should be allowed to criticise their government. In an internal memorandum of the Lagos Secretariat, civil secretaries are informed of the protocol in cases of “press attacks” in which Nigerian journalists “misrepresent government policy”. In cases of sedition, where a media statement is

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allowing him to gain more power in Nigerian politics. See: Tajudeen Abdurraheem and Adebayo Olukoshi, ‘The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism: 1945-1985’, *Review of African Political Economy*, no. 37 (1986): 64–80.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence’, 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: ‘Debates of the House of Representatives’ (Nigerian House of Representatives, 14 January 1960), 41.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Nigeria Independence Act’, 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: ‘Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading’ (House of Commons, 14 July 1960), 1807.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: Public Relations Department Lagos, ‘Press Release’ (Nigerian Broadcasting Service, 25 July 1953), 1–2; John Macpherson, ‘Extract from Speech Broadcast by His Excellency the Governor of Nigeria on 8th October, 1953’, 1–2,.

<sup>35</sup> Lawal, ‘From Colonial Reforms To Decolonization’, 42–44.

perceived to be intended to incite anti-government sentiments, law officers would often choose to write a press release that “corrected the false information.” However, it was also possible to prosecute the writer or publisher, although this was only done if there was enough evidence to ensure a conviction. Prosecution was relatively uncommon due to high costs, but the fact that it was a possibility shows that freedom of press was not guaranteed. Between 1950 and 1952, one newspaper editor was sentenced to four months in prison for this offence,<sup>36</sup> and in 1945, radical Zikist newspapers were permanently banned for expressing support for labour strikes.<sup>37</sup> According to Dahl, mentioned in the introduction, free press is a necessary institution of democracy,<sup>38</sup> and penalties that journalists and editors risked when criticising the colonial government shows that the Nigerian press was by no means free during this period.

## 2.2 BUILDING (UN)DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

The numerous political reforms of the 1950s were introduced with the purpose of gradually turning Nigeria into a liberal democracy in anticipation of the independence. As the previous section indicates, the colonial government put effort into creating a political culture in which citizens would participate in political discourse, emphasising that hard work and participation would be necessary in order to establish and maintain a democratic government. At the same time, the reforms, starting with a new constitution, laid the foundations for the expansion of self-government, first at the local level, and later at regional and federal levels. This section shows that many, but not all of the political institutions that Dahl lists as a requirement for democracy<sup>39</sup> were gradually introduced in Nigeria between 1950 and 1960.

With the new constitution, which took effect in 1952, the intentions of expanding self-government were set in stone by the colonial government. Moderate representatives of the three regions of Nigeria had been included in the drafts of the constitution.<sup>40</sup> It was decided that Nigeria would become a federation, in which the Northern, Eastern and Western regions would

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<sup>36</sup> ‘Criticism of Government Policy’, December 1952, CO 554/662, National Archives: L.H. Goble, ‘Press Attacks’, 1–3.

<sup>37</sup> Abdulraheem and Olukoshi, ‘The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism’, 64–65.

<sup>38</sup> Dahl, ‘What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?’, 188.

<sup>39</sup> Dahl, 187–89.

<sup>40</sup> L. P. M., ‘Nigeria under the Macpherson Constitution’, *The World Today* 9, no. 1 (1953): 12.

each have considerable autonomy, which was seen as a solution to cultural and ethnic differences between the regions.<sup>41</sup> Each region held its own parliamentary elections in 1952, in which citizens held the right to vote on the basis of tax contribution. Members of the federal parliament, which consisted of a single House of Representatives, were selected from members of regional parliament. This meant that legislative power was now in the hands of Nigerians, although the Governor still had the right to appoint representatives to protect commercial and minority interests.<sup>42</sup>

Executive power on the regional level was vested in the Executive Council, which still included British colonial officers such as the Civil, Legal and Financial Secretaries, as well as traditional chiefs, and ministers that had to be approved by the regional Lieutenant-Governor. Another important detail about the ministers is that they were not personally in control of their departments. Instead, they had to share this power with civil servants, who were predominantly British.<sup>43</sup> According to Macpherson, this unique characteristic was necessary due to the “special circumstances of this large and diverse country,”<sup>44</sup> referring to the ethnic diversity of Nigeria. The division of power as described in the Macpherson Constitution would characterise Nigerian politics throughout the following years, with legislative power largely in the hands of moderate Nigerian political parties, and executive power still lying with the Governor and other British colonial officers. Executive power, and self-government, would be granted to regional governments in 1957.<sup>45</sup>

With the electoral and representative system in place, political parties evolved into an important part of Nigerian politics. Besides the aforementioned NCNC, the most important parties were the Northern People’s Congress (NPC, founded in 1949) and the Action Group (AG, founded in 1951). From the start however, these major political parties were already aligned with their

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Nigeria Independence Act’, 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading’ (House of Commons, 14 July 1960), 1793.

<sup>42</sup> M., ‘Nigeria under the Macpherson Constitution’, 15–17.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Nigeria under the Macpherson Constitution’, 15–17.

<sup>44</sup> ‘The Organisation of Government in Nigeria’, 1952-1953, CO 554/312, National Archives: John Macpherson, ‘Extract from Speech by His Excellency the Governor Sir John S. Macpherson, G.C.M.G., to the House of Representatives on the 3rd of March, 1953’.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’, 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959’, 1–7.

respective regions and ethnic groups. As the name suggests, the NPC represented the Northern Region, which predominantly consisted of Hausa-Fulani Muslims, and the NPC's leader Ahmadu Bello was also part of the traditional ruling elite of Sokoto Caliphate. Similarly, AG represented the Yoruba majority in the Western Region and was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The NCNC, under Azikiwe, was mostly aligned with the Eastern Region's Igbo majority, and was the sole party in the region.<sup>46</sup>

This ethnopolitical consciousness formed a major problem for Nigeria's ability to form a sense of national unity: rather than political cooperation, the ethnic ties of political parties created an atmosphere of ethnopolitical rivalry.<sup>47</sup> It also left many ethnic minorities underrepresented in their own regional government. Such groups would form their own parties, sometimes with ties to a larger party from a different region that represented their ethnicity. For example, the southern parts of the Northern Region had a large non-Muslim minority that did not feel represented by the conservative Muslim NPC. Their party, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) was allied to the Western Region's AG, with whom they shared their cultural heritage. Colonial officials saw these minority parties as a problem, because they were often more radical. Instead, colonial officers favoured the moderate NPC's conservatism, which allowed the Colonial Office to keep the decolonisation process under control. The introduction of direct elections in the Northern Region was even postponed because this would jeopardise the NPC's majority in the region.<sup>48</sup> This shows that to the British, values of democracy were less important than keeping control over the decolonisation process.

The next step in decolonisation was regional self-government, which was granted to the Eastern and Western Regions in 1957, with the Northern Region following in 1959. This meant that executive power for regional matters would be in the hands of democratically elected Executive Councils consisting of Nigerians, who no longer answered to the Governor. This was seen as the last major step before self-government on the federal level, and Nigerian independence.<sup>49</sup> With the formal political institutions in place, and the majority of political power in the hands

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<sup>46</sup> Ebegbulem, 'Ethnic Politics and Conflicts in Nigeria', 79.

<sup>47</sup> Ebegbulem, 76–77.

<sup>48</sup> 'Implications of Self-Government', 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: 'Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959', 7–8.

<sup>49</sup> 'Implications of Self-Government', 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: 'Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959', 1–9.

of Nigerian parties, the Colonial Office focussed its attention to the ‘Nigerianisation’ of the civil service, a process in which Nigerians would be trained to work as civil servants, so they could replace the British officials who accounted for the vast majority of civil service work. Nigeria’s reliance on British bureaucrats posed a serious problem, since many British civil servants planned on leaving the country once Nigeria became independent.<sup>50</sup>

Colonial officials had already been aware of this issue for a long time. In 1953, ‘a competent civil service, which is impartial and free of corruption’<sup>51</sup> was already listed by colonial officials as one of the conditions for self-government. Officials emphasised that the civil service employed by, but independent of the government was essential in carrying out government policy. Training Nigerians to work in the civil service was already a part of the Colonial Office’s policy at this time, but as self-government expanded, the imminent shortage of civil servants became a more pressing issue. Colonial officials and politicians alike feared that failure to train enough civil servants before the independence would result in corruption and inability to uphold the rule of law. Moreover, the Colonial Office had envisioned the civil service as a politically neutral entity with executive power, that would act as a safeguard against ministers who might be caught up in party politics. This way, potential political rivalries would not destabilise the country’s development.<sup>52</sup> Yet by 1960, the civil service was still dependent on British bureaucrats, to the point where the Colonial Office considered paying these British administrators to keep their positions after the independence.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’ 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: O.P. Gunning, ‘Random Thoughts on Self-Government’, 9 June 1953, 12–13; ‘Nigeria Independence Act’, 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: House of Commons, Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading, 1803.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’, 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: ‘Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959’, 1.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Implications of Self-Government’, 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: ‘Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959’, 1–2.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Nigeria Independence Act’, 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: House of Commons, Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading, 1794–1796.

### 2.3 NIGERIA'S COLONIAL HERITAGE

In December 1959, Nigeria elected a new Federal House of Representatives. In the months leading up to the elections, the Colonial Office had been working on drafts of the Independence Bill, so the results of the elections would determine which parties would lead Nigeria's first independent government. Unsurprisingly, the NPC remained as the largest party, thanks to its dominance in the Northern Region, by far the largest of the three regions with more than half of the Nigerian population.<sup>54</sup> The NPC formed a coalition with the NCNC, and the newly elected Nigerian House of Representatives passed its "Resolution Asking For Independence" in January of 1960.<sup>55</sup> By July, the Nigerian Independence Bill passed British parliament, granting Nigeria its independence and membership to the British Commonwealth by October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960.<sup>56</sup>

Independence meant that Britain would no longer be involved in Nigerian matters. British MP's were predominantly pleased with the way Britain handled its responsibility to democratise its former colony, and were optimistic about Nigeria's future. They often described Nigeria as a 'worthy student',<sup>57</sup> reflecting the paternalistic ideas that were still present in the minds of the MP's. Nigeria was deemed ready to function as a sovereign democratic state after years of institution-building, but to what extent did Nigeria meet Dahl's requirements for democracy? As the previous sections have pointed out, many of the formal institutions were in place. Citizens were represented by elected members of parliament, but the laws around elections were still different in each region. Most notably, elections were still indirect in the North, and women were not allowed to vote in the North at all,<sup>58</sup> while Dahl's emphasises inclusive citizenship as a requirement for democracy.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> E. O. Awa, 'Federal Elections in Nigeria, 1959', *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 21, no. 2 (1960): 101.

