



# ETHNO-TRIBAL POLITICS IN NIGERIA

COLONIAL FOUNDATIONS, POSTCOLONIAL RECONSTRUCTIONS

Mohammed Sulemana

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY  
Sydney – Australia

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DEPARTMENT OF MODERN HISTORY, POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL  
RELATIONS, FACULTY OF ARTS

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Thesis Title

**ETHNO-TRIBAL POLITICS IN NIGERIA**  
*COLONIAL FOUNDATIONS, POSTCOLONIAL RECONSTRUCTIONS*

By  
MOHAMMED SULEMANA  
*BA Hons (Ghana), MIL (Sydney)*

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of  
Master of Research (MRes) degree.

Supervisor  
DR. NOAH R. BASSIL

Institution  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY, SYDNEY – AUSTRALIA  
Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations

Date  
NOVEMBER 21, 2014

To my twin siblings:  
Hassan and Huseina

### **Thesis Abstract**

Nigeria is known for its perverse and ferocious web of ethno-tribal identity politics. Since the early post-independent years, problems associated with ethno-tribalism have posed a significant challenge to the country's progress. In searching for a political institutional response, Nigeria at independence adopted the federal spirit upon which imperial Britain founded its Nigerian colony in 1914. Federalism, an entirely foreign and novice political system, was to become not only a solution to the plethora of economic and political problems but just as importantly it was perceived as the sole remedy to the endless legacy of upheaval, disunity and conflict. However, after half a century of attempts, the country is plagued by intransigencies associated with ethno-tribal politics. From this background, this research brings a fresh perspective to Nigeria's protracted ethnic challenge by answering questions like: why has ethnicity continued to remain decisive in postcolonial Nigeria? And why has ethno-federalism done little to rid the Nigerian postcolonial state of the autocratic legacies of colonialism?

The thesis employs an historical method, Africanist and postcolonial themes and draws from the frameworks of prominent authors such as Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson and crucially Mahmood Mamdani. This thesis argues that the federal solution to Nigeria's ethnic challenge failed because; firstly, its socio-legal character has glorified autocratic colonial traditions, and secondly, federalism represented an obsession with high politics to the detriment of how the socio-legal foundation of postcolonial institutions create ethnic sentiments on the low, everyday spheres of society. The thesis therefore argues that a policy that is meant to respond to the enduring and negative manifestations of ethno-tribalism must focus on the multiple political arenas of Nigerian society: a departure from measures applied thus far.

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My foremost gratitude goes to Almighty God: my creator and maker, then to my family, nuclear and extended.

This thesis benefitted from the concerted and intellectually stimulating guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Noah Bassil. I am particularly grateful to him for his friendship, and for assisting and providing me with insights into Africanist scholarship.

I also acknowledge the friendship and support of Brigadier (Rd.) Vincent Williams and Ms. Lise Waldek, all at the Department of Policing, Intelligence and Counterterrorism (PICT), Macquarie University.

A lot of gratitude also go to all my friends. I should mention Mohammed Ibrahim, Emmanuel Ofori, Yussif Ibrahim, Karamzo Saccoh, John Boakye-Danquah, Nuradeen Nuhu, George Tweneboah, Nana Nimo Appiah-Agyekum, Vincent Martey Sackitey, Muhammad Bangura and Hayford Otchere.

And to all others who have contributed to my rather slow and long journey of enlightenment; from a village boy in rural Ghana, through turbulent years in the streets of Accra, and finally, by a dint of fate, to university life on the hills of Legon. I thank Dr. Lord Justice Gyamfi-Fenteng, DCE (Asante Akim South, 2001-2007) and Hon Mrs. Gifty Ohene-Konadu, MP (Asante Akim South, 2001-2009) for giving me my first experience in Ghanaian politics. I am also grateful to Messrs. Kwabena Nketia Sakyi and Selorm Kofi Dake. Together, all the above individuals assisted my decisive leap from a local crab hunter to a global gatherer of ideas.

And finally, to my Africa: one step at a time, you shall be free of the socio-historical imprints of that treacherous stranger.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and a leading producer of global crude oil; it has the continent's largest workforce, and currently its biggest economy. However, due to challenges posed by ethnicity and tribalism, Nigeria is not usually known for these or other positive national indicators. Policies of British colonialism and their legacies have, among other things, transformed ethnicity into an enduring national burden. The result is that a larger part of Nigeria's national life has been cast in tribal terms. The list includes politics;<sup>1</sup> religion;<sup>2</sup> ethnic and regional conflicts;<sup>3</sup> economic development,<sup>4</sup> and recently terrorism and political violence.<sup>5</sup> This extreme case of ethno-tribal straightjacketing even encompasses areas such as fertility and child mortality as well as the environment and climate change.<sup>6</sup> This is so much so that the likes of Ukoha Ukiwo note that in Nigeria today "no work is deemed 'scholarly' that does not consider the salience or irrelevance of ethnicity in its analysis and conclusions".<sup>7</sup>

The search for answers to the hydra-headed challenge of ethno-tribal politics has concerned politicians and academics in equal urgency. And based on the country's political orientation as well as prevailing academic dispositions in social research,

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<sup>1</sup> Ukoha Ukiwo, "Politics, Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, no. 1 (2003); Yusufu Turaki, "The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria" (Boston University, 1993); Richard A. Joseph, "Class, State, and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria," *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 21, no. 3 (1983); Franca Attoh and Omololu Soyombo, "The Politics of Ethnic Balancing in Nigeria," *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 3, no. 2 (2011); Okwudiba Nnoli, "Ethnic Politics in Nigeria," (1978).

