

FROM CONQUEST TO INDEPENDENCE: THE NIGERIAN COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

Tunde Oduwobi

University of Lagos, Nigeria. E-mail: tundeoduwobi@yahoo.com

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Abstract: This paper is a panoramic discussion of the imposition and character of colonial British administration in Nigeria. It begins by examining the factors and circumstances which facilitated the intrusion of the British in the Nigerian area. The most important event in this development was the conquest of the Lagos in 1851 and its formal incorporation as a colony ten years later in 1861. Concomitantly, British influence spread into the hinterland from Lagos and from the lower reaches of the Niger. Such, however, was the character of the British penetration that when in 1900 political control was formally established over the Nigerian area it took the tripartite form of three autonomous administrations. These three became subsequently amalgamated in 1914 to form the Nigerian state; yet the tripartite administrative traditions were not obliterated and they remained as latent forces modifying the country's historical development. Thus, at the twilight of the colonial period, Nigerian nationalism, developing as it was to terminate British colonialism, became negatively adulterated by ethnic nationalism resting on the strong pillars of the tripartite traditions fostered by British colonial rule. The Nigerian state therefore emerged from colonialism with the problem of forging political unity.

Keywords: Nigeria, colonialism, independence

PRELUDE

The historical background of the colonial period, about which this chapter is concerned, may be traced to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade by the British in 1807. To be sure, the sale and traffic of human beings was obnoxious and morally reprehensible. But that consciousness only became compelling and

universal in Britain following its technological advancements in the eighteenth century as Europe's leading industrial economy. The Industrial Revolution, as it is commonly referred, led to a phenomenal rise in the use of a variety of agricultural products. This enhanced demand for raw materials progressively undermined the pre-eminence of the slave trade within the matrix of the British economy.¹ By 1805, notes Adu Boahen, only two per cent of British export tonnage was employed in the slave trade.² In particular, there was an awakened interest in tropical African products, such as dyes, gums, and vegetable oils. A significant position came to be occupied by palm oil, which served a variety of purposes including lubrication, lighting, and soap manufacture. The chief supply-source of this commodity in West Africa was the Nigerian coast. This economic development provided the enabling circumstances for the abolition of the slave trade.

An integral factor in the abolition, in fact, its original strain, were the activities of humanitarians and philanthropists who campaigned against it as intrinsically evil, and expounded agrarian theories for the exploitation of the agricultural potentials of Africa as a panacea for the termination of the trade. The principal element of the argument was that the African's orientation on the economic viability of his homeland should be diverted from slave to agricultural exports. They advanced, too, the introduction of Western civilization through African conversion to Christianity. "The Bible and the Plough", therefore became their slogan—i.e., religious and economic strategies—as the primary means of undermining the slave trade. The various Christian evangelical missions, whose advent

dates from the 1840s in Nigeria, were agency for the actualization of these hopes. The foregoing were the forces that underlay the presence of the British in Nigeria during the nineteenth century, and which marked the genesis of their political activities in the country.

1. THE IMPOSITION OF COLONIAL RULE

By 1884 on the eve of the Berlin Conference, British influence had well been established in the Nigerian area. Beginning in 1849 when the British established a consular authority for the Bights of Benin and Bonny (Biafra), gun-boat diplomacy was adopted to protect their commercial interests against the coastal states.³ In 1851 for instance the British decisively intervened in a dynastic dispute in Lagos,⁴ and ten years later (1861) took complete possession of the island as a colony. From Lagos, the British became gradually involved in the developments of the hinterland in Yorubaland.⁵ The British applied themselves with the same vigour in the Niger Delta where by a series of coercive manipulations they compelled the delta states to do their bidding.⁶ From the 1850s, the Niger River became the medium for the spread of British influence to the country's northern reaches—thanks to the Scottish industrialist, MacGregor Laird, whose pioneering efforts were accompanied by a flood of British trading concerns in the Niger-Benue basin. A crucial stage was attained in 1879 when these firms coalesced into one to form the United African Company. By 1882, when the company changed its name to the National African Company it had begun to nurse political ambitions over the areas of its operation.

Connected with the rising influence of the British in Nigeria was the increasing commercial rivalry among the major European powers which by 1884 had reached fever-pitch. It took a distinctive political dimension in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference as each power sought geo-political control to protect its commercial interests. The eventual colonial acquisitions were preceded by a treaty-making phase during which the powers signed agreements with the local authorities to formalize their interests. But in contemporary European diplomacy these documents were conceived to establish political claims. In 1900, the geographical configuration of Nigeria was defined under three political and administrative units, namely, the Colony and Protectorate of

Lagos; the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria; and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. In what follows an attempt is made to discuss the process by which these units were achieved.