<sup>55</sup> 'Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence': 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: 'Debates of the House of Representatives' (Nigerian House of Representatives, 14 January 1960).

<sup>56</sup> 'Nigeria Independence Act', 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: House of Commons, Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading, 1846.

<sup>57</sup> 'Nigeria Independence Act', 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: House of Commons, Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading 1800-14 .

<sup>58</sup> Awa, 'Federal Elections in Nigeria, 1959', 102.

<sup>59</sup> Dahl, 'What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?', 189.

Moreover, the representativity of the government was heavily tainted by the ethnopolitical consciousness that dominated party politics. Not only were ethnic minorities underrepresented because of this, but the tribalist attitudes within political parties also affected their ability to work together and inhibited a sense of national unity. While debating the independence, one Western representative from the Ijaw tribe blamed the British for splitting his tribe between the Eastern and Western regions. He expressed the fear of Action Group's domination in the West, calling tribalism the replacement of "white imperialism with black imperialism", and going as far as comparing AG's leader Awolowo to Hitler.<sup>60</sup> This type of sentiment about tribalism was not unusual within the House, and although many representatives stressed the importance of Nigerian unity, many others argued that this unity was simply unrealistic for Nigeria.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, the way that the British had drawn Nigeria's national and regional borders, with no regards to traditional territories, indirectly turned out to be one of the most problematic colonial institutions.

The issues with ethnopolitical divides reflected the British favouritism towards conservative and anti-radical parties during the 1950s. As discussed, the success of the NPC was the result of the indirect election laws in the North, which had been advocated by the Colonial Office, and the disproportionate size of the Northern Region made the NPC the largest party in Nigeria. Splitting the regions up was suggested by Northern as well as Western opposition parties, but the Colonial Office, as well as the NPC and AG had always resisted this idea.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the fact that ministers shared their executive power with the Public Service, which was not elected, limited the representativity of the policies made by the government. In short, the independent Nigerian government was not as representative as it seemed, and citizenship was not as inclusive as it seemed.

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<sup>60</sup> 'Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence', 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: 'Debates of the House of Representatives', (Nigerian House of Representatives, 14 January 1960), 39-40.

<sup>61</sup> 'Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence', 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: 'Debates of the House of Representatives', (Nigerian House of Representatives, 14 January 1960), 41-45.

<sup>62</sup> 'Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence', 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: 'Debates of the House of Representatives', (Nigerian House of Representatives, 14 January 1960) 56-58; 'Implications of Self-Government', 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: 'Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959' 1.

British anti-radicalism also affected the democratic potential in terms of freedom of speech and association. The fact that ‘radicals’ and journalists faced fines and potential prison time for criticising the colonial government, and the general criminalisation of what the British saw as radical nationalism is undemocratic by any standard.<sup>63</sup> In 1960, the Secretary to the Ministry of Information told the House of Representatives that the press should be free after independence, but that this freedom would not be unconditional: discipline and cooperation with the government would be necessary, and there should be no room for “destructive criticism” or “attempt[s] to bring down the government.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, government authority would still be prioritised over freedom of press.

Over the course of the 1950s, Nigeria underwent tremendous changes. The colonial authorities saw that independence was inevitable, and aimed to control the process of decolonisation. Through gradual reforms and support for moderate nationalism, they attempted to turn Nigeria into a stable democratic country and potential ally to Britain. This was done by building political institutions such as the regional and federal governments and a parliamentary system, and by encouraging citizens’ participation in the political sphere. However, the authoritarian nature of the colonial system was still present throughout this period: there was no place for those who were considered too radical or too critical of colonial policy. This anti-radicalism characterised the entire project of ‘democratising’ Nigeria, and reflects the British’ paternalistic ideas of bringing modern civilisation to Africa. The rules of democracy were often bent to ensure that Britain would stay in control of the decolonisation process. These attitudes and policies put a class of educated and conservative moderate nationalists in power, who claimed to promote Nigerian national unity, while in reality, ethnopolitical consciousness hindered democratic party politics. By 1960, Nigeria may have looked like a democracy, but there were serious cracks in the surface that explain the events of the following years.

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<sup>63</sup> Dahl, ‘What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?’, 189.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence’, 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: ‘Debates of the House of Representatives’, 71–73.

PERSISTENCE OF UNDEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AFTER 1960

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In the period directly after the independence, Nigerian politicians, as well as the former colonial officers from Britain were optimistic about democratic development in Nigeria. In March 1961, former Governor John Macpherson reflected on the decolonisation process in a lecture given at the Royal Society of Arts. He emphasised how peaceful the transition of power was, due to its gradual nature, which gave Britain the time to build democratic institutions. Macpherson quoted Nigeria's conservative Federal Prime Minister Abubakar Balewa (NPC), who also stated that "the building of our nation took place at the wisest pace". Macpherson did acknowledge the issues of regionalism and tribalism, and the shortage of educated Nigerians to fill high positions in the civil service and military, but he optimistically claimed that these problems would gradually disappear as the Nigerian democracy matured.<sup>65</sup>

However, these problems did not disappear as time went by. Rather, the political situation in Nigeria deteriorated quickly. Less than six years after the independence, a military coup d'état resulted in the executions of prominent leaders such as Balewa and Premiers of the Northern and Western Regions; Ahmadu Bello and Samuel Akintola. By May 1967, Nigeria was at war with the secessionist Biafra Republic, formed by Igbo nationalists from the Eastern Region.<sup>66</sup> This chapter explains how the flawed political institutions described in chapter 2 persisted during the 1960s, and answers the following sub-question: "*In what ways did postcolonial political institutions resemble their colonial predecessors, and how did these institutions shape the political developments that led to the failure of electoral democracy?*"

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<sup>65</sup> John Macpherson, 'Sovereign Nigeria', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 109, no. 5059 (1961): 528–35.

<sup>66</sup> Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)* (Algora Publishing, 2009).

### 3.1 DIVISION OF POLITICAL POWER

During the early 1960s, Nigeria continued to be ruled on the federal level by the coalition of the conservative Northern NPC and the Eastern NCNC that had been elected in 1959. Together, these parties dominated federal parliament as well as executive power, while neither of the parties truly represented the national interest. While the NCNC had started out as a party with national appeal, but mostly represented Eastern and Igbo interests and became more conservative after independence.<sup>67</sup> The NPC had always been an unapologetically regional party. In both parties, the positions that party leaders filled showed that regional matters had priority over national matters. NPC party leader Ahmadu Bello preferred the role of regional Prime Minister of the North over a federal ministerial position. Similarly, federal NCNC ministers were not as prominent within the party as regional leaders.<sup>68</sup>

With this conservative coalition in power on the federal level, and the same parties in charge in the Eastern and Northern regions, progressive parties and ethnic minorities became political outsiders. In the North, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), offered an alternative for progressive Muslims, advocating for female suffrage.<sup>69</sup> Ethnic minorities, concentrated in the southern part of the North, were represented by the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC).<sup>70</sup> Still, the NPC was by far the most dominant party in the North, and by extension the most powerful party in the country, due to the size of the Northern Region.<sup>71</sup> UMBC did suggest splitting up the North to stop the NPC's domination over ethnic minorities, but it was exactly this domination that stopped the UMBC from having any real influence, since the NPC simply outnumbered the opposition.<sup>72</sup>

On the federal level, Awolowo's Action Group was still the main opposition party. Its regional influence was limited to the Western Region, but in federal parliament Awolowo strongly

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<sup>67</sup> Clyde Sanger, 'Chances for Nigeria's Left Wing: New Party Gathers Support', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 11 November 1963.

<sup>68</sup> Larry R. Jackson, 'Nigeria: The Politics of the First Republic', *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 3 (1972): 280–82.

<sup>69</sup> Sanger, 'Chances for Nigeria's Left Wing'.

<sup>70</sup> Abdulraheem and Olukoshi, 'The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism', 66–69.

<sup>71</sup> Jackson, 'Nigeria: The Politics of the First Republic', 280.

<sup>72</sup> Abdulraheem and Olukoshi, 'The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism', 68.

opposed the NPC-NCNC coalition,<sup>73</sup> adopting elements of socialism and Pan-Africanism in response to the dominant conservatism.<sup>74</sup> Such “radical” ideas did not sit well with the more moderate branches of AG, and an internal struggle in 1962 led to a party split in which Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Premier of the Western Region,<sup>75</sup> founded a new party under the name Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), which allied itself with the NPC.<sup>76</sup> This split, which came to be known as the Western Political Crisis,<sup>77</sup> had far-reaching effects in the West as well as in national politics, since the AG lost much of its power to the NNDP, strengthening the already dominant coalition. Awolowo attempted to keep the position of Regional Prime Minister in the hands of AG, but since Akintola refused to resign from the position, the federal government intervened by declaring a state of emergency in the West, recognising Akintola as rightful Premier,<sup>78</sup> and even arresting Awolowo and some of his allies, who would subsequently be sentenced to ten years in prison for treason.<sup>79</sup> As the main opposition party in the federal parliament, AG lost 54 of its 75 seats in parliament,<sup>80</sup> and Awolowo’s imprisonment left many Yoruba’s in the West feeling unrepresented in the federation.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Abdulraheem and Olukoshi, ‘The Left in Nigerian Politics and the Struggle for Socialism’, 68–69; Jackson, ‘Nigeria: The Politics of the First Republic’, 282.

<sup>74</sup> Sanger, ‘Chances for Nigeria’s Left Wing’.

<sup>75</sup> Interestingly, Action Group’s party leader Awolowo chose to lead the opposition in federal parliament, leaving the position of Regional Prime Minister to Akintola upon Nigeria’s independence. This shows Awolowo’s commitment to national politics, in contrast to the NPC’s party leader Ahmadu Bello, who kept the position of Regional Prime Minister over that of Federal Prime Minister. See: ‘Nigeria Independence Act’, 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: House of Commons, Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading 1800-01; and Larry R. Jackson, ‘Nigeria: The Politics of the First Republic’, *Journal of Black Studies* 2, no. 3 (1972): 281.

<sup>76</sup> John P. Mackintosh, ‘Politics in Nigeria: The Action Group Crisis of 1962’, *Political Studies* 11, no. 2 (1963): 138–41.

<sup>77</sup> Geoffrey Taylor, ‘Challenge To Nigerian Constitution: Government’s Task of Dealing with Two Crises’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 6 October 1962.

<sup>78</sup> Mackintosh, ‘Politics in Nigeria’, 138–41.