<sup>2</sup> Ukiwo, "Politics, Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria."; Daniel Egigba Agbibo, "Ethno-Religious Conflicts and the Elusive Quest for National Identity in Nigeria," *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 1 (2013).;

<sup>3</sup> Ifeanyi Onwuzuruigbo, "Researching Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: The Missing Link," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 33, no. 10 (2010); Yvan Guichaoua, "How Do Ethnic Militias Perpetuate in Nigeria? A Micro-Level Perspective on the Oodua People's Congress," *World Development* 38, no. 11 (2010).;

<sup>4</sup> Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria* (Avebury Aldershot, 1995); L. Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity, and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988); Eghosa E. Osaghae, "Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria," (Nordic Africa Institute, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Egigba Agbibo, "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective," *African Conflict & Peacebuilding Review* 3, no. 1 (2013); Cyril I. Obi, "Nigeria's Niger Delta: Understanding the Complex Drivers of Conflict," in *FOI - NAI Lecture Series on African Security* (The Nordic Africa Institute, Conflict, Displacement and Transformation, 2008); John Boye Ejibowah, "Who Owns the Oil?: The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria," *Africa Today* 47, no. 1 (2000).

<sup>6</sup> Konia T. Kollehlon, "Ethnicity and Fertility in Nigeria," *Biodemography and Social Biology* 50, no. 3-4 (2003); Diddy Antai, "Inequalities in under-5 Mortality in Nigeria: Do Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Position Matter?," *Journal of epidemiology/Japan Epidemiological Association* 21, no. 1 (2010). Olakunle Michael Folami and Adejoke Olubimpe Folami, "Climate Change and Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria," *Peace Review* 25, no. 1 (2013); Ejibowah, "Who Owns the Oil?: The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria."

<sup>7</sup> Ukoha Ukiwo, "The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria," *Oxford Development Studies* 33, no. 1 (2005): 4.

attempts at explaining Nigeria's ethnicity have gone through various phases.<sup>8</sup> For example to the nationalist bourgeoisie of the immediate post-independence era, the roots of Nigeria's combative identity lied in autocratic and repressive British colonial policies. This belief ultimately led to the enforcement of federalism—particularly consociational ethno-federalism—as a political structure and an organizational culture. The reason for this was twofold. Firstly, federalism was an admission that the Nigerian colonial state was a colonially invented amalgam of distinct, autonomous and competing communities. Secondly, following the British colonial tradition of granting semi-autonomy to Nigeria's ethnic groups, political elites in post-independent Nigeria also saw ethnically defined federalism to be a necessary arrangement for national cohesion in the postcolonial state. Yet despite five decades of independence, not only is Nigeria still cast under the shadow of belligerent ethnic politics; Nigeria's ethnicity has also been understood to be transforming into ideological violence and political extremism.<sup>9</sup> Even after the return to civilian rule in 1999, after decades of ethnically charged and varying military dictatorships, Nigeria is still held under the abyss of “unbridled competition for power, and the failure of government to deliver democratic dividends”.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, discussions of a possible case of state failure in Nigeria have ethnicity as a key cause.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, whilst the question – why has Nigeria remained entrapped under the challenges of ethnicity and tribalism for this long – has received a lot of attention, it still requires further elucidation.

The place of ethno-tribalism in the Nigerian polity has been explained from the socio-historical perspective, with the country's colonial experience at its core. Ethnicity in Nigeria has been traced to pre-independence nationalism and state formation in the immediate postcolonial era. The argument, needless to say, is that the colonial experience has had a heavy influence on identity formation and the way that certain forms of identity have infiltrated the political structure, systems and policies of

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<sup>8</sup> A. L. Jinadu, "The Dialectics of Theory and Research on Race and Ethnicity in Nigeria," in *Race, Ethnicity and Ethno-Nationalism*, ed. Peter Ratcliffe (London: University College of London Press, 1994), 166.

<sup>9</sup> Ufo Okeke Uzodike and Benjamin Maiangwa, "Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: Causal Factors and Central Problematic," *African Renaissance: Terrorism in Africa* 9, no. 1 (2012); Daniel A. Tonwe and Surulola J. Eke, "State Fragility and Violent Uprisings in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram," *African Security Review* 22, no. 4 (2013); Faith Osasumwen Oviasogie, "State Failure, Terrorism and Global Security: An Appraisal of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northern Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Society* 2, no. 1 (2013); Agbiboa, "Why Boko Haram Exists: The Relative Deprivation Perspective."; "The Nigerian Burden: Religious Identity, Conflict and the Current Terrorism of Boko Haram," *Conflict, Security & Development* 13, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Ukiwo, "Politics, Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria," 115.