By 1890, the British government in Lagos had concluded treaty agreements with a number of Yoruba states variously recognizing the pre-eminence of British interest vis-à-vis other European powers. In the spirit of the time, a less friendly disposition was viewed by the British as unacceptable. It was in this stance that the British conquered the Ijebu Kingdom in May 1892 for obstructing free trade and communication with the interior. Thereafter the British embarked on the process of bringing Yorubaland under their political control either through threat of force as they did in Ibadan in 1893 when a resident was stationed there, or a demonstration of force as when in 1894 a punitive action was taken against the Alaafin and his town of Oyo was bombarded.

East of Yorubaland, the treaty-making exercises of Hewett, the consul of the Bights of Benin and Bonny, with the local authorities in 1884 marked the beginning of the eventual British take-over. In 1887, King Jaja of Opobo was forcibly removed and exiled for obstructing commerce; Nana, an Itsekiri merchant prince was likewise treated in 1894 for a similar offence; while the Benin Kingdom was conquered in 1897, and its king exiled for obscurantism. Hence British political control had come to be established by the time the bights and their undelimited hinterland were proclaimed as the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1889. It became the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893, and although it changed again to the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1900 to signify the imposition of colonial rule, it was not until about 1905 that its hinterland borders were determined after the British conquest of the inhabitants.⁷

North of the Niger-Benne basin, the activities of the National African Company prepared the ground for the eventual imposition of colonial rule. As already mentioned, the company had by 1882 begun to nurse political ambitions of its own to protect its commercial interests in its area of operation. For this purpose, it applied for a charter from the British government, but which was turned down. Not daunted, however, the company embarked on indiscriminate treaty-making exercises by which it claimed to obtain political and commercial concessions from local

authorities on the Niger-Benue basin. These documents secured the area for the British at the Berlin Conference, and in 1886 the British granted the company the charter by which it was to protect British interests in the area on behalf of the government. Following the grant of the charter the company changed its name to the Royal Niger Company (RNC).

From the Niger-Benue basin the company launched northwards as it approached the Sokoto caliph for commercial concessions in the caliphate. The situation, however, became serious when the French and the Germans joined in the fray as they sought to challenge and undermine the manoeuvres of the RNC at the caliph's court. It all soon blew up into an international and diplomatic issue. In the event, between 1894 and 1899 the various governments involved concluded a number of agreements by which the Sokoto Caliphate area was assigned to the British. By the same token, the state of Borno was partitioned into three with its western portions going to the British. It was on this basis that the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was proclaimed on 1 January 1900. The charter of the RNC was revoked as its territories formed the southern limits of the new protectorate.

The Protectorate of Northern Nigeria did not, however, become an administrative until after 1903. This because the various (though not all) emirates of the caliphate offered stoic resistance to the imposition of colonial rule. Sokoto, the seat of the caliphate, was the last to fall in March 1903.

But all resistance was only broken in July with the death on the twenty-seventh of Caliph Attahiru at the Battle of Burmi on the eastern marches of the caliphate whither the caliph had fled. In Borno, the British takeover was less complicated. There, the French had in 1900 assisted the Shehu to restore his authority, and for which he was to pay an indemnity of 80,000 dollars. In 1902, the British took effective occupation of their zone in Borno. A garrison was established in the town of Maiduguri to which the Shehu was induced to establish his seat of government by an offer of relief from further payments of the French indemnity.

2. THE COLONIAL REGIME

The inauguration in 1900 of three geo-political administrations for the Nigerian area marked the

formal commencement of British colonial rule in the region. The geo-political entities, as already mentioned, were the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Their respective administrations found themselves confronted with broadly similar problems concerning the governance of the populations under their jurisdiction. And instinctively all three administrations adopted identical methods in resolving the issue, distinguished only by the territorial peculiarity of the respective areas. Problem with which they had to contend related to climatic, communication, personnel, and financial factors. While the first two, for example, created logistic difficulties, the other two compounded such difficulties by their insufficient amounts. In the circumstances, all the three administrations sought to establish a cheap and manageable means of government by utilising indigenous socio-political structures and systems as basis of local government.⁸ Indirect rule, as this concept of government has come to be understood, involved the relatively few Europeans available in supervisory capacities over the various indigenous authorities applying indigenous administrative concepts to the extent to which these were permissible to the British. The nature and application of indirect rule during the early part of the colonial period are examined in the following discussion. It need be stated at this juncture, however, that the variant of indirect rule conceived by Sir Frederick (later Lord) Lugard in Northern Nigeria subsequently formed the basis of British official policy in Nigeria in particular and in their other non-settler dependencies in Africa in general.