<sup>79</sup> Amusa Saheed Balogun, ‘An Assessment Of The Partisan Role Of The Nigeria Police Force In The 1962 Action Group Crisis’, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 22 (2013): 48; ‘Claim for Return of Enahoro “Sound”: Nigeria’s Observance of Institutions’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 11 April 1963.

<sup>80</sup> John P. Mackintosh, ‘Nigeria since Independence’, *The World Today* 20, no. 8 (1964): 335.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Rising Discontent in Nigeria: But Democracy Survives’, *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 29 September 1963.

In the same year, Nigeria made the first significant changes to the regional borders since they were established by the British in 1914.<sup>82</sup> However, this change was not about splitting up the enormous Northern Region, something that minorities and other regions had been advocating for since the 1950s.<sup>83</sup> This had always been opposed by the powerful NPC and the Colonial Office,<sup>84</sup> and was generally difficult because changing the constitution required a two-thirds majority in federal parliament, and majorities in all regional parliaments. Instead, 1963 saw the creation of a brand new Mid-West Region, carved out of the Western Region. This development was supported by the federal and regional parliaments, as well as a referendum held in the new region. The Midwest overwhelmingly supported the NCNC, but ultimately benefited the North as well by further weakening the political weight of the West.<sup>85</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the disproportionate size of the North after the creation of the Midwest.<sup>86</sup>

These events, particularly the Western crisis, illustrate the political power dynamics in Nigeria in the first term after the independence. The conservative political elite that had gained power with support of the British continued to rule Nigeria, with very limited tolerance towards opposition. The opposition was already marginal on regional levels due to the ties between parties and ethnic groups, and when AG split up in 1962, the federal government sided with pro-NPC leader Akintola, using police force to take control of the region<sup>87</sup> and imprisoning the opposition leader in the process. With the domination of the NPC (with NCNC support) over the opposition, and by extension domination of one *region* over others, and one *tribe* over others, postcolonial Nigeria did not seem all that different from its colonial predecessor. Before

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<sup>82</sup> Ebegbulem, 'Ethnic Politics and Conflicts in Nigeria', 76; Stephen O. Bamiduro, 'Press And Politics In Nigeria's First Republic 1960-1966', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 11, no. 3/4 (1982): 108. One exception was the 1961 plebiscite that determined that the Southern Cameroons (in the Eastern Region) would leave Nigeria to be a part of Cameroon upon the latter's independence, a decision that had been made in 1959 under the British. See: 'Nigeria Independence Act', 1960, CO 554/2190, National Archives: House of Commons, Nigerian Independence Bill: Second Reading, 1796-98.

<sup>83</sup> 'Implications of Self-Government', 1953-1958, FCO 141/13370, National Archives: 'Northern Region of Nigeria: Preparation for Regional Self-Government by March 1959, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Bamiduro, 'Press And Politics In Nigeria's First Republic 1960-1966', 113.

<sup>85</sup> Yemi Babatunde, 'Democratic Rule in Nigeria Unlikely: Accent on Suppression', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 22 December 1964; Mackintosh, 'Nigeria since Independence', 329-33.

<sup>86</sup> Austin Emielu, 'Ethnic and Regional Identities in Nigerian Popular Music: A Special Focus on the Edo', *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 9 (1 January 2013): 96.

<sup>87</sup> Mackintosh, 'Nigeria since Independence', 334.

the independence, federal representative N.A. Ezenbodor had already warned his colleagues that Nigeria was at risk of replacing ‘white imperialism’ with ‘black imperialism’,<sup>88</sup> and by 1963 it looked like Nigeria was going down a path of internal colonialism, continuing the use of colonial methods of control, instead of the promised democratisation.



**FIGURE 1:** Map of Nigerian Regions from 1963 to 1967

Source: Austin Emielu, ‘Ethnic and Regional Identities in Nigerian Popular Music: A Special Focus on the Edo’, *African Music: Journal of the International Library of African Music* 9 (1 January 2013): 96.

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<sup>88</sup> N.A. Ezenbodor represented the Western Region in the House of Representative, and was a member of the Ijaw tribe, which was a minority in his region. See: ‘Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence’, 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: ‘Debates of the House of Representatives’, 40.

### 3.2 UNDEMOCRATIC RESULTS

The tribal nature of Nigerian politics and the unequal division of power – both traits that were inherited from the colonial era – had strong effects on the democratic potential of institutions. The fact that the most powerful political parties in the country each represented an ethnic group meant that patron-client relationships between politicians, and citizens and businesses were commonplace. Other forms of corruption, such as bribery, misappropriation of public funds and fraud posed serious issues on regional and federal levels. In 1963, a commission appointed by the High Court of Lagos found that in the Western Region alone, over £4 million had been illegally pocketed by politicians in the past few years.<sup>89</sup> Civil service offices were not free of corruption either. Their salaries, which were low compared to those in the private sector, created an incentive for civil servants to take bribes and embezzle public funds.<sup>90</sup>

It must be noted however, that corruption was in no way a new phenomenon in Nigeria. Although there seems to be a colonial stereotype of “the corrupt Nigerian”, historian A.A. Lawal has found extensive evidence of corruption by British civil servants, colonial officials and banking institutions during the colonial era, nuancing the image of corruption appearing out of nowhere after 1960. While colonial administrators set out to build a system in which corruption was impossible, Lawal argues that such attempts were futile.<sup>91</sup>

As explained in chapter 2, the civil service was one of the elements of independence that the British worried about most in the 1950s, due to the scarcity of Nigerians who were able and willing to fill the positions previously held by British bureaucrats. Nigerianisation continued during the early 1960s, although many high-ranking officials in the civil service and military were still British during this period, being financially compensated by Britain.<sup>92</sup> Ex-governor John Macpherson stated that in 1961, over 80% of regional civil service positions in the Eastern and Western regions had already been filled by Nigerians, but in the North and on the federal

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<sup>89</sup> ‘Police May Act on Fraud Allegations’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 3 January 1963; Mackintosh, ‘Nigeria since Independence’, 336; Michael M. Ogbeyi, ‘Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960: A Socio-Economic Analysis’, *Journal of Nigeria Studies* 1, no. 2 (2012): 5.

<sup>90</sup> Hella Pick, ‘How Soon Can Nigerians Run Nigeria?’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 4 November 1960.

<sup>91</sup> A. A. Lawal, ‘Anatomy of Corruption in the British Colonial Service in Nigeria.’, *Journal of West African Studies* 31 (1987): 92–98.

<sup>92</sup> Pick, ‘How Soon Can Nigerians Run Nigeria?’

level, these numbers were much lower,<sup>93</sup> and the transition did not go as quickly as expected. Ethnicity played a role here as well, as many civil servants preferred serving their own region and tribe, over working at the federal level. Although the presence of the British was widely resented amongst Nigerian citizens, their replacement was not politically prioritised during this period.<sup>94</sup>

The sustained presence of British civil servants is one of the explicit ways in which colonialism persisted in the postcolonial period, and a symbol of the incomplete decolonisation theorised by Maloba. Although a comparative study shows that the Nigerian civil service was considered one of the most well-functioning in Africa in this period,<sup>95</sup> the reluctance of the Nigerian government to stimulate Nigerianisation out of intertribal mistrust posed a problem. Some federal ministers were reluctant to hire Yoruba's within their ministry, because they were thought to be loyal to AG rather than their NPC or NCNC superiors. Even British servants were preferred in such cases, due to their perceived neutrality.<sup>96</sup> This way, the persisting presence of British bureaucrats actually slowed down Nigerianisation, and perpetuated tribal nepotism, which in turn contributed to the animosity between ethnic groups, and further solidified the powerful position of the political elite over political outsiders.

Another way in which the political status quo tightened its grip was through outright fraud. Since the seats in the Federal House of Representatives were divided over the four regions based on their population, a national census was necessary to determine the amount of seats granted to each region. With new federal elections coming up in 1964, there was a strong incentive for political parties to tamper with these procedures. The first attempt at a census was never published after being rejected by Federal Prime Minister Balewa, and the second census was highly controversial, with Northern politicians accusing the Eastern Region of inflating its population by claiming to have found villages that were previously undiscovered, adding thousands to the population. Numbers in the North were equally questionable: while the Northern population was previously estimated to be roughly 18 million, the region claimed to

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<sup>93</sup> Macpherson, 'Sovereign Nigeria', 532–33.

<sup>94</sup> Pick, 'How Soon Can Nigerians Run Nigeria?', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 4 November 1960.

<sup>95</sup> Claudius Bamidele Olowu, 'Pride and Performance in African Public Services: Analysis of Institutional Breakdown and Rebuilding Efforts in Nigeria and Uganda', *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 67, no. 1 (2001), 117–18.

<sup>96</sup> Pick, 'How Soon Can Nigerians Run Nigeria?'

have no less than 30 million inhabitants (against the 23 million in the other three regions combined).<sup>97</sup> When another census in February 1964 yielded similar results despite additional safety checks including a team of UN advisors, Eastern Premier Michael Okpara expressed his doubt that another attempt at an accurate census would be successful. Instead, Okpara and many others argued for a new system in which all regions would be split up,<sup>98</sup> but just as before, the initiative was prevented by the NPC.<sup>99</sup>

The fact that several political parties tampered with census numbers to gain seats in parliament severely undermined the fairness of elections, one of the most important elements of democracy according to Dahl.<sup>100</sup> Like their colonial predecessors, the ruling NPC-NCNC coalition was willing to bend the rules of democracy to ensure their position of power. In October 1963, a year after Awolowo's imprisonment, a new reform meant that the appointment of new judges no longer required approval from the politically neutral Judicial Service Commission, leaving these matters to party politics. Even though this type of procedure was not uncommon in other countries,<sup>101</sup> the tribalized nature of Nigerian politics, and the ruling elite's reputation of nepotism meant that the judicial power was no longer independent of the executive power.

However, democratic values had not disappeared completely. When plans for a Preventive Detention Bill were announced, Nigerian lawyers as well as journalists and members of the NCNC and AG voiced their concerns about the undemocratic implications of such a law. The

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<sup>97</sup> Clyde Sanger, 'Nigeria Faces Threat to Its Unity: Census Will Reveal Rivalries', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 28 October 1963.

<sup>98</sup> 'Demand for Another Census in Nigeria: Government Faces Crisis', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 28 February 1964.

<sup>99</sup> Bamiduro, 'Press And Politics In Nigeria's First Republic 1960-1966', 113.

<sup>100</sup> Dahl, 'What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?', 188.