<sup>11</sup> Christopher J. Kinnan et al., "Failed State 2030: Nigeria-a Case Study," (DTIC Document, 2011); Morten Bøås and Kathleen M. Jennings, "'Failed States' and 'State Failure': Threats or Opportunities?," *Globalizations* 4, no. 4 (2007); Henry E. Alapiki, "State Creation in Nigeria: Failed Approaches to National Integration and Local Autonomy," *African Studies Review* 48, no. 03 (2005).



Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> Seen from this angle, the continuing relevance of ethno-tribalism in Nigeria and the various attempts to explain its place in the postcolonial Nigerian society can be said to be a test case of the wider African milieu.

There existed vigorous efforts from the 1960s to the early 80s on the part of policy-makers and scholars alike to erase tribalism and ethnicity from discourses of the African condition and development (with some authors calling for their de-dramatization and political and intellectual banishment!). To Aidan Southall for example, the tribe was “illusory” and a “largely artificial organ diseased and deformed clogged with persistent and well-motivated prejudices and misconceptions”.<sup>13</sup> Morten Fried posited that the tribe “is so ambiguous and confusing that it should be abandoned by social scientists”.<sup>14</sup> In more recent analyses, Claude Ake sees African ethnicity as “phenomenally problematic”<sup>15</sup> whilst Ukiwo notes with reference to Nigeria that ethnicity has not escaped rejectionist tendencies.<sup>16</sup> Despite these expository push-and-pull however, both tribalism and ethnicity have made a forceful comeback, since the end of the Cold War, and have been the subject of much focus.<sup>17</sup> Even after efforts to locate tribalism and ethnicity in the past, or to deny their relevance to contemporary Africa, they remain defining characteristics of Africa’s future and, in one way or another, are seen as impacting on Africa’s hopes for sociopolitical progress.

This may be due to the fact that, as Ake further admits, ethno-tribalism is perceived to be responsible for “political instability and weak national identity” in Africa.<sup>18</sup> As Timothy Shaw illustrates, whether as paradigms for internal differentiation, external fragmentation or both, ethnicity and tribalism have remained central concepts in African comparative politics.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, ethnicity and tribalism are still viewed as defining Africa’s future and perceived chances of sociopolitical progress. Shaw

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<sup>12</sup> A. E. Afigbo, “Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State,” *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 21, no. 4 (1991).

<sup>13</sup> Aidan Southall, “The Ethnic Heart of Anthropology,” *Cahiers d’Etudes africaines* 25, no. 100 (1985): 572; “The Illusion of Tribe,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 5, no. 1-2 (1970).

<sup>14</sup> Morton H. Fried, “On the Concepts of ‘Tribe’ and ‘Tribal Society’\*,” *Transactions of the New York Academy of Sciences* 28, no. 4 Series II (1966): 442.

<sup>15</sup> Claude Ake, “What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?,” *Transformation*, no. 22 (1993): 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ukiwo Ukiwo states that in recent years, ethnic studies have not escaped the wide reaching net of Marxist thinking, “as class analysts did their best to confine ethnicity to the realm of false consciousness”. Ukiwo, “The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria,” 11.

<sup>17</sup> See Southall, “The Illusion of Tribe.”; Timothy M. Shaw, “Ethnicity as the Resilient Paradigm for Africa: From the 1960s to the 1980s,” *Development and Change* 17, no. 4 (1986); Obi, “Nigeria’s Niger Delta: Understanding the Complex Drivers of Conflict.”; Elliott Green, “Ethnicity and Nationhood in Precolonial Africa: The Case of Buganda,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 16, no. 1 (2010); Peter P. Ekeh, “Social Anthropology and Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 04 (1990); Southall, “The Ethnic Heart of Anthropology.”

<sup>18</sup> Ake, “What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?,” 1.

<sup>19</sup> Shaw, “Ethnicity as the Resilient Paradigm for Africa: From the 1960s to the 1980s,” 591.

further links the Nigeria identity question to the broader African experience when he opined that the role of tribalism and ethnicity in contemporary Africa may perhaps be due to the role of tribalism as a tool for socio-political mobilization, especially as native leaders in colonial Africa mobilized to take control from departing colonialists.<sup>20</sup> It is safe to assert therefore that the problem with Nigeria's ethnicity within the African context is not as uniquely Nigerian as the responses to it and accompanying problems. The challenges of ethnicity are clear and for Nigeria to move forward, I will be arguing that the country must depart from solutions applied thus far, which have rather promoted tribal and ethnic identities. Put simply, ethno-tribal politics in Nigeria needs further socio-historical analysis and re-contextualization.

### **Contextualizing the problem**

To date, efforts at explaining ethnicity in Africa have been framed by two main positions. Firstly, ethnicity has moved from being conceived as primordial and kin-based to being understood as socially constructed.<sup>21</sup> The view of a 'constructed' ethnicity contrasts with kin-based primordialism in the sense that it sees the existence of the ethnic groups and identities as a figment of human systems, thoughts and processes. Secondly, the view that contemporary ethnic identity in Africa is a consequence of the continent's colonial heritage has almost become a rule in African ethnogenesis. Largely, studies conducted on ethnicity in Nigeria have followed these broad trends.