The head of the administration of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was styled high commissioner to which Lord Lugard was appointed in 1900. At his exit in 1906, the post was re-designated as governor. The protectorate was divided into provinces and divisions respectively under residents and district officers, with assistant district officers attached to the latter.

The divisions comprised the various local government units with the head of each unit styled the Native Authority. Under this dispensation, Borno, the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate and suchlike political entities became transformed into local government areas as the Shehu and the emirs (including the Caliph of

Sokoto) were appointed as Native Authorities. However, since the protectorate officials were convinced that the best and most convenient means of local government administration was through the appointment of a paramount authority, non-centralised communities were either aggregated under one of their kind as Native Authority or were simply brought under a neighbouring Native Authority.

Again, following the typical political structure of Borno and the emirates, each local government area was divided into districts under district heads, and placed over the heads of the constituent villages or towns. Revenue was raised through the imposition of taxes which were channelled through village and town heads and their respective district heads.

The Native Authorities retained a share of the taxes collected in their respective areas of jurisdiction, while the remaining portion went to the protectorate government. However, from 1911 the portion allocated to the Native Authorities was converted into a treasury (called the Native Treasury) which became the basis for the establishment and maintenance of a local government bureaucracy characterized by budgetary allocations.⁹ Hence one or more local government units supported by a Native Treasury were referred to as a Native Administration.¹⁰ In effect, the Native Authority and all other local government functionaries became salaried or stipendiary staff of the Native Administration.

The Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, as the name indicates, comprised two territorial sections. The colony incorporated areas annexed to the British Crown with all political authority exercised by British officials. In the protectorate area, indirect rule was applied as the indigenous authorities were not shorn of all political power. The entire area (i.e., colony and protectorate) was divided into districts. A district commissioner was appointed for each, and was responsible to the governor who was the head of the administration.

In the protectorate, the territories of the pre-colonial Yoruba kingdoms constituted the units of local administration. Under the Native Councils Ordinance of 1901, the indigenous authorities were invested with executive, legislative and judicial powers under the supervision of the district commissioner.

Since the concept of taxation was alien to pre-colonial Yoruba societies and as tolls were abolished under the new dispensation, local administration revenue was principally derived from court fees and fines.¹¹ Usually the indigenous authorities shared a moiety of the revenue, while the other part was used to run the local administration.

In the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, the head of the administration, as in the North, was referred to as the high commissioner until 1906. The territory was divided into divisions and districts respectively under divisional commissioners and district commissioners. A great majority of the communities of the protectorate were non-centralised. Although under the principle of indirect rule indigenous authorities were appointed by which local administration was operated, but the character of such appointments seldom had roots in the indigenous political system. For political headship became distorted through the substitution of the traditional democratic practice by an autocratic genre with the appointment of those styled as Warrant Chiefs. Worse still was the fact that many of those appointed lacked the traditional qualification or eligibility for political headship. A local government unit was usually formed under the collective headship of Warrant Chiefs over a designated area of jurisdiction.

In 1906, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were merged under a single administration called the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria headed by a governor. No new major administrative changes were introduced except that the territory was divided into three provinces headed by provincial commissioners. The provinces consisted of districts under district commissioners. In 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, and thus emerged the Nigerian state.¹²

The head of the new administration, styled governor-general, was Lord Lugard who applied the territorial divisions of the North alongside its system of indirect rule to the south.¹³ This brought about two immediate difficulties. The first was the question of taxation. The idea of a regular imposition of taxation was as mentioned earlier for the Yoruba area, generally alien to the ethnic groups of the south. It was therefore met with some opposition. Thus while it came to be generally applied in the Yoruba and Benin areas

by 1918, it took another decade thereafter before it could be introduced in the south eastern parts of the country.

The other and second problem was the concept of paramount authority. According to the provision of the relevant statute, the Native Authority Ordinance, a Native Authority could be a “chief ... or any native tribunal.”¹⁴ The ideal, however, was the former.¹⁵ Thus even in a place like Yorubaland where there were paramount authorities, their traditional councils were denied official recognition so that the term Native Authority applied solely to the rulers. As a corollary, the term sole Native Authority subsequently emerged in administrative vocabulary. Matters were made worse among the acephalous societies of the southeast where a number of Warrant Chiefs were appointed as Native Authorities over designated areas. So disturbing did conditions become that in 1924 the idea of Native Authorities had to be revoked for these areas and the position was reverted to the *status quo ante*. The unsatisfactory nature of the situation underlay the demonstrations in Warri and Aba in 1927 and 1929 respectively following the introduction of taxation.