<sup>101</sup> 'Rising Discontent in Nigeria: But Democracy Survives', *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 29 September 1963; Patrick Keatley, 'Africa's Crowning Glory', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 11 April 1962. These reforms came with Nigeria's declaration of the First Nigerian Republic in 1963. Before this change, Nigeria existed as a sovereign federation within the Commonwealth, with Elizabeth II as its queen. The new position of (non-executive) president was filled by Nnamdi Azikiwe (NCNC), who had previously played a similar role as Governor-General. He was seen as a Southern counterweight to the Federal Prime Minister, the Northern Abubakar Balewa (NPC).

bill was not enacted after this widespread critique,<sup>102</sup> which shows that democratic values still carried some weight in this period, and that there was some room for freedom of expression. In the colonial period, the British claimed to support the free press, but compromised on expressional freedom when colonial interests were at risk. Similarly, the Ministry of Information stated in 1960 that “destructive criticism” could not be tolerated.<sup>103</sup> Prosecution of journalists was about as rare in this period as it had been in the 1950s: journalists were mostly free in their work, but during the Western Political Crisis, two journalists were exiled from the region for their critique on the federal government.<sup>104</sup> An important characteristic of the press was that most newspapers were partially or completely owned or sponsored by political parties, and were involved (explicitly or implicitly) in the ethno-political rivalries of these parties, with biased publishing as a result,<sup>105</sup> and thus limited availability of neutral information for citizens.

What about other restrictions on freedom of expression, such as protests and strikes? After the collapse of AG in 1962, trade unions were the main voice of opposition on the federal level, and strikes were an important form of protest. As with the press, union activity was fairly unrestricted, but regional and federal governments often ignored such collective action. One rare victory was a general strike in 1963, which convinced the government to appoint a commission that would make plans for improved wage structures.<sup>106</sup> However, the fact that the government generally failed to respond to citizens’ protests shows that the government did not act in the best interest of its citizens, as should be expected in democratic states.<sup>107</sup> Just like in colonial Nigeria, citizens’ opinions carried little weight in postcolonial Nigeria, and in such situations, freedom of expression is not worth much.

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Nigerian Bar “Gravely Concerned”’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 25 July 1963; Mackintosh, ‘Nigeria since Independence’, 334.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Nigerian Resolution Asking for Independence’, 1959-1960, DO 35/10451, National Archives: ‘Debates of the House of Representatives’, 71–73.

<sup>104</sup> Mackintosh, ‘Politics in Nigeria’, 146; ‘Free and Not-so-Free Speech’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 27 May 1965.

<sup>105</sup> Bamiduro, ‘Press And Politics In Nigeria’s First Republic 1960-1966’, 117.

<sup>106</sup> Sanger, ‘Chances for Nigeria’s Left Wing’; ‘Rising Discontent in Nigeria: But Democracy Survives’.

<sup>107</sup> Maloba, ‘Decolonization: A Theoretical Perspective’, 9.

### 3.3 THE COLONIAL ROOTS OF THE 1966 COUP D'ÉTAT

From 1964 onwards, the political situation in Nigeria deteriorated quickly. The series of failed censuses had destroyed the ties between the NPC and NCNC, and the anticipation of the elections on December 30<sup>th</sup> further raised the stakes for political parties. This rivalry solidified with the creation of two electoral alliances: the NCNC united with AG to form the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), while the NPC started the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) with support from Akintola's NNDP. Both alliances were also supported by smaller minority parties,<sup>108</sup> and profiled themselves as nation-wide groups, despite being dominated by the NCNC and NPC respectively.<sup>109</sup>

Apart from the increasingly tense regional relations, the two political alliances were also polar opposites in their ideologies. According to Douglas Anglin, a contemporary political scientist commenting shortly after the elections, the NNA represented reaction, feudalism and neo-colonialism, while the UPGA was perceived to stand for progress, democracy and socialism. With such unreconcilable differences, the odds of the old coalition working together again were almost non-existent. President Azikiwe rightly described the atmosphere during the months before the elections as antagonistic and tribal. Fearing that the "hooliganism and thuggery" of politicians and citizens would escalate, an independent Electoral Commission was appointed to take measures against potential riots and attacks.<sup>110</sup>

Still, both the NNA and UPGA made constant allegations about electoral fraud and violence. Oppression of local opposition was common in all regions, with some cases of would-be candidates being intimidated, arrested, kidnapped and otherwise prevented from entering the elections. Three days before the elections, Okpara (who had become leader of the UPGA) announced that the UPGA would be boycotting the elections, and would not allow the NNA to

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<sup>108</sup> Walter Schwarz, 'Critical Election for Nigeria: The First of Two Articles by Walter Schwarz', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 9 December 1964; 'Who's Who in Nigeria', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 30 December 1964.

The UMBC, NEPU and the Northern Progressive Front were Northern parties that joined the UPGA, while the NNA had Southern parties such as the Midwest Democratic Front and the Niger Delta Congress on its side.

<sup>109</sup> Douglas G. Anglin, 'Brinkmanship in Nigeria: The Federal Elections of 1964-65', *International Journal* 20, no. 2 (1965): 176-77.

<sup>110</sup> Anglin, 177-179.

take office.<sup>111</sup> The Electoral Commission considered the alliance's request to postpone the elections, but a lack of consensus prevented the Commission from taking action.<sup>112</sup> Ultimately, voting in the Eastern Region and most of Lagos was sabotaged by the NCNC, which unsurprisingly resulted in an overwhelming NNA victory.<sup>113</sup> Azikiwe pled for new elections, threatening to resign as President, and the elections were completed in January 1965.<sup>114</sup>

Due to the electoral complications, it took some time for a new government to be fully installed. The NNA had still come out of the elections on top, which meant that Balewa would continue as Federal Prime Minister, and that the NPC would still be the most powerful party in Nigeria, with support of Akintola's NNDP.<sup>115</sup> Tribal antagonism had by no means disappeared however. By October, the West had its regional elections, and after an allegedly rigged victory by the NNDP, UPGA leader Alhaji Adegbenro proclaimed his own regional government, leading to his arrest, and riots in which seventeen citizens were killed by police force.<sup>116</sup> At this point, not much was left of the democratic ideal of "free, fair and frequent elections."<sup>117</sup>

It was clear that Nigeria had become even more polarised after the national elections than it already was. Threatening with resignation, secession and violence as a response to perceived electoral fraud had become a common method in the rivalry between Nigerian ethnopolitical groups. Eventual escalation was a logical result of the pressure that had been building up fast since the national elections. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1966, Balewa's government was overthrown by a military coup d'état, following the assassinations of important NNA leaders such as

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<sup>111</sup> Yemi Babatunde, 'Democratic Rule in Nigeria Unlikely: Accent on Suppression', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 22 December 1964; Walter Schwarz, 'Poll Terror Charges in Nigeria: Africa's Steadiest Democracy in Peril', *The Observer* (1901-2003), 27 December 1964.

<sup>112</sup> Walter Schwarz, 'Nigeria to Proceed with Election in Spite of Boycott', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 30 December 1964.

<sup>113</sup> Anglin, 'Brinkmanship in Nigeria', 182-83.

<sup>114</sup> 'Compromise Attempts Made in Nigeria: President Azikiwe Cancels "resignation" Broadcast', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 2 January 1965; Walter Schwarz, 'Nigeria to Finish off Its Election: Parties Resolving the Crisis', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 20 January 1965.

<sup>115</sup> Colin Legum, 'Nigeria Hanging on as a United Nation', *The Observer* (1901-2003), 4 April 1965.

<sup>116</sup> Walter Schwarz, 'NNDP Victory in Nigerian Poll', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 13 October 1965; Walter Schwarz, 'Nigerian Opposition Leader Held after Forming "Government"', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 15 October 1965; '17 People Die in Western Nigerian Riots', *The Guardian* (1959-2003), 10 November 1965.

<sup>117</sup> Dahl, 'What Political Institutions Does Large-Scale Democracy Require?', 188.

Balewa, Bello and Akintola by a military mutiny.<sup>118</sup> The chaos, initiated by Igbo military officers, allowed Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi to take power, who promised to solve Nigeria's problems of corruption and internal conflict,<sup>119</sup> and initially enjoyed widespread support from Nigerian citizens.<sup>120</sup> This support shows citizens' resentment towards the NNA political elite, and the lack of faith in the self-proclaimed democratic system: the military regime was expected to be temporary, and to bring forth a new political culture characterised by integrity and democracy.<sup>121</sup>

In conclusion, the early postcolonial period of 1960-1966 was a continuation of the colonial period in several ways, most importantly in the political power dynamics that characterised the country. The moderate conservative elite, foremostly represented by the NPC, was put in power by the British, and continued to rule the federation after independence. This was possible due to the unequal division of the country into regions based on ethnic groups, which enabled the North to politically outnumber the other regions. Other parties could either choose to work with the NPC to increase their power – as done by the NCNC until 1964, and the NNDP after 1962 – or oppose the NPC, as AG chose to do. The internal colonialism of the federal coalition was most clearly shown during the Western Political Crisis, which effectively destroyed the opposition, and strongly resembled the British attitude of anti-radicalism.

Nigeria still looked like a democracy on the face of it, and was considered democratic by the international press,<sup>122</sup> but it had the same autocratic characteristics as the colonial regime. Just as Britain had done, the NPC-led coalition bent and broke the rules of democracy to maintain its power, most notably through the census fraud of 1963, and electoral fraud in 1964, but also through the NPC's refusal to split up the Northern region, and the limited independence of neutral judicial power since 1963. Protests and strikes were generally ignored, which shows

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<sup>118</sup> 'Army Mutiny Rocks Nigeria: Rebel Officers Seize Premier', *The Observer (1901-2003)*, 16 January 1966.

<sup>119</sup> Walter Schwarz, 'Nigeria to Act against Corruption', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 7 February 1966; Walter Schwarz, 'Nigeria Takes Step towards a Unitary Government', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 14 February 1966.

<sup>120</sup> Ogbeyi, 'Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960', 7.

<sup>121</sup> Pita Ogaba Agbese, 'With Fingers On The Trigger: The Military As Custodian Of Democracy In Nigeria', *Journal of Third World Studies* 9, no. 2 (1992): 220–22.

<sup>122</sup> Yemi Babatunde, 'Democratic Rule in Nigeria Unlikely: Accent on Suppression', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 22 December 1964.

the autocratic nature of the postcolonial government, in which freedom of expression existed, but had no effect on policy.