The triumph of constructivism over primordialism for instance has seen the popularization of constructivist interpretations that focus on Nigeria's political institutions at federal, state and local government levels.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, other authors have used the constructivist framework to discuss the instrumental use of ethnicity to achieve personal and or collective ends.<sup>23</sup> For example, Ukiwo, Audrey Smock and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1969); John Sharp, ed. *Ethnic Group and Nation: The Apartheid Vision in South Africa*, vol. 79, South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts (1988); John Saul, ed. *The Dialectics of Class and Tribe*, vol. 1, The State and Revolution in Eastern Africa (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979); Ronald Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology," *Annual review of anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1978); Jonathan Y. Okamura, "Situational Ethnicity," *Ethnic and racial studies* 4, no. 4 (1981); Bruce J. Berman and J. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Rotimi T. Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria* (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2001); A. L. Jinadu, "Federalism, the Consociational State, and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 15, no. 2 (1985); J. Isawa Elaigwu, "Federalism in Nigeria's New Democratic Polity," *ibid.* 32 (2002); John Boye Ejibowah, "Territorial Pluralism: Assessing the Ethnofederal Variant in Nigeria," *Regional and Federal Studies* 20, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>23</sup> John N. Paden, ed. *Communal Competition, Conflict and Violence in Kano*, Nigeria: Modernization and the Politics of Communalism (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1971); Osaghae, "Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria."; Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "The National

Abdul Mustapha illustrate how the political class manipulates and politicises ethnic identities in Nigeria.<sup>24</sup> James Coleman's *The Ibo and Yoruba strands in Nigerian nationalism* shows how the increasing progress of Igbo speaking people in academia threatened the survival of the Yorubas who started their own ethnic movements in response.<sup>25</sup> Paul Anber also reveals how Hausa migrants in the Yoruba town of Ibadan utilized their ethnicity to control the cattle and kola trade.<sup>26</sup> This study demonstrates the ethnic versatility of the migrants who suddenly developed political institutions and systems to survive in a foreign society. Additionally, John Paden studies how Igbo migrants survived the competition for resources with Hausa-Fulanis in the latter's city of Kano.<sup>27</sup> Eghosa Osaghae's *Structural Adjustment and ethnicity in Nigeria* underlines the institutionalist face of identities in Nigeria.<sup>28</sup> He demonstrates how the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the 1980s increased ethnic conflicts by highlighting how the various components of SAP – devaluation, removal of subsidies from social goods and rationalization of the public sector etc. – offered the economic impetus for an entrenched ethnicization of Nigerian society.<sup>29</sup> Worse still, the *de-statization* objective of SAP along with economic hardships meant that Nigerians were left to fend for themselves. The result was a sudden resurgence of primordial identities, which was utilized for both positive and negative purposes.<sup>30</sup>

Within the constructivist prism, ethnicity in Nigeria has also been seen to be a consequence of the country's colonial experience. Peter Ekeh argues that any valid conceptualization of the uniqueness of African politics must start with an analysis of continent's colonial experience.<sup>31</sup> This is because, as Ukiwo observes of British colonialism, "the quest for imperial hegemony inspired cartographic demarcation of ethnic boundaries and anthropological observation of bio-cultural characteristics of

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Question and Radical Politics in Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 13, no. 37 (1986); Attahiru Jega, *Identity Transformation and Identity Politics under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria*(Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2000); J. Coleman, "The Ibo and Yoruba Strands in Nigerian Nationalism,"(East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971); Paul Anber, "Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 5, no. 2 (1967).

<sup>24</sup> Ukiwo, "The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria."; "Politics, Ethno-Religious Conflicts and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria."; Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Transformation of Minority Identities in Post-Colonial Nigeria," *Identity transformation and identity politics under structural adjustment in Nigeria* (2000); Audrey C. Smock, *Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

<sup>25</sup> Coleman, "The Ibo and Yoruba Strands in Nigerian Nationalism." He also highlights how the rising profile of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (an Igbo) in the nationalist movement aroused rivalry among the Yoruba elite leading to the formation of alternative political platforms.

<sup>26</sup> Anber, "Modernisation and Political Disintegration: Nigeria and the Ibos."

<sup>27</sup> Paden, *Communal Competition, Conflict and Violence in Kano*.

<sup>28</sup> Osaghae, "Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 5-6. The SAP period also witnessed and unprecedented rise in "ethnic unions of various complexions". However, most of the ethnic conflicts in Nigeria occurred within the time of SAP.

<sup>31</sup> Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative studies in society and history* 17, no. 01 (1975).

ethnic groups".<sup>32</sup> Colonialism was crucial in shaping the ethnic and tribal structure in Africa. From this point of view, the challenge of ethnicity in Nigeria can be seen from two perspectives. On one hand, ethnicity has been problematised as the negative implications of the country's colonial past through the actions and inactions of colonial authorities, missionaries and emergent nationalists. From this angle, colonialism and the tripartite but fake colonial federation created in 1914 have been veritably blamed for Nigeria's enduring ethnicity problem.<sup>33</sup> This perspective makes up the background of the consociational state arrangement of the Nigerian federation.<sup>34</sup> Authors who subscribe to this view have explained how such colonial policies created ethnic minorities and essentialized political demands.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, colonial policies of indirect rule and other policies bordering on education and culture have been blamed for the negative social and cultural stratification of society in Nigeria.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, and on a broader level of analyses, ethnicity has been grossly blamed for the overall failure of the postcolonial Nigeria state.<sup>37</sup> In the view of those who subscribe to the second perspective, colonialism cannot be responsible for as much as critics claim. It seems, from this standpoint, that the most enduring hindrance to national unity in Nigeria is not only the existence of colonially created ethnicities *per se* but also of the negative implications of postcolonial political institutions.