During the 1930s moves were initiated to redress the shortcomings of the system in the country generally. This led to the gradual abolition of the Sole Native Authority concept as the base of executive authority of the local administration both at the central and town levels was democratized. Needless to say, the Warrant Chief system, with no roots in the indigenous system, suffered a natural death.

One other feature of Lugard’s amalgamation was the retention of the two administrations. J.J. White describes the position and its political repercussions aptly. “Northern and Southern Nigeria”, he writes “were retained as the two main constituent units of the new country—becoming respectively the Northern and Southern Provinces, each under a fully-fledged lieutenant-governor complete with secretariat.”¹⁶ And the effects? “The division of the country into North and South ... meant, in effect, that the concepts of North and South should continue to serve as the administrative strait-jacket within which the minds of policy makers would have to operate.”¹⁷

This dichotomy was assiduously fostered especially by British officials in the North as they championed the cause of a northern

identity. For them the North held out the hope of their notions of the ultimate aim of indirect rule. This was that the Native Administrations should develop into semi-autonomous states under the traditional aristocracy and forming a Nigerian confederal union.¹⁸ Arguably the most influential exponent of this Northern identity was H.R. Palmer who was the lieutenant-governor for the Northern Provinces between 1925 and 1930. In 1928, he wrote to a close associate, G.J. Lethem: “One cannot ‘unify’ Nigeria. They don’t seem to understand that fully—and that is the only real justification for Lieutenant-Governors.”¹⁹ He said as much in the open. In the same year of 1928 on the occasion of a meeting of the Central Executive Council, he was reported to have “said that the fact must be faced that eventually there would be three countries—East of the Niger, the North and the Yoruba country—all divergent and requiring separate treatment.”²⁰

Hence one major outcome of Lugard’s amalgamation was that the country’s political unity was constrained by its bi-polar administrative structure. And although the country had since 1939 been divided into more administrative regions, the concepts of North and South have become ingrained and fossilized within the country’s body politic.²¹

3. THE GROWTH OF NATIONALIST SENTIMENT

By the 1940s, the reality of the Nigerian state, despite contrary voices and notions as those of the likes of Palmer, had been accepted by a large section of the Western-educated elite as they were in the vanguard of the crusade for the greater involvement of Nigerians in the management of the affairs of their country. This emergent national consciousness was precipitated by several factors resulting from the harsh conditions of colonialism and colonial rule.

One of the basic assumptions underlying the imposition of colonialism was the notion of white supremacy. Accordingly, the colonial situation was characterised by racial inequality and discrimination. A policy of separateness was maintained in all spheres of social life. Thus, for example, not only were Europeans settled in different residential areas, their quarters contrasted sharply with the squalor of the Nigerian areas as there was a wide disparity in the quality and quantity of the provision of

facilities. Again, job opportunities and promotion for Nigerians were limited. Few Nigerians attained the upper echelons in both government and private organisations, and even then these ones did not enjoy equal level of emoluments and perquisites with their European colleagues.

It need be added that the concept of white superiority was equally fostered by early Christian evangelism. Convinced that Africa had little worthy heritage, the missionaries directed their energies at denationalising the African. However, such notions had provoked in the Western-educated African—a product of the mission schools—a cultural consciousness and which aimed at separating Christian precepts from Western concepts. Attempts at establishing independent African churches or the substitution of English and biblical names with African ones were some of the traits of cultural nationalism by which Nigerians endeavoured to retain the relevant aspects of their culture.

Economic exploitation was another factor that promoted Nigerian national awareness. By 1930, the Nigerian economy had come to be completely dominated by European firms to the exclusion of Nigerian entrepreneurs. The export and import trade was controlled by such European firms as the UAC, CFAO, SCOA, PZ, and John Holt, with the consequence that they were the principal determinants of the prices of export goods (agro-based items produced by Nigerians) and import goods (manufactured items consumed by Nigerians).

The unassailable position enjoyed by these firms was ensured by the fact that Nigerian businessmen had little access to the capital market. The banks, and these were controlled by Europeans, were reluctant to grant them credit facilities for the ostensible reason of lack of guarantees, but mainly because of distrust for the African. The whole position was agonizing to Nigerians; worse still as the greater part of the profits made by the forms were transferred to their home countries, and not re-invested in Nigeria for industrial growth. It was against this background that Nigerian entrepreneurs established an indigenous bank in 1933 called the National Bank.

The issue of the little opportunity available for educational growth was another sore point. The provision of Western education was largely in the hands of the Christian missions. Not only

were their aims limited to religious considerations, the missions were also hampered by financial constraints to provide requisite educational facilities. Consequently, the country was without educational institutions for the development of high-level manpower. When eventually the colonial government made a gesture in this direction, it was devious.