Tribalism had not only inhibited the democratic potential of party politics, it had also exacerbated nepotism, clientelism and corruption throughout the political sphere and the civil service. With most of the Nigerian press financially dependent upon one of the ethnopolitical factions, tribalism held the entirety of Nigerian society in its grip. The colonially imposed domination of the NPC, and by extension of the North over the South, and the Hausa-Fulani over other ethnic groups, was effectively a continuation of colonialism, which fostered regional secessionist sentiments, and a general resentment towards those in power, symbolised by the widely supported coup of January 1966.

## MILITARY RULE AND CIVIL WAR

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The coup of January 1966 marked the end of the Nigerian First Republic. With Ironsi's military regime in power, there was not much left of the democratic and semi-democratic institutions that had been in place since before the independence. Two days after the coup, *The Guardian* concluded that democracy had failed as a result of the tribal tensions and corruption of politicians<sup>123</sup> (as I have argued in the previous chapter, true democracy never existed in Nigeria in the first place). Although Ironsi had come to power in an undemocratic way, he seemed committed to solving Nigeria's problems of tribalism and corruption. At the end of January 1966, the Head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, as was Ironsi's official title, announced that Nigeria would transition from a federal to a unitary government, in an attempt to reduce tribalistic tension. Corruption in politics and public service would no longer be tolerated in 'new Nigeria': eight former ministers were immediately detained on suspicion of corruption.<sup>124</sup>

Once the seal of peace and parliamentary democracy had been broken however, it was difficult to establish a new order. In July 1966, a Northern countercoup resulted in Ironsi's assassination, bringing Colonel Yakubu Gowon to power,<sup>125</sup> which meant that the anti-corruption campaign also came to an end.<sup>126</sup> This chapter discusses political processes that followed the two military coups of 1966, the escalation of the Biafran War, and the ways in which this conflict further deteriorated the chances of Nigerian democracy. I will argue that the Biafran War was a colonial conflict that logically followed from the undemocratic, colonial power structures that characterised the post-independence period (described in chapter 3), and answer the sub-question: "*How did the military coup of January 1966 lead to the escalation of the Biafran War, and how did this conflict affect Nigeria's democratic potential?*"

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<sup>123</sup> Geoffrey Taylor, 'A Democracy That Failed', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 17 January 1966.

<sup>124</sup> 'No Place in Nigeria for Profiteers', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 29 January 1966; Schwarz, 'Nigeria to Act against Corruption', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 7 February 1966.

<sup>125</sup> Arua Oko Omaka et al., 'The January 1966 Military Revolt in Nigeria and the Ethnic Conundrum', *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 10, no. 2 (19 March 2021): 64.

<sup>126</sup> Ogbeidi, 'Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960', 7.

#### 4.1 THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE INTO WAR

Although Ironsi's reign over Nigeria was short, his regime had a significant impact on the political developments that led to the Biafran War. The sudden transition from a civil government into a military regime meant that the old elite disappeared from the political stage. With the assassinations of the most important NNA leaders, the most powerful party of the country, the NPC, had lost all of its power and relevance overnight. Although UPGA leaders had not been targets of the military purge, most politicians carefully stayed out of Ironsi's way after witnessing the imprisonment of those who stood accused of corruption.<sup>127</sup> President Azikiwe, who had been abroad during the coup, did not return to Nigeria until after the beginning of the war. Since the country was in a state of emergency, the constitution was suspended, and by extension the position of president.<sup>128</sup> While Ironsi took charge at the Federal level, regional military governors were appointed to rule each of Nigeria's regions.<sup>129</sup>

The rigorous anti-corruption policies introduced by Ironsi, as well as the desire to create a unitary government served the purpose of counteracting tribalism. In addition to the arrest of corrupt politicians, the civil service, which had previously been organised predominantly on the regional level, would now be centralised in order to reduce clientelism and nepotism.<sup>130</sup> Along with these reforms, Ironsi also banned party politics and announced the centralisation of executive and legislative powers to the Federal government, effectively ending the system of regional autonomy.<sup>131</sup> Although the intended effect was to create a sense of national unity to replace the ethnic tensions that had dominated the period before the coup, Ironsi's reforms had the opposite effect: the coup, military regime and centralising reforms were seen by many

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<sup>127</sup> Colin Legum, 'Can Nigeria Escape Her Past?: Colin Legum, Our Commonwealth Correspondent, Traces the Origins of the Nigerian Army Mutiny to Its Roots in the Federation's History', *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 30 January 1966; Schwarz, 'Nigeria to Act against Corruption'.

<sup>128</sup> 'Dr Azikiwe Waiting to Be Invited', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 18 January 1966.

There was a lot of speculation about the timing of the military takeover and Azikiwe's overseas trip: some speculated that Zik had been warned about the coup, or was even involved in its organisation.

<sup>129</sup> Omaka et al., 'The January 1966 Military Revolt in Nigeria and the Ethnic Conundrum', 57.

<sup>130</sup> Chiemela Godwin Wambu and Chinyere S. Ecoma, 'A Post-Mortem Assessment of General JTG Aguiyi Ironsi's Contribution to Nation Building Efforts in Nigeria, January-July 1966', *Saudi J. Humanities Soc Sci* 6, no. 12 (2021): 527; Walter Schwarz, 'What's Gone Wrong in Nigeria', *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 26 June 1966.

<sup>131</sup> Uchenna S. Ani and Innocent-Franklyn Ezeonwuka, 'The Ironsi Regime and Decree No 34: A Historical Review', *Renaissance University of Management and Social Sciences*, 4 October 2019, 113.

Northerners as an Igbo conspiracy intended to dominate the North. The coup had been plotted by Igbo officers, Ironsi and his closest associates were Igbo's, and the commission tasked with the reforms also consisted of Igbo's.<sup>132</sup> All regional military governors however, were chosen based on the majority ethnicity of the respective region.<sup>133</sup> Considering this overrepresentation of Igbo's in Ironsi's regime, it is unsurprising that Northerners, particularly those who supported the NPC, saw themselves as the victims of the new regime.

The new reforms and the perceived victimisation of the North resulted in unrest across the country. From May 1966 onwards, riots broke out in several Northern cities and Igbo's in the region soon became targets of ethnic violence. The riots and violence against Igbo's were not only ethnically motivated: for the Northern Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo minority represented the perceived ethno-political domination of Ironsi's military rule, so violence was also a way of protesting against the new government.<sup>134</sup> The result was a large-scale migration of Igbo's from the North to the traditionally Igbo-majority East, which already faced overpopulation. Between June and October, approximately 60.000 Igbo's left the Northern region.<sup>135</sup>

The military regime was considerably more authoritarian than its civilian predecessor in terms of press freedom. Despite the fact that most newspapers in the country were tied to political parties, the press in Nigeria had always been relatively free. As violence escalated in the North however, the military regime started censoring newspapers in an attempt to prevent further unrest. Walter Schwarz, a British journalist who had covered Nigerian politics for the Guardian for years, was deported in June. He later wrote that before the coup, politicians had told him in person about their desire to have him and certain other foreign journalists deported, but that the

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<sup>132</sup> 'Nightmare Anniversary for Nigeria', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 1 October 1966; Ani and Ezeonwuka, 'The Ironsi Regime and Decree No 34', 113–14.

<sup>133</sup> Omaka et al., 'The January 1966 Military Revolt in Nigeria and the Ethnic Conundrum', 61–62.

<sup>134</sup> Walter Schwarz, 'General Ironsi Gives Final Warning after Nigerian Riots', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 31 May 1966; Walter Schwarz, 'Basic Mistrust of South's Intentions in N. Nigeria', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 3 June 1966; 'Riots Again in North Nigeria', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 6 June 1966; Walter Schwarz, 'Gen. Ironsi's Trust in His Friends Leads Nigeria Back to Tribal Strife', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 25 June 1966; Schwarz, 'What's Gone Wrong in Nigeria'.

<sup>135</sup> 'Nightmare Anniversary for Nigeria', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 1 October 1966.

checks and balances of the First Republic were always strong enough to prevent this.<sup>136</sup> This development shows that despite the ambition to end tribalism and corruption, Ironsi's government did not shy away from autocratic methods to accomplish their goals. In this sense his military dictatorship was no different from the British regime or the First Republic, but Ironsi went one step further by violating the freedom of press.

The counter-coup that started on July 28<sup>th</sup> and put General Gowon in power, was a result of the perceived Igbo domination. This time, the coup was plotted by Northern army officers, and resulted in the death of Ironsi<sup>137</sup> and many other (predominantly Igbo) military officers. Gowon, being a member of a Northern minority group and a Christian, was selected as a relatively neutral leader.<sup>138</sup> Although Gowon reversed Ironsi's controversial unification decree, emphasising that Nigeria could only function as a federation, the targeted attacks against Igbo's did not end. In fact, violence reached its peak in September, when estimates of Igbo death counts reached 30.000.<sup>139</sup> Around this time, there were already speculations of the Eastern Region planning to secede from Nigeria.<sup>140</sup>

Soon after coming to power, Gowon ordered the release of several political prisoners, including former AG leaders Awolowo and Enahoro, a gesture that gained him much support in the Western region.<sup>141</sup> With a new alliance between the North and West, there was once again one region in Nigeria that was politically excluded by the others. Exclusion of ethno-political groups was built into the system set up by the British during the period of decolonisation, and the military regime had not changed this. The Guardian accurately described the situation as a "dangerous game of political musical chairs", which could not be solved by the military, since

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<sup>136</sup> Schwarz, 'Gen. Ironsi's Trust in His Friends Leads Nigeria Back to Tribal Strife'; Schwarz, 'What's Gone Wrong in Nigeria'.

<sup>137</sup> At the time of the counter-coup, Ironsi's whereabouts were not publicly known. He had been kidnapped during the coup, but his body was only found months later. See: Patrick Keatley, 'Nigeria Mourns the Victims of Last Year's Rebellions', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 16 January 1967.

<sup>138</sup> 'Can Nigeria Stay Together?', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 3 August 1966; 'Support for Col. Gowon Promised', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 4 August 1966.

<sup>139</sup> Akinyemi, 'The British Press and the Nigerian Civil War', 416.

<sup>140</sup> Adeoye Akinsanya, 'Federalism And Military Rule In Nigeria, 1966-75', *Journal of the Indian Law Institute* 20, no. 3 (1978): 393; 'Nightmare Anniversary for Nigeria'; 'Can Nigeria Stay Together?'

<sup>141</sup> Ani and Ezeonwuka, 'The Ironsi Regime and Decree No 34', 114.

they were just as wrapped up in the intertribal rivalry as political parties had been.<sup>142</sup> While the military takeover was meant to be a temporary measure that would “restore democracy”, returning to a civilian government seemed increasingly unlikely.