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<sup>32</sup> Ukiwo, "The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria," 11.

<sup>33</sup> Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*; Eghosa E. Osaghae, "Ethnic Minorities and Federalism in Nigeria," *African Affairs* 90, no. 359 (1991); Jinadu, "Federalism, the Consociational State, and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria."; J. Isawa Elaigwu, "Federalism in Nigeria's New Democratic Polity," *ibid.* 32(2002); John A. Ayoade, "Secession Threat as a Redressive Mechanism in Nigerian Federalism," *Publius* 3, no. 1 (1973); Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State."; John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013); Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State."; Eghosa E. Osaghae and Rotimi T. Suberu, *A History of Identities, Violence and Stability in Nigeria* (Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, University of Oxford, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> See the arguments of Jinadu, "Federalism, the Consociational State, and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria."

<sup>35</sup> Osaghae and Suberu, *A History of Identities, Violence and Stability in Nigeria*; Eghosa E. Osaghae, "Federalism, Local Politics and Ethnicity in Nigeria: Do Ethnic Minorities Still Exist in Nigeria?," *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 24, no. 2 (1986); Obaro Ikime, "Reconsidering Indirect Rule: The Nigerian Example," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 3 (1968); Joseph Adebawale Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894-1934* (Ibadan: Longman 1973).

<sup>36</sup> Thomas J. Davis and Azubike Kalu-Nwiyu, "Education, Ethnicity and National Integration in the History of Nigeria: Continuing Problems of Africa's Colonial Legacy," *Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 1 (2001); Abu Bakarr Bah, *Breakdown and Reconstitution: Democracy, the Nation-State, and Ethnicity in Nigeria* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> Muhammad Sani Umar, *Islam and Colonialism: Intellectual Responses of Muslims of Northern Nigeria to British Colonial Rule*, vol. 5 (Danvers: Brill, 2006); Turaki, "The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria."; Mustapha, "Transformation of Minority Identities in Post-Colonial Nigeria."; Toyin Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria* (Indiana University Press, 2009); Davis and Kalu-Nwiyu, "Education, Ethnicity and National Integration in the History of Nigeria: Continuing Problems of Africa's Colonial Legacy."; Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State."

From the above analysis, Nigeria's approach to ethnicity as a negative implication of colonialism has encountered some setbacks: both policy and intellectual responses have focused on the top strata of the political system and by so doing have left a significant ratio of Nigeria's ethnic phenomenon unaccounted for. For example, Nigeria's imperfect federation bequeathed by the British in 1960 has been seen to be responsible for almost every issue of ethnicity and tribalism ever since. To Olumide Ekanade, this federal structure has been the basis for the ethnicization of resource allocation.<sup>38</sup> According to him this led to a number of inter-ethnic problems such as the 1966 coupe d'état, which removed Nigeria's first post-colonial prime minister.<sup>39</sup> Others authors such as E.C Ejiogu and Chinua Achebe imagine the ramifications of that imperfect federation to include the events leading to the Biafran war of secession<sup>40</sup> whilst others such as Ken Post and M. Vickers point to the innumerable ethnically incited coupe d'états that followed that of January 15 1966.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps in agreement with these conclusions, Toyin Falola draws some continuity between Nigeria's past and its present suggesting that, much like its colonial precursor, both the state and the police in postcolonial Nigeria pursue elite power.<sup>42</sup> For these authors, the root of ethnic consciousness was colonialism: ethnicity was a byproduct of the colonial state. This argument is not entirely misplaced.

However, as evidenced from a number of studies of Nigeria, ethnicity is not just the outcome of the political institutions that resulted directly from colonialism but also from postcolonial policies, which fostered a culture of ethnic belligerence on the lower and everyday levels of society. Whereas colonialism may have created ethnic divisions in contemporary Nigeria, postcolonial political arrangements such as ethno-federalism further accentuated and essentialised ethno-tribal identities thereby strengthening the colonial impact on national identity. By focusing on the highest political institutional level in search of reasons for, as well as answers to, Nigeria's ethno-tribal challenge, the question of how lower level actors foment ethnic belligerence due to postcolonial experiences of the autocratic institutions, also inherited from colonialism, usually take on secondary relevance. That is, such studies have focused on how institutions are structured, constituted and maintained based

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<sup>38</sup>Olumide Ekanade, "The Inter-Face of Ethnicity and Revenue Allocation in Nigeria's First Republic," *African Identities* 10, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, 108.

<sup>40</sup> Dan M. Mudoola, "Biafra: The Question of Recognition and African Diplomacy" (paper presented at the University Social Sciences Council Conference, Makerere, 1968); E. C. Ejiogu, "On Biafra: Subverting Imposed Code of Silence," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 6 (2013); "Chinua Achebe on Biafra: An Elaborate Deconstruction," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 48, no. 6 (2013).