In 1930 the government established a medical school and in 1934, the Yaba Higher College. But this educational advancement was limited in scope. In the first place, the two institutions were denied university status or affiliation. They were therefore diploma-awarding institutions. Secondly, the government educational initiative sidelined the training of manpower development in management and political administration as no provision was made for disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. The two schools were concerned to provide a limited number of personnel for the government medical and technical departments.²² And in view of the fact that the two institutions awarded diploma certificates, their graduates occupied subordinate positions. Thus the government's reluctance in promoting qualitative and quantitative higher education was a source of grievance to Nigerians. Protest against the government was expressed with the formation of the Lagos Youth Movement in 1934 when the Yaba Higher College was about to be established. In 1936, the group changed to the Nigerian Youth Movement to demonstrate its identification with national issues.²³

In the political sphere, the involvement of Nigerians in the country's administration was limited to the appointment of a few unofficial members in the Legislative Council. Initial British policy indeed was for the marginal involvement of the available articulate Western-educated class whom they regarded as unrepresentative of the Nigerian masses in terms of number, territorial affiliation, and cultural identity. Not only were they mainly concentrated in Lagos, they formed a new elite apart from the traditional ruling and aristocratic class considered the true representative of the Nigerian mass by the British government. The official position was, however, unacceptable to the Western-educated elements since they were the better material available that could function under the new colonial dispensation. In the circumstances, this articulate section of the society grieved about the fact that for the next two decades after the establishment of the

Central Legislative Council in 1923, the Nigerian representation in the council was below one-third of its total membership.²⁴

It is significant to point out that the growth of nationalist feeling was not solely precipitated by internal developments in the country. There were some external currents as well which played a part in the phenomenon. During the opening decades of the twentieth century educated Nigerians were exposed to contemporary movements and literature which sought to champion the dignity and political emancipation of the black race. Foremost in this promotion of black consciousness were the activities and writings of such figures like Edward Wilmot Blyden (a Liberian); W.E.B. du Bois and Booker T. Washington (both of whom were African-Americans); and Marcus Garvey (a Jamaican). The resultant influence played a part in the formation of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA) in 1919 by a group of Anglophone West Africans to press for political and social reforms.²⁵

Another pressure group whose ideals were akin to those of the NCBWA was the West African Students' Union (WASU) formed in 1925 in London by Ladipo Solanke, a Nigerian law student who graduated in 1926. The union played a significant role in the promotion of nationalist consciousness through the spread of ideas and support for the development of literary and pressure groups in Nigeria.

The momentum of nationalist awareness was quickened by developments associated with World War II. In the first instance, there was widespread frustration in Nigeria against the position of the British government that the principles of the 1941 Atlantic Charter—a joint declaration with the American government on the right of all peoples to self-determination—did not apply to colonial dependencies. To many Nigerians, there was no justification therefore for their recruitment in the British army to defend and uphold the British Empire if there were no prospects for independence at the end of the war.

Second, the participation of Nigerians in the war as well as the large number of European and American soldiers to which the country played host exposed Nigerians to the human frailties of white men from which they had hitherto been shielded.²⁶ The notion of white superiority was at once dispelled.

4. POWER DEVOLUTION

As a result of increasing nationalist agitation and American international pressure, Britain (and other European colonial powers) was constrained to grant greater African involvement in governance.²⁷ This gradual devolution of power may, however, be contextualised through an examination of the process and character of constitutional developments in the country since 1914.

The amalgamation of the country in 1914 was accompanied by the establishment of a central body called the Nigerian Council. With Lugard, the governor-general, the council comprised twenty-four of the most senior British officials in the country. The council included also twelve nominated unofficials, six of whom were British individuals representing various trading and commercial interests. The other six were Nigerians, namely, the Sultan of Sokoto, Emir of Kano, Alaafin of Oyo, Chief Dore Numa (Itsekiri), Messrs. Richard Henshaw (Calabar) and C.A. Sapara (Lagos).

The Nigerian representation was non-consequential not only because they constituted a hopeless minority, but also that the first four mentioned were an arm of the government machinery since they were heads of local government units. They constituted the traditional ruling aristocracy whom the British, as exemplified by Lugard, considered the true representatives of the interests of the Nigerians masses. Accordingly, the remaining two Nigerians were nominated as representatives of an emergent minority group, the educated elite, largely concentrated in the coastal towns of Lagos and Calabar.

As an official institution, however, the Nigerian Council served no ends in good governance. It was strictly an advisory body functioning as the appendage of the executive. At any rate, the majority of the Nigerians in the council who were expected to convey public opinion of the Nigerian masses showed little concern as they were unable to effectively communicate this in the English language, the official medium, of which they had no knowledge.