In the following months, support for Eastern separatism grew amongst citizens and Eastern leaders as a result of the mass violence. Student protests followed when Gowon publicly emphasised Nigeria’s federal unity,<sup>143</sup> and Regional Military Governor Odumegwu-Ojukwu presented Gowon with an ultimatum after failed negotiations in Ghana, demanding full regional autonomy for all regions as a solution to the deep divide between the East and the rest of the Federation. He threatened to “take unilateral action” if the demands would not be met.<sup>144</sup> Tension built until May 29<sup>th</sup> 1967, when Gowon announced the States Decree, which divided Nigeria’s four regions into twelve states.<sup>145</sup> By ending the unequal division of regions, with the disproportionately-sized Northern region that had been the cause of so many of Nigeria’s political problems in the past decade, Gowon had accomplished what had been impossible under the rule of the NPC. However, the centralisation required by this reform was deemed unacceptable in the East, where Ojukwu proclaimed the Republic of Biafra the next day,<sup>146</sup> illustrated in Figure 2.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> ‘Can Nigeria Stay Together?’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 3 August 1966.

<sup>143</sup> ‘Students Fight Colonel Gowon’s Federal Moves’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 2 December 1966.

<sup>144</sup> ‘Nigerian Leaders Meet in Ghana’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 5 January 1967; Walter Schwarz, ‘Who’ll Put Nigeria Together Again?’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 16 January 1967; Walter Schwarz, ‘Leaders Try to Avert Nigerian Showdown’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 6 March 1967.

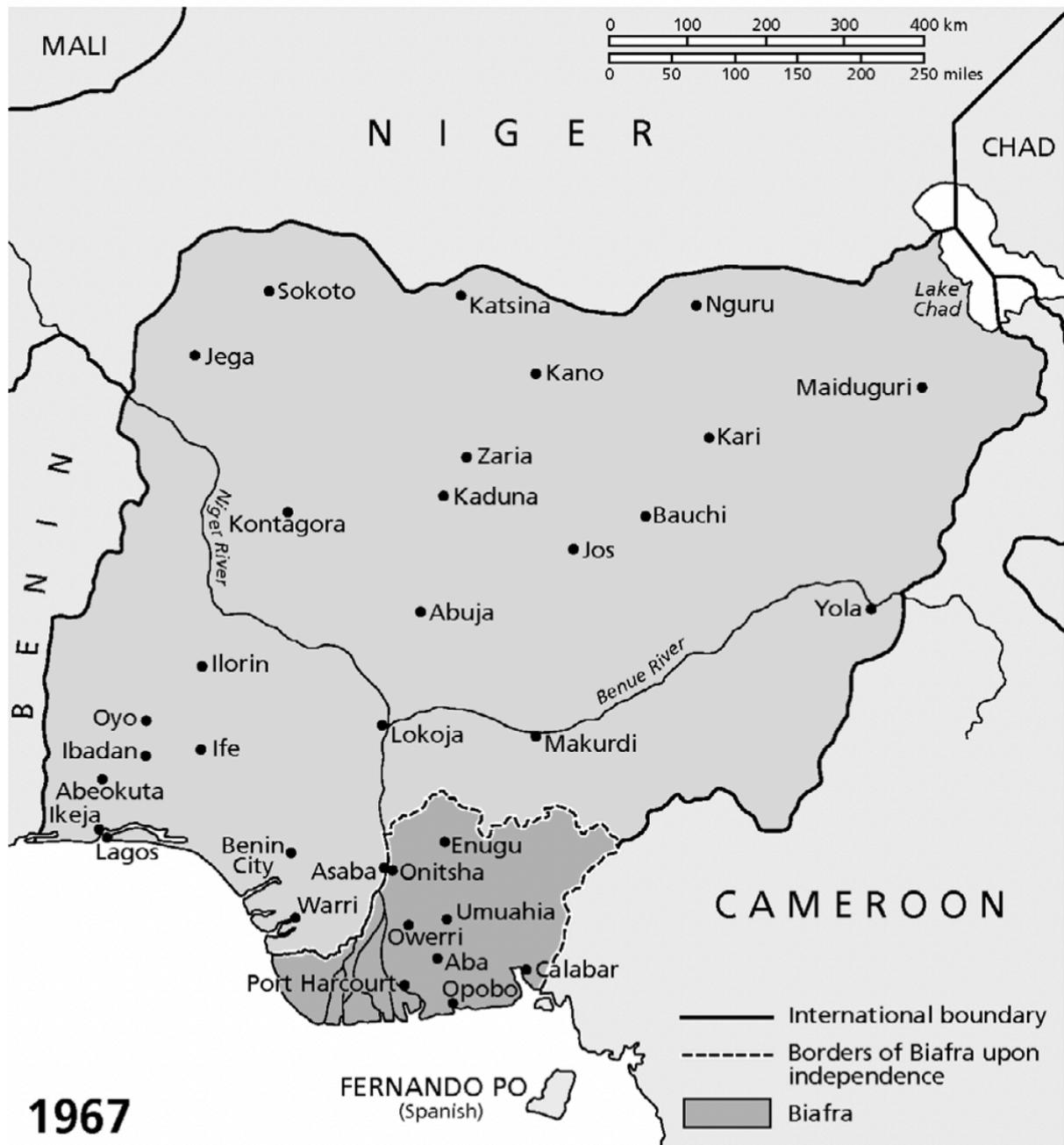
<sup>145</sup> ‘E. Nigeria No Longer Recognises Col. Gowon’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 3 March 1967; Harold Jackson, ‘E. Nigeria Challenges Col. Gowon’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 14 March 1967; Harold Jackson, ‘Secession Not Viable for Eastern Nigeria’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 16 March 1967; Walter Schwarz, ‘E Nigeria on Brink of Secession’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 29 May 1967.

<sup>146</sup> Akinsanya, ‘Federalism And Military Rule In Nigeria, 1966-75’, 393; Patrick Keatley, ‘East Nigerian “Revolt Will Be Crushed”’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 31 May 1967.

<sup>147</sup> Bonny Ibhawoh, ‘Refugees, Evacuees, and Repatriates: Biafran Children, UNHCR, and the Politics of International Humanitarianism in the Nigerian Civil War’, *African Studies Review* 63, no. 3 (September 2020): 573.

**FIGURE 2:** Map of the Biafran Republic in 1967, situated in Nigeria's former Eastern Region.

Source: Bonny Ibhawoh, 'Refugees, Evacuees, and Repatriates: Biafran Children, UNHCR, and the Politics of International Humanitarianism in the Nigerian Civil War', *African Studies Review* 63, no. 3 (September 2020): 573.



#### 4.2 THE BIAFRAN WAR AS A COLONIAL CONFLICT

The civil war between Biafra and the rest of the Nigeria from 1967 to 1970 was a result of the ethnic tensions and escalated violence, particularly against Igbo's, who no longer trusted the Federal Government to protect them from injustices and Northern domination.<sup>148</sup> On the surface, these particular issues seem to be caused by the military regimes that took over in 1966, which is why the war was mostly seen as an ethnic or religious conflict.<sup>149</sup> As I have shown in this thesis so far however, the problems that underlie the conflict date back to the colonial era. The Biafran War must be considered a colonial conflict, in which Biafra attempted to free itself from Nigeria's (specifically Northern) internal colonialism. Since the conflict is far too complex to discuss in its entirety in this section, I will focus on the ways in which the Biafran War was a result of the internal colonialism of Nigeria during the 1960s.

Considering how closely postcolonial Nigeria resembled its colonial predecessor in the period from 1960 to 1967, the secession of Biafra can be seen as a war of independence against internal colonialism. The First Republic had always been dominated by the NPC, which had been put in power by the British, and was able to stay in power through the flawed federal institutions, but also by oppressing opposition and committing fraud. Nigeria's civilian regime looked like a democracy, but it was effectively a continuation of the colonial state, with the Northern region using autocratic methods to politically dominate the rest of the country. While the Eastern NCNC may have worked with the Northern NPC during the first few years, it was always the NCNC that depended on the NPC, not the other way around. By the time that the war started, sentiments of regional secession had already been voiced in almost every region at some point: first in the West in 1962, then in the North during Ironsi's short reign,<sup>150</sup> and finally in the East after the Northern counter-coup. After a brief period of intermission, the North had regained its position of power over the other regions, and with the West on its side, the East was left excluded from any real political power, like the West had been during the rule of the NPC/NCNC coalition.

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<sup>148</sup> Lasse Heerten and A. Dirk Moses, 'The Nigeria–Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide', *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 2–3 (3 July 2014): 172–73.

<sup>149</sup> Nicholas Ibeawuchi Omenka, 'Blaming The Gods: Christian Religious Propaganda In The Nigeria—Biafra War', *The Journal of African History* 51, no. 3 (2010): 367–69.

<sup>150</sup> Donald L. Horowitz, 'Patterns of Ethnic Separatism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 2 (1981): 178.

From this perspective, the Biafran secession is a logical result of Gowon's States Decree. Although Nigeria would remain as a federation, the creation of states required significant centralisation. Just as unification under Ironsi had been unacceptable to the North, unification under Gowon was unacceptable for the East.<sup>151</sup> An important difference between the two however, was that the Eastern region feared for the safety of its people since the eruption of large-scale violence against Igbo's. Eastern leaders such as Ojukwu considered the unity of the Nigerian nation to be irreparably damaged after this show of ethnic violence.<sup>152</sup> As a federal region, the East still had some level of autonomy, but the new arrangement would mean being far more dependent upon the central government,<sup>153</sup> and those they considered responsible for the anti-Igbo violence of 1966.<sup>154</sup> For the East, the States Decree symbolised the long-standing desire of the North to colonise the other regions, which is why the Decree was the direct cause of the secession.

Another important aspect in the Biafran secession was the increasingly lucrative oil industry that was developing in the Niger river delta, a part of the Eastern Region. When oil export first started in 1958, a British colonial commission determined that 50% of natural resources belonged to the region of origin, while the other 50% would be shared with other regions and the federal government.<sup>155</sup> As the value of oil export increased and the political situation deteriorated, the question of who was entitled to natural resource royalties returned. In 1967, when the East was reconsidering its place in the federation, the federal government asked oil companies to make its payments to the federation instead of the Eastern region,<sup>156</sup> while Ojukwu claimed that Eastern oil revenue belonged to the Eastern regional government.<sup>157</sup> When the war between Nigeria and Biafra started, outgoing oil tankers were initially exempt

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<sup>151</sup> Akinsanya, 'Federalism And Military Rule In Nigeria, 1966-75', 393.