<sup>41</sup> Ken Post and Michael Vickers, *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria 1960-1966* (Sandton: Heinemann, 1973).

<sup>42</sup> Falola, *Colonialism and Violence in Nigeria*.

on autocratic colonial traditions. In doing so, they have ignored micro level analyses such as the internal workings of group categorizations, motivations and interests. This, it seems, is the reason for the fact that despite intense discussions and innumerable political-institutional attempts at responding to ethnicity, the tenacity of the problem in the Nigerian polity continues unabated. Worse still, in recent years ethnic altercations have grown even more intense and have expanded in number, resulting in the quest for national unity becoming increasingly elusive.<sup>43</sup> The argument that the Nigerian colony ignored and dismissed the various manifestations of ethnic conflicts borne out of autocratic colonial policies, focusing instead on how to control the colonized, is not unpopular.<sup>44</sup> Must postcolonial political institutions, to the peril of postcolonial Nigeria, repeat this tradition? Whilst admitting that the high and low levels of politics are mutually constitutive, this question elucidates the relevance of understanding how lower level ethnic analysis functions as a pillar for grasping Nigeria's ethnic dilemma.<sup>45</sup> This thesis thus begins from the position that there is a plethora of socio-economic and political factors, at the macro and micro level, which are responsible for the ongoing ethnic phenomena in Nigeria. With this knowledge, it is argued that the possibility emerges to present an alternative and more encompassing understanding of the challenges ethnicity poses and ways Nigeria can overcome them.

### **Research Objective and Question**

This thesis attempts to answer the question of why have ethnicity and tribalism continued to dominate the political life of post-colonial Nigeria. The thesis perceives the problem as follows: ethno-tribal politics continue to haunt contemporary Nigeria because the response to Nigeria's ethnic identity problem has mostly been perceived from the political institutional level (macro or high politics) with little regard for how such political institutions facilitate the creation and making of ethnicities among ordinary individuals (micro or low politics). Indeed, the relatively scant attention given to low-level ethnic analysis may be the reason for the fact that whilst discussions on ethnicity are as diverse as the ethnic identity problématique itself,

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<sup>43</sup> Bowstock Umaroho, "Case for Political Decentralisation in Nigeria" (RMIT University, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> In *The Political Economy of Nigeria* Claude Ake explains the link between colonialism and postcolonial ethnic rivalries in Nigeria by recounting how the colonial administration totally ignored or under-researched the various manifestations of ethnic conflicts and revolts, focusing instead on how to control the colonized in perpetuation of colonial rule. He maintains that this colonial tradition of ignoring such socially sensitive topics flourished into postcolonial Nigeria under the leadership of indigenous leaders as they kept the policies of colonial Nigeria intact. See Claude Ake, *Political Economy of Nigeria* (London: Longman, 1985).

<sup>45</sup> This point is echoed by authors such as Nnoli, Osaghae and Efeanyi Onwuzuruigbo in their analyses of inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts and the starting and sustenance of tribal sentiments. See Nnoli, *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria*; Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Ethnicity and Its Management in Africa: The Democratization Link* (Lagos: Malthouse Press, 1994); Onwuzuruigbo, "Researching Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: The Missing Link."

ethno-tribalism has paradoxically proven an intractable and unresolvable issue. The thesis posits that ethnofederalism has failed to address the ethno-tribal legacies of colonialism because the socio-legal character of federal institutions and policies has created conditions at the lower levels of society which have resisted de-ethnicization and de-tribalization in contemporary Nigeria. A holistic response to ethnicity in Nigeria therefore must be seen both in the multiple arenas of high politics; that is Nigeria's departments and institutions that are vital to the survival of the Nigerian state, and low politics; the policies and actions of individuals and groups in everyday life.

### **Method and Theory: Ethno-politics as an historical study**

#### ***Some Definitions***

Before setting out questions of theory and approach, a number of definitions are appropriate, to demarcate the boundaries of some terms used in this thesis. Ethno-tribalism, ethno-tribal politics or ethno-politics are employed in this thesis to refer to the use of ethnic or tribal categorizations to achieve social, economic or political ends. This definition acknowledges the confusion and intellectual "tug of war" surrounding whether or not the "tribe" and "ethnic group" (and for that matter tribalism and ethnicity) encapsulate the same meaning.<sup>46</sup> Leroy Vail has stated that the use of one and not the other is merely a question of judgment: "If one disapproves of the phenomenon, it is tribalism; if one is less judgmental, 'it' is 'ethnicity'."<sup>47</sup> Also whilst the thesis may use tribalism and ethnicity interchangeably, the concepts are taken to form the two, sometimes hard to delink, components of ethno-tribalism as defined above. Additionally, this thesis uses the terms ethnofederalism or consociational federalism to mean the granting of political autonomy and or socio-economic advantage to a region or a group based on ethnic affiliations or ethnically defined interests. Ethnofederalism or consociational ethnofederalism is usually founded on the real or perceived rights of ethnic groups to autonomously co-exist within a state.<sup>48</sup>

To put the thesis within the context of Africa's colonial heritage and make it relevant to the above question and hypothesis, this thesis adopts postcolonialism and "Africanism" as theoretical frameworks, giving the thesis the relevant historical

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<sup>46</sup> Southall, "The Illusion of Tribe."; Leroy Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, Introduction.