Lugard's successor in 1919 Sir Hugh Clifford, recognized the farcical nature of the council and abolished it. A constitution was promulgated in its place in 1922 which established a Legislative Council. The council was provided with powers

to consider and approve government's administrative and fiscal policies. The membership of the council was, however, lopsided in favour of the government. There were twenty-seven officials to eighteen unofficial seats, with ten reserved for Nigerians of the latter number. Four of the Nigerian seats were elective and were allocated to Lagos and Calabar on a ratio of 3 to 1. The remaining seats were to be filled by educated nominees from parts of the country. Indeed the dearth of a highly educated class in the Northern Provinces was one reason that the representation and jurisdiction of the Legislative Council was restricted to the Southern Provinces. Legislation in the North remained therefore strictly under the powers of the governor.

It is significant to note that the elective principle embodied in the constitution stimulated the formation of political organisations which emerged as platforms for the election of representatives. An attendant result of this development was the promotion of political and national consciousness. Until the late 1930s, the leading party was the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded by Herbert Macaulay, who because of his nationalist activities has been ascribed in Nigerian nationalist historiography as the "father of Nigerian nationalism."

By the mid 1930s, it was becoming evident that the increasing number of Western-educated elements in the country, especially in the Southern Provinces, could no longer be politically marginalized. Hence under the governorship of Donald Cameron (1931–1935) the educated elite were introduced to governance through the democratisation of the local government institution. Thus when in 1946 a new constitution was promulgated by Governor Richards many of them gained membership into the Legislative Council either as elected or nominated representatives of their local councils.

The Richards Constitution of 1946 can in some respects be regarded as a watershed in the political history of the country. For one thing, it created regional councils which formed the superstructure of subsequent constitutional developments. For another, the constitution terminated the principle of official majorities. One other fact was that it created a Central Legislative Council with a membership encompassing representation from the three

administrative division of the country, namely, the Northern Provinces, Western Provinces, and Eastern Provinces. From the constitution is to be dated the gradual transfer of power to Nigerians.

Under the constitution, regional councils, designated Houses of Assembly, were established for each of the country's three administrative divisions. The councils, however, did not constitute legislative organs serving as constitutional checks to the political authorities of their respective territories. Rather they played the role of a consultative forum, and were involved in fiscal and related matters. Representatives were elected from local government councils to the regional councils, which in turn elected its representatives to the Central Legislative Council. As noted above, the councils contained unofficial majorities.

The Richards Constitution was superseded by the Macpherson Constitution in 1951. The new constitution enhanced the level of Nigerian participation in government through the establishment of executive councils with Nigerian majorities. The constitution transformed the country into a federal state of three regions—as the three administrative divisions were now designated—for by providing the regions with legislative and executive councils they were turned into political units with statutory powers for the governance of their respective areas. This political metamorphosis was signified by a change in the designation of the head of the administration from chief commissioner to lieutenant-governor.²⁸

The Macpherson Constitution established a parliamentary form of government in which the Nigerian members of the various executive councils (regional and central) were derived from the membership of the legislature.²⁹ At the central executive council each region was represented by four members. Since representation in the regional legislature was by direct franchise and not through the local government councils as under the Richards Constitution, there emerged political parties seeking to control the affairs of their regions. In the event, three of these became pre-eminent by reason of the fact each commanded the support of the dominant ethnic group in the region in which it was based. These were the Action Group (AG), National Congress of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC),³⁰ and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) respectively supported

by the Yoruba (West), Igbo (East), and Hausa/Fulani (North). Ethnic and regional politics thereafter marked political developments in the country.

The regional elections under the new constitution were held between August and December 1951. The NPC won majority seats in the North, the AG in the West, and the NCNC in the East. In likewise manner these were the main parties represented in the Central legislature, called House of Representatives, where membership was by election from the regional legislatures.

One difficulty in working the constitution was that the regional legislatures were the pillars on which the central legislature rested. In view of the rivalry and distrust that characterised relations among the parties, constitutional deadlocks were frequent when a particular region felt that a proposed central policy was inimical to its interests. This was the case in late March 1953 when the AG and the NCNC signified intention for full independence for the country in 1956. The NPC, fearing that without sufficient constitutional safeguards, this demand may lead to dominance of administrative personnel by southerners, opposed the idea. In desperation they proposed a confederal association with the rest of the country which would allow them a large measure of autonomy.