<sup>152</sup> Charles R. Nixon, 'Self-Determination: The Nigeria/Biafra Case', *World Politics* 24, no. 4 (1972): 475-76; Schwarz, 'Who'll Put Nigeria Together Again?'

<sup>153</sup> Akinsanya, 'Federalism And Military Rule In Nigeria, 1966-75', 393-96; Schwarz, 'Who'll Put Nigeria Together Again?'; Schwarz, 'Leaders Try to Avert Nigerian Showdown'.

<sup>154</sup> Charles R. Nixon, 'Self-Determination: The Nigeria/Biafra Case', *World Politics* 24, no. 4 (1972): 475.

<sup>155</sup> Chibuike Uche, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (2008): 115-16; Phia Steyn, 'Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903-58', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 2 (1 June 2009): 266.

<sup>156</sup> Uche, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', 122.

<sup>157</sup> Walter Schwarz, 'Eastern Region of Nigeria Seizes Financial Autonomy', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 1 April 1967; 'Biafra Claims Oil Royalties', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 22 June 1967.

from the trade embargo that was placed onto Biafra by Nigeria, because the federation was still hoping to be paid for the oil that left the Niger delta.<sup>158</sup> This economic dispute does not only reflect the tribalism that had already been present in Nigeria since the colonial era, it also shows that all parties knew how important oil revenue would be if the East were to secede. Finally, it shows that the federation intended to claim Eastern oil revenue *and* keep the East dependent upon the rest of the country in a way that strongly resembles colonial dependency and natural resource exploitation.

The dispute of Nigerian oil also saw the return of older colonial dynamics, as British oil companies controlled the vast majority of the Nigerian oil industry. Shell-BP in particular had a total of £250 million invested in Nigerian oil by 1967, which was “of great importance to Britain’s economic balance of payments,” according to British prime minister Wilson.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, Britain became more dependent upon Nigerian oil due the Six Day War in the Middle East, which disrupted oil flow to Britain from June 1967. Although Britain formally intended to stay neutral, these high stakes and the dispute over oil royalties meant that Britain and Shell-BP had to make a decision on which party would receive the payments. Since Biafra was considered to be an unlikely winner of the conflict, the British government concluded that paying Nigeria would be the safer option.<sup>160</sup>

The value of Nigerian oil added the economic dimension of colonialism to the Biafran War. The conflict was not only about the self-determination and freedom from the federal government’s repression, it was also about the capital from export of oil, which brought Britain into the conflict. While the British government backed Nigeria to protect its own economic interests, France chose to support Biafra, for both economic and political reasons. France’s economic incentive was similar to that of Britain: the French state-owned oil company SAFRAP initially controlled 7% of Nigeria’s oil production, and was interested in expanding this market share at the expense of Shell-BP. France therefore supported Biafra through oil

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<sup>158</sup> Uche, ‘Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War’, 123.

<sup>159</sup> Uche, 113.

<sup>160</sup> Our Commonwealth Correspondent, ‘Pay Now or No Oil, Says Nigeria’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 15 June 1967; ‘How Safe Is Nigeria’s Oil?’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 15 June 1967; Terence Prittie, ‘Britain Still Trying to Keep up Flow of Oil from Nigeria’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 11 July 1967; Uche, ‘Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War’, 123–27.

royalties and by supplying weapons in the hopes of SAFRAP inheriting Shell-BP's assets.<sup>161</sup> Politically, De Gaulle saw the presence of a strong Nigerian federation as a threat to French hegemony in West Africa, so the Biafran secession was seen as beneficial to France.<sup>162</sup> Interestingly enough, most francophone West African countries were on Nigeria's side despite France's support for Biafra. This was because a Biafran victory could spark more secessionist conflicts throughout Africa, which most states wanted to avoid.<sup>163</sup> Despite the support France offered in the form of oil royalties, weapons and mercenaries,<sup>164</sup> France never formally recognised the Biafran Republic.<sup>165</sup> While the Biafran War was already a conflict with colonial causes and characteristics, Britain and France both fuelled the conflict, turning it into a proxy war between the two main former colonial powers in Africa who were both concerned with economic gain.

#### 4.3 THE EFFECTS OF THE BIAFRAN WAR ON NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

By the time that the war ended in a Nigerian victory in January 1970, Biafra was in ruins. In addition to the thousands of military casualties on both sides, between one and two million people are estimated to have died of starvation as a result of the Nigerian naval blockade, which stopped food supplies from coming into Biafra. Today, there is still an academic debate about the recognition of the use of famine as a means of committing genocide against Igbo's.<sup>166</sup> The war, and particularly the famine, were widely covered by the foreign media,<sup>167</sup> and the colonial

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<sup>161</sup> Christopher Griffin, 'French Military Policy in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 26, no. 1 (2 January 2015): 118–19; Uche, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', 128–29.

<sup>162</sup> Uche, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', 128.

<sup>163</sup> Chibuike Uche, 'Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War', *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (2008): 128; Mehrunnisa H. Iqbal, 'The Organisation Of African Unity— 1969-73', *Pakistan Horizon* 26, no. 4 (1973): 50–60.

<sup>164</sup> Griffin, 'French Military Policy in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970', 121–23.

<sup>165</sup> Françoise Ugochukwu, 'The Nigerian Civil War and Its Media: Groping for Clues', *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 2 (2010): 184.

<sup>166</sup> Heerten and Moses, 'The Nigeria–Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide', 169–71; Douglas Anthony, "'Ours Is a War of Survival": Biafra, Nigeria and Arguments about Genocide, 1966–70', *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 2–3 (3 July 2014): 206–206; Nixon, 'Self-Determination', 473.

<sup>167</sup> Coverage of the famine actually contributed to the popularisation of the well-known trope of the "starving African child" that is often used by humanitarian organisations. See: Heide Fehrenbach and Davide Rodogno,

attitudes that were present in British and French involvement were already controversial at the time, as some even claimed that the British policy towards the Biafran War was worse than anything Britain had done during its colonial rule over Nigeria.<sup>168</sup>

The defeat of the Biafran Republic meant that the secessionist territories were reincorporated into the federation. Although Biafran leaders expressed fears of further ethnic violence, and colonel Ojukwu fled the country, Gowon emphasised that Igbo's were still considered fellow Nigerians, and that reconciliation would be the main priority in the aftermath of the civil war.<sup>169</sup> This reintegration had limited success; on the one hand, violence targeted against Igbo's came to an end, and the federal government seemed committed to the reintegration of Biafra into Nigeria.<sup>170</sup> On the other hand, the military government was limited in its capacity to carry out its plans, and was relatively slow in solving the acute problems of famine, despite large amounts of foreign aid.<sup>171</sup>

Moreover, the population of the former Republic of Biafra was significantly disadvantaged by the conversion of Biafran to Nigerian currency. Obafemi Awolowo, who had become minister of finance after his release from prison in 1966, was tasked with re-integrating Biafra into the Nigerian economy. The resulting policy would be known as the Twenty Pound Scandal. Biafran bank deposits made during the war were not acknowledged. Instead, clients of Biafran banks were all given a modest twenty Nigerian pounds, regardless of how much they previously

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“‘A Horrific Photo of a Drowned Syrian Child’: Humanitarian Photography and NGO Media Strategies in Historical Perspective’, *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 900 (December 2015): 1148-50.

<sup>168</sup> Our own reporter, ‘British Policy under Savage Attack at Biafra Rally’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 30 September 1968; Michael Lake, ‘Biafra: The Morals of Investment: What Are Britain’s Prospects in Nigeria Now?’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 15 January 1970.

<sup>169</sup> Crawford Young, *The Post-Colonial State in Africa*, 20; ‘Reconciliation in Nigeria’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 18 February 1970; ‘Can Gowon Save the Ibo?’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 14 January 1970.

<sup>170</sup> Colin Legum, ‘After the Tragedy’, *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 18 January 1970; David J. Murray, ‘Nigeria After Biafra’, *Current History* 58, no. 343 (1970): 141.

<sup>171</sup> John de St. Jorre, ‘Nigeria/Relief Work: Softening the Blow of Biafra’s Defeat’, *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 18 January 1970; “‘Problems” on US Aid for Nigeria’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 12 February 1970; ‘Can Gowon Save the Ibo?’; Our own Reporter, ‘The Ibo Food Crisis Persists’, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 25 March 1970; Dick Moberly, “‘I Am Conscious That I Myself Have Become Dehumanised. Faced with the Necessity of Saying ‘No’ so Often to the Individual to Cope with Feeding the Mass, I Have Become Callous””, *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 14 April 1970.

owned. This left many citizens deprived of the necessary capital to rebuild after the war, and reinforced the idea that Igbo's were still a marginalised group within the federation.<sup>172</sup>

The civil war had made the military government more authoritarian throughout all of Nigeria. The large-scale mobilisation meant that the country was far more militarised than before, with soldiers abusing their power over citizens and violent incidents that remained unpunished. The military government also introduced bans on strikes and unions, and minimum punishments for certain crimes, including the death penalty. Police and military power over citizens was expanded by removing the requirement of arrest and search warrants, and allowing preventative arrests.<sup>173</sup> Press freedom and expats were not exempt from this trend towards authoritarianism: in 1970, a Canadian journalist as well as a group of Irish Catholic priests were arrested and deported on the suspicion of feeding anti-federalist sentiments.<sup>174</sup>

The Nigerian oil industry allowed the military government to fund its autocracy. In 1969, Gowon already increased government control over oil licenses,<sup>175</sup> and after the war ended, oil production rose sharply. In 1971, Nigeria joined OPEC before gradually nationalising oil production.<sup>176</sup> As an OPEC member, Nigeria benefited massively from the 1973 oil crisis, but these benefits were not enjoyed by everyone equally. While profits were partly used to fund infrastructure, much of the revenue was spent on the military.<sup>177</sup> The issue of corruption had also returned, particularly within the military, where bribes and extortion were commonplace. Taking bribes was also common within the civil service,<sup>178</sup> as it had been before Ironsi's rule.

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<sup>172</sup> Godwin Onuoha, 'Bringing "Biafra" Back in: Narrative, Identity, and the Politics of Non-Reconciliation in Nigeria', *National Identities* 20, no. 4 (8 August 2018): 386.

<sup>173</sup> 'If You Beat "em, Join" Em', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 4 September 1970; Murray, 'Nigeria After Biafra', 141; Peter Hillmore, 'What Can Politics Solve?', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 30 September 1974.

<sup>174</sup> Our Foreign Staff, 'Nigeria 'Feeding 700,000 Ibos a Day'', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 29 January 1970.