<sup>48</sup> See works such as Jinadu, "Federalism, the Consociational State, and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria."; Kunle Amuwo, *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria* (Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1998); Arend Lijphart, "Consociation and Federation: Conceptual and Empirical Links," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 03 (1979).

context. The combination of postcolonial and Africanist themes in answering the above question ensures that the thesis takes into account relevant dimensions of the postcolonial Nigerian state. This allows for a fresh perspective on ethnicity in Nigeria, and in fact, may be relevant to understanding ethnicity in Africa as a whole.

### ***Postcolonial and Africanist Frameworks***

Edward Said's *Orientalism*<sup>49</sup> is conceptually and ideationally different from earlier criticisms of colonialism because it interrogates the "lines of thought that made the non-European world available for explanation and [supposed] objective description as a problem in its own right".<sup>50</sup> Although Said critiques and traces the trajectory of imperialism specifically in the Arab and Middle Eastern world, his approach nevertheless appealed to many scholars of Africa. For example, his conceptual and erudite treatment of postcolonialism as a study of how colonialism has shaped the former colonial world establishes the intellectual bond between postcolonialism and Africanist scholarship.<sup>51</sup> From the immediate post-independence era, African writers have engaged "the lines of thought" and action that conceives of the non-European, in particular the African, as a problem and a subject of analysis. The question regarding how African identity was constructed during colonialism by the colonisers has led to critical approaches by Africanists across the disciplines. Conjointly these figures argue that African identity and society is ideologically misconceived and misinformed and have sought to unpick such misconceptions and misrepresentations. This has been done by following emancipatory themes championed by such intellectuals as Frantz Fanon<sup>52</sup> and George Padmore,<sup>53</sup> and culturist concepts like those upheld by philosophers such as Valentine Mudimbe and

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<sup>49</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*(New York: Vintage, 1978).

<sup>50</sup> Sanjay Krishnan, "Edward Said, Mahmood Mamdani, Vs Naipaul: Rethinking Postcolonial Studies," *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 58, no. 4 (2012): 821.

<sup>51</sup>Works that interrogate how colonialism fashioned Africa include VY Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*(Indiana University Press Bloomington, 1988)., Archie Mafeje's "'Africanity: A Combative Ontology'," *The Postcolonial Turn: Re-Imagining Anthropology and Africa. Bamen—da and Leiden: Langaa and African Studies Centre* (2011)., Dickson Mungazi's *The Mind of Black Africa*(ABC-CLIO, 1996)., and Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*(New York: Grove press, 1967); *The Wretched of the Earth*, vol. 390(New York: Grove Press, 1965).

<sup>53</sup> George Padmore, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire*(New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); *How Britain Rules Africa*(New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).



Anthony Appiah,<sup>54</sup> former revolutionary leaders as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana<sup>55</sup> and even novelists such as Chinua Achebe.<sup>56</sup>

Informed by these positions, this thesis' usage of the "post" in "post-colonial" is not synonymous with the "post" in, for example, "post-independence".<sup>57</sup> For defining the postcolonial merely as "coming after the colonial", underlines a disservice to a more progressive and active definition: postcolonial as the sociopolitical "aftermath of the colonial".<sup>58</sup> This project therefore follows the field of study that analyses, explains and constructs the sociopolitical legacies of imperialism – postcoloniality – and interrogates the politics associated with that field. That is, it adopts a similar conceptualization as Webner's *et al.*: postcoloniality as the "contemporary state of ex-imperial societies in Africa and Asia and also the attempts being made to describe them in ways which have meaning".<sup>59</sup> Still in line with Robert Young, to whom postcoloniality is the economic, material and cultural conditions that create the conditions that post-independence states operate in.<sup>60</sup>

However, the use of postcoloniality in pursuing conception of ethnicity in an African country envisages a number of possible limitations. In her answer to Prakash Gyan's question, "who's afraid of postcoloniality?"<sup>61</sup> Rita Abrahamsen provides a "flippant, but not entirely unjust answer": African studies.<sup>62</sup> Despite this answer, Abrahamsen goes on to argue that a constructive engagement between African studies and postcolonial studies would be helpful since the,

postcolonial perspective can...benefit from the encounter with African studies,  
as a more empirical focus can help give postcolonialism more contemporary

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<sup>54</sup>Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>55</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa*(Pan-African Publishers, 1980); *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization*(New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1970); *I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology*(London: Heinemann, 1961).

<sup>56</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Colonialist Criticism*, *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1988); "An Image of Africa," *The Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977).

<sup>57</sup> Credit to Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Is the Post-in Postmodernism the Post-in Postcolonial?," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>58</sup> Robert J. C. Young, "What Is the Postcolonial?," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 40, no. 1 (2009): 13.. This point is also ably demonstrated in the African context by Pal Ahluwalia, *Politics and Post-Colonial Theory: African Inflections*(London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Richard P. Werbner and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*(London: Zed Books 1996), 272.

<sup>60</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*(New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)..

<sup>61</sup> Gyan Prakash, "Who's Afraid of Postcoloniality?," *Social Text* 49, no. 4 (1996)..

<sup>62</sup> Rita Abrahamsen, "African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge," *African Affairs* 102, no. 407 (2003): 189.

relevance through investigations of current relationship between power, discourse and political institutions and practices.<sup>63</sup>

This thesis aims to do exactly this. That is, it interrogates the role of ethnicity in Nigeria and investigates how colonially constructed foundations underline and reconstruct postcolonial ethnic identities. From this perspective, Tejumola Olaniyan was right in asserting that in order to “understand the varied legacies of colonialism in Africa with any measure of depth, we must specify the particular nature of colonialism experienced by the continent.”<sup>64</sup> He continues by postulating that the “ubiquitous usage of ‘colonialism’ as a catch-all to describe the disparate experiences of many societies under imperial rule is not useless; it only needs specific details in particular instances for productive illumination.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the use of postcoloniality as the overarching theme in analysis of contemporary Nigerian society acknowledges a number of points.

Firstly, postcoloniality in this sense is not just about a study of the indices of Nigerian society after independence, but particularly of how colonialism shaped the colonial Nigerian experience and its contemporary counterpart in much the same way as Prakash Gyan for example applies postcoloniality to the Indian sub-continent.<sup>66</sup> The second point proceeds from Abrahamsen’s observation that postcoloniality will be a more potent tool for unpacking contemporary Africa. In this sense, postcoloniality can redeem itself from being tagged as “words only” and esoteric into being policy-relevant and practical if it continually engages current sociopolitical problems like ethnicity in Nigeria. Thirdly, this thesis focuses on postcolonialism as an analytical framework for studying how imperialism fashioned power, discourse and political institutions and practices.<sup>67</sup> As postcolonial theory itself is a western analytical approach, it requires some Africanisation to be applicable to issues raised in Africa. This way, as Abrahamsen postulates, postcolonialism can then be tempered with Africanist themes in revealing the intellectual, analytical, and indeed, the practical thrust of colonial legacies in contemporary Nigeria in regards to ethnicity.<sup>68</sup> This is not only useful but also fundamental in understanding the African, or in this thesis, Nigerian condition.

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>64</sup> See also Tejumola Olaniyan, "Africa: Varied Colonial Legacies," in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray, eds., *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 270.

<sup>66</sup> Gyan Prakash, *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>67</sup> Abrahamsen, "African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge," 195.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

Therefore, Nigerian identity – as Bruce Berman observes in a number of his works in regards to the identity question in Africa generally – cannot be wholly understood by the application of modernist paradigms concerned with what Africa ought to be rather than what Africa is.<sup>69</sup> What Africa is, and by extension Nigeria, is best conceived through the lens of postcoloniality in tune with the argument that to understand contemporary Africa there is the need to “reconnect the present with the pre-colonial and colonial past”.<sup>70</sup> This allows for the historical aberrations of colonialism and the aftereffects of the European domination of the continent to be acknowledged, and for adequate responses to be framed accordingly.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into four chapters. After this introductory section, which sets out the background, problem, objectives, and the theoretical and methodological questions, the first chapter focuses on the colonial architecture as a manufacturer of ethnicity in Africa in ways that are relevant to Nigeria. This chapter particularly focuses on how colonialism shaped ethnic identity and how this artificiality of African identity was to reflect in the political system that emerged out of colonialism. On a more specific level, the second chapter builds on the previous chapter by discussing the question of colonially constructed ethnicities as it applies to Nigeria. This chapter also exclusively interrogates the relationship between Nigeria’s ethnicity and Nigeria’s governmental policies in the immediate post-independent era. The chapter also focuses on how Nigeria’s response to an invented national identity further creates identity. The third chapter, borrowing from Mahmood Mamdani’s seminal work,<sup>71</sup> utilizes the colony/post-colony debate on a much lower level by delving into the role of individuals in making ethnicity. The aim of this chapter is, first, to demonstrate the limit of Nigeria’s federal response to its ethnic legacy of colonialism and, second, to suggest alternative ways of understanding Nigeria’s identity question. The fourth and final chapter concludes and recaps key arguments, restates the thesis’ hypothesis and where possible suggests recommendations to Nigeria’s ethno-tribal problématique.

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<sup>69</sup> Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*; Bruce J. Berman, "Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa," (JICA Research Institute 2010); "Ethnicity, Bureaucracy and Democracy: The Politics of Trust," in *Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa*, ed. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh, and Will Kymlicka, eds (London: James Currey, 2004); "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism," *African affairs* 97, no. 388 (1998).

<sup>70</sup> Werbner and Ranger, *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*.

<sup>71</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

## CHAPTER 1. AFRICAN IDENTITY AND THE COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE

### 1.1.Introduction

Discussions of ethno-tribal identity in Africa, as in any part of the former colonial world, have started with the question of how colonialism impacted on the identities of the colonised. Whether writing about sub-Saharan Africa, the Indian sub-continent, greater Asia, Latin America or Australasia, the “invention” of identity during the colonial period has seen similar trajectories and points of reference. As Annie Coombes writes:

The colonisers’ dealings with indigenous peoples – through resistance, containment, appropriation, assimilation, miscegenation or attempted destruction – is the historical factor which has ultimately shaped the cultural and political character of the new nations, mediating in