This disagreement led to arbitration by Oliver Lyttelton, the colonial secretary, as a result of which a new constitutional and federal arrangement was designed.³¹ The regions were granted greater powers in view of their particularistic tendencies. This was further signified by the fact that unlike hitherto when elections to the House of Representative was by indirect elections from the regional legislatures, representation in the central legislature was now by direct franchise.

There were other aspects of the Lyttelton Constitution, as it was called, which signified the gradual withdrawal of the British.³² Government business in the regions was to be directed by the party majority leader in the regional legislature. He was to be designated premier,³³ and would be responsible to the British regional governor.³⁴ At the federal level, the legislature was to be presided over by a non-partisan Nigerian designated the speaker. The different levels of political development between the northern and southern regions were

exemplified in fact that while in the latter British officials were now excluded from both the legislative and executive councils (except the governor who presided over the executive council), in the north a handful of British officials still retained membership in the councils. Thus it was that the two southern regions requested and were granted regional self-government in August 1957, while the north deferred till March 1959. The status of regional self-government meant the exclusion of the British regional governor from the executive council, although he retained reserve powers to disallow measures which he considered inimical to national interests.

There were similar developments at the centre. In September 1957 the post of prime minister, akin to the regional premier, was created. This led to the exclusion of British officials in the executive council except the governor-general who presided. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the NPC was appointed to the post as the leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives following the federal election held between October and December 1954. He retained this position in similar circumstances after the elections held in December 1959. He thus became Nigeria's prime minister at independence in October 1960.

Yet in their devolution process, the British bequeathed to the country a political liability which impeded national unity. This was the unequal geo-political structure of the country which left a section of the country, the Northern region, over half the size of the whole. Not wanting to be involved with fresh administrative problems, the British simply shunned repeated calls from southerners for the creation of more regions or boundary adjustments to redress the geo-political imbalance.³⁵ In effect, half of the membership seats in the central legislature (the House of Representatives) were allotted to the North.³⁶ This meant that, with the final devolution of power to Nigerians the North would always have an overriding influence in the country's affairs. Given the ethnic particularisms of the country's politics, this geo-political equation conferred great political advantage on the NPC, with its complete dominance of the North. With a large number of representatives in the central legislature the NPC had easier circumstances to form the nucleus of the central government. This was what happened in 1959 when the NPC, having failed to secure the required majority to

form the government, entered into an alliance with the NCNC as the stronger partner. This underlying advantage of the North, concretized by the NPC's stronghold in the region, over the rest of the country did not augur well for political stability.

NOTES

¹ Under the slave-oriented economy, British shipping conveyed slaves to the slave plantations of British colonies in the Americas upon which Britain was dependent for raw materials.

² Adu Boahen, *Topics in West African History* (London: Longman, 1966), 117.

³ The first consul was John Beecroft, a trader in the bights.

⁴ They ejected King Kosoko and replaced him with his uncle, Akitoye, who promised to uphold British interests.

⁵ See in general, S.O. Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours* (Ibadan: University Press Plc., 1991); B.A. Awe, "The Rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba Power in the Nineteenth Century" (DPhil thesis, Oxford, 1964); O.O. Ayantuga, "Ijebu and Its Neighbours, 1851–1914" (PhD thesis, London, 1965).

⁶ As in the Lagos area and its hinterland, there is also a substantial amount of literature on the activities of British activities in the Niger Delta and its hinterland during the nineteenth century. For a panoramic coverage, see K.O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830–1995* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), and J.C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885–1906* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).

⁷ See O. Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 36–53.

⁸ "If the tribal system is allowed to fall into decay," noted a senior official of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, "it will be necessary to increase to an extent almost beyond the resources of the protectorate staff necessary for doing the work which is now done under the tribal system." [C.O. 520/9, Confidential, No. 9, Probyn to C.O., 15 September 1901, as cited in Anene, *Southern Nigeria*, 250.] MacGregor, the governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos remarked in a similar vein in the same year that "if there was to be peace and government... conducted at an expense that can be borne by local revenue that Government must as regards the interior be carried on through the instrumentality of the chiefs." (NAI, CSO 1/3, vol. V., Letter No. 44 of 11 November 1901, MacGregor to Colonial Office, as cited in J.A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longman, 1973), 94.

⁹ Mary Bull, "Indirect Rule in Northern Nigeria, 1906–1911," in *Essays in Imperial Government*, ed. Kenneth Robinson and Frederick Madden (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963), 47–87.

¹⁰ 'Each Unit,' wrote Lugard, 'which possesses a Treasury of its own is called a Native Administration.' [Lord Lugard, *Political*

Memoranda, 3rd edn. (London: Frank Cass, 1970), 320.

¹¹ Toll collection constituted the primary source of revenue for the indigenous authorities. Its abolition was therefore unpopular, and in Ilesa the colonial government had to use force to ensure compliance. (See Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire*, 98–99)

¹² The primary reason for the amalgamation was economic. It was an arrangement by which the deficits incurred by the northern administration would be defrayed by the solvency of its southern counterpart, thus relieving the British government of its subvention to the former. Besides, not only had the two administrations embarked on competing highway commercial policies by building rival railway systems, they also engaged in unfriendly administrative relations arising from boundary disputes. The home authorities found this situation awkward and embarrassing since the two were British territories.

¹³ The title of governor-general was replaced by that of governor at the end of Lugard's tenure in 1919. It was revived in 1955, used by Sir John Macpherson at the tail end of his tenure and by his successor, Sir James Robertson, 1955–1960.

¹⁴ *Laws of Nigeria, 1923* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1923), CAP 73, Section 4.

¹⁵ Lugard advised: "The first step is to endeavour to find a man of influence as chief, and to group under him as many villages or districts as possible." [A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), 70/71 (para. 24).

¹⁶ J. J. White, *Central Administration in Nigeria, 1914–1948* (Dublin: Irish Academy Press, 1981), 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41. Lugard dismissed counsels from other quarters that the country should be divided into three or more administrative zones. See A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria*.

¹⁸ For the struggles see White, *Central Administration*, *passim*.

¹⁹ Palmer to Lethem, Letter, 7 August 1928 as cited in *ibid.*, 153. On assumption of office in 1931, Governor Donald Cameron prevailed upon the British government to replace the post of lieutenant-governor with that of chief commissioner. "The lieutenant governors", writes G. N. Uzoigwe, "had received their commissions directly from the king and this had caused them, especially those for the north like Palmer and [C.W.] Alexander, not only to attempt to undermine the authority of Lagos but also to work toward Northern Nigeria separation on some spurious arguments. Now that the chief commissioner no longer received his commission directly from the king, he became a sort of super resident. [G. N. Uzoigwe, "Federalism Versus Centralism: Continuity and Change," in *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honour of Toyin Falola*, ed. Adebajo Oyeade (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), 190.

²⁰ White, *Central Administration*, 157.

²¹ Thus although the modern conception of the division of the country into six territorial zones is to de-emphasise the notion of bipolarity, the endurance of the North-South heritage is reflected in the nomenclature of the zones—namely, North West, North Central, and North East on one hand, and South West, South South, and South East on the other.

²² The number of admission was, in fact, dictated by anticipated vacancies in government technical departments. Hence not only was course of study predetermined, as applicants had no free choice; the highest intake during the first decade of the school did not exceed 36 from about 150 applicants, i.e., 24 percent. [J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (California: University of California Press, 1958), 123–24.]

²³ This was embodied in its *Nigeria Youth Charter* published in 1938. The organization hoped to work for “the unification of the tribes of Nigeria through the encouragement of better understanding and cooperation to the end of creating a common ideal.” [Cited in Coleman, *Nigeria*, 225.]

²⁴ See S.O. Okafor, *Indirect Rule: The Development of Central Legislature in Nigeria* (Surrey: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1981), 57–99, 179–88. The highest number of Nigerian representation throughout the twenty four-year existence of the council was 14 out of a total of 45 members.

²⁵ They demanded, inter alia, legislative councils with half of their memberships comprising elected Africans; and the establishment of a university for the West African colony territories.

²⁶ During the war West Africa, Nigeria in particular, became strategically important to allied movements and communications as a result of the control of the Mediterranean by the Axis powers.

²⁷ For some of these impelling factors, see G.O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1933–1953* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1973), ch. III.

²⁸ Cf. Palmer’s notion above on the office of the lieutenant governor as implying a quasi-independent political authority.

²⁹ The Nigerian members in the executive councils were designated ministers.

³⁰ This became the National Council of Nigerian Citizens in 1961 following the excision of the Southern Cameroons from Nigeria.

³¹ This was arranged through conferences with party leaders first in London between 30 July and 22 August 1953, and then in Lagos in January 1954.

³² The constitution became operational from October 1954.

³³ These posts were filled by the heads of the parties namely, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Zik) for the Western, Northern, and Eastern Regions respectively, being also members of their regional legislatures.

³⁴ The regional lieutenant-governors were, under the new arrangements, re-designated governor, while the governor of the country became governor general.

³⁵ The Willink Commission set up in November 1957 to look into the issue recommended against a change in the country’s tripartite geo-political structure.

³⁶ Indeed new electoral delimitation exercises conducted for the 1959 federal election gave the north 174 out of 312 seats, i.e., 56 percent.