<sup>175</sup> Ann Genova and Toyin Falola, 'Oil in Nigeria: A Bibliographical Reconnaissance', *History in Africa* 30 (2003): 137.

<sup>176</sup> 'Nigeria Joins Oil Leaders', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 22 September 1970; Peter Hillmore, 'Nigerian Government to Enter Oil Prospecting Field', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 28 April 1971; Peter Hillmore, 'Nigeria to Follow Arabs in Seeking Bigger Oil Stake', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 28 October 1971.

<sup>177</sup> Sayre P. Schatz, 'A Look at the Balance Sheet', *Africa Report* 15, no. 1 (1 January 1970): 19; Genova and Falola, 'Oil in Nigeria', 137.

<sup>178</sup> Colin Legum, 'Can Gowon Halt Nigerian Corruption in Time?', *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 20 February 1972; Ogbeyidi, 'Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria since 1960', 7.

The Biafran War and the oil boom tightened Gowon's grip over Nigeria, but the colonially inherited political problems of the First Republic (tribalism and corruption) also legitimised the regime, since they promised to solve these issues. While military rule was seen as a necessary temporary measure in 1966, plans for a transfer of power to a new civilian government were abandoned.<sup>179</sup> In 1972, Azikiwe proposed a political system of 'dyarchy', in which civilian and military leaders would share the power of government, so that the military could be a safeguard against the political issues of the First Republic.<sup>180</sup> His statement illustrates the lack of faith in civil party politics that marked the period after the civil war.

While Nigeria had become significantly more authoritarian under Gowon, military rule did not manage to solve the problems that it was expected to solve. Apart from corruption and poverty, the most important political issue was still the tribalism that had haunted Nigeria since the Federation's inception. Though much less visible after the abolition of political parties and the replacement of regions with states, the mutual mistrust between ethnic groups did not disappear after the civil war ended. After a 1974 census, the problem of inflated population numbers resurfaced, with some regional numbers being widely contested. The census's estimate of the total Nigerian population was 30% higher than UNESCO's estimates, rendering the census useless.<sup>181</sup> The return of census fraud shows that ethnic rivalry for political power was as alive as it had been in 1964, while political and civic freedoms had been sacrificed in an attempt to unify the country. While the First Republic at least had some democratic characteristics, the military regime after Biafra had lost all pretensions of ruling Nigeria democratically. Gowon's rule lasted until a new military coup ousted him in July 1975,<sup>182</sup> and Nigeria would continue to be ruled by the military until 1979.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Hillmore, 'What Can Politics Solve?'; Peter Hillmore, 'Nigeria Abandons Plan for Civil Rule', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 2 October 1974.

<sup>180</sup> Agbese, 'With Fingers On The Trigger: The Military As Custodian Of Democracy In Nigeria', 222; 'Nigeria's Lasting Problems', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 2 September 1970.

<sup>181</sup> A. Correspondent, 'Census Statistics Reopen Old Sores', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 29 July 1974; Hillmore, 'Nigeria Abandons Plan for Civil Rule'.

<sup>182</sup> 'End of an African Enigma?', *The Guardian (1959-2003)*, 30 July 1975; Colin Legum, 'The "hawk" Who Is Replacing Gowon', *The Observer (1901- 2003)*, 3 August 1975.

<sup>183</sup> Crawford Young, *The Post-Colonial State in Africa*, 151.

## CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

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On the surface, the history of Nigeria seems to be full of unexpected turns. In the 1960s, the country looked like a postcolonial success story, and Britain credited itself with this democratic success. The First Republic of Nigeria was a textbook example of how Britain had brought modern civilisation and democracy to Africa. When the country fell apart in a brutal civil war seven years later, this image of successful decolonisation was shattered. However, the war was often reduced to a tribal or religious conflict. In other words, the nature of African society was to blame for the breakdown of democracy.

This thesis presents a different narrative, one that includes the colonial legacy that shaped the political developments of postcolonial Nigeria. Historian Wunyabari Maloba argues that the ability of postcolonial states to fully decolonise hinges on the ability to replace colonial institutions with democratic institutions. I have applied Maloba's theory to the case of Nigeria, analysing political institutions built during the decolonisation of the 1950s, and tracing these institutions through the early postcolonial period of the 1960s. In every chapter, the "democraticness" of institutions was assessed using the requirements of large-scale democracy theorised by Dahl: freedom of expression and association, free, fair and frequent elections of representative officials, and inclusive citizenship. The central research question of this thesis is: "*Why has Nigeria struggled to develop a stable democracy in the period between 1960 and 1975?*" I will return to the sub-questions answered in the previous chapters, before arriving at the answer to the main question.

Chapter 2 started by analysing British colonial rule in Nigeria during the 1950s, in order to answer the sub-question: "*Which political institutions shaped British colonial rule in Nigeria in the 1950s, and how compatible are these with democratic values?*" Nigeria's period of controlled decolonisation was characterised by an overarching ideology of anti-radicalism. The aim was to prepare Nigeria for its role as a modern democratic state and an ally to Britain, while keeping strict control over the process of decolonisation. Many institutions that are required for democracy were put in place throughout the decade, such as the Westminster-style system of parliament and ministers. The Colonial Office explicitly aimed to stimulate political participation of citizens and the press.

However, this period was still unmistakably colonial and autocratic: the British desire to shape Nigerian politics to its advantage meant that basic democratic values were disregarded, and institutions were only democratic as long as it suited British interests. By far the most influential case of institutional manipulation was the division of the country into three regions, one of which outnumbered the others in size and population. This created a political environment in which parties aligned with ethnic groups, and allowed the conservative NPC to control the federal government, which suited British interests.

Chapter 3 answered the sub-question: *“In what ways did postcolonial political institutions resemble their colonial predecessors, and how did these institutions shape the political developments that led to the failure of electoral democracy?”* The First Republic was a continuation of colonialism; throughout the existence of the Republic, the NPC managed to stay in control through its colonially inherited position of power, and Nigeria was characterised by internal colonialism rather than democracy. When necessary, undemocratic methods such as fraud were used to manipulate the electoral system, a trait also inherited from the British. Political opponents stood little chance unless they aligned themselves with the NPC; the relationship between the NPC and other parties in the 1960s was similar to the relationship between the Colonial Office and Nigerian political parties in the 1950s.

This meant that the democratic requirement of “free, fair and frequent elections” was not met. While freedom of expression and association existed, strikes and protests carried little weight. The Nigerian government primarily served its own interests, much like the British colonial system did. Most media were owned by political parties, and were therefore wrapped up in ethnopolitical rivalries, reinforcing tribalism and secessionist sentiments, and hindering citizens’ ability to make unbiased political decisions. The tribalism, corruption and ethnic nepotism of this period deteriorated faith in electoral democracy, resulting in the military coups of 1966. All the while, Britain credited itself with having created modern democracy in Africa.

Chapter 4 answered the sub-question: *“How did the military coup of January 1966 lead to the escalation of the Biafran War, and how did this conflict affect Nigeria’s democratic potential?”* Military leaders were hoping to solve the problems of tribalism and corruption, even if it meant temporarily sacrificing the system of electoral democracy, but the military was equally limited by tribalism. Considering the relationship of internal colonialism between the North and the

other regions, the Biafran War must be seen as a war of independence against internal colonialism, and a reaction to the Northern-dominated Federal Military Government's ambition to centralise power. The internal colonialism that caused the war had been made possible by the British colonial legacy. Geopolitically, the war saw Britain and France returning to imperial rivalry by fuelling the conflict for economic gain.

While military rule and the Biafran War had not solved any of the country's political issues, it had cost Nigeria its remaining elements of democracy. Elections, citizens' representation and party politics had been abolished. Journalistic censorship and a ban on strikes had eroded freedom of expression and association. The war had left the country more militarised and authoritarian, and corruption at a peak. Meanwhile, tribalism and interethnic power struggle still existed beneath the surface, as revealed by the 1974 census fraud. This period reflects Claude Ake's image of African democracy (as mentioned in the introduction); a vicious cycle of coercion and alienation, which is seen in Nigeria between ethnopolitical groups, as well as between the government and its citizens.

Having considered the ways in which undemocratic colonial institutions have persisted after the Nigerian independence, it can be concluded that Maloba's concept of incomplete decolonisation accurately characterises the case of Nigeria. However, the ideographic approach of this thesis has pointed out that the reality of Nigerian history has an additional layer of complexity. Maloba's theory brings to mind a clear-cut dichotomy between colonial and democratic institutions, where the former are overtly oppressive and exploitative, while the latter are textbook cases of democratic utopia. In reality however, there is a significant grey area between the two, and the political history of Nigeria reflects this. The colonial institutions introduced by the British often looked democratic. Nevertheless, the colonial, undemocratic authority that was used to impose these institutions hollowed out their democratic potential. Thus, historical reality was more nuanced than the theory suggested. This explains why Nigeria was considered a democracy, while in reality, the colonially inherited political institutions were fundamentally flawed and inhibited the development of true democracy, instead creating a negative spiral of autocratisation.

While Nigeria is currently under a civilian and elected government, many of the problems that troubled Nigeria persisted until long after 1975. Politicisation of ethnicity, corruption, and economic inequality are still present today. Without disregarding the decades between 1975

and the present, this thesis has shown that these problems have their roots in Nigeria's colonial legacy. Further research will have to analyse how Nigeria's political system was hindered by its colonial heritage during the Second, Third and Fourth Republics of the following decades.

Further research would benefit from a more diverse selection of sources. While the colonial documents, in combination with Stoler's method of "reading against the archival grain", have provided insight into the British colonial thinking of the 1950s, this thesis lacks the Nigerian voices of this period, apart from some Nigerian parliamentary debates. The same can be said for the journalistic source material used to research the period of 1960 to 1975. This research relied mostly on British sources, in which the colonial gaze is undeniable. Despite the effort to offset this by citing secondary literature from predominantly African authors, further research that includes more of the Nigerian perspective would be a valuable and logical next step.

Based on this thesis, it must be concluded that Nigeria's lack of successful democratisation cannot be explained using the simple and racist logic of African backwardness. Nigeria's political history can only be understood as a result of the British brand of decolonisation, which attempted to build democratic institutions, but instilled fundamentally undemocratic elements that inhibited true democracy. The British approach to decolonisation has undoubtedly had its effect on other British ex-colonies in Africa, which struggled with similar political problems according to Ake and Crawford Young. The tragic irony of British decolonisation lies in the internal contradiction of *imposing democracy*: autocratic methods could never result in a democratic political system.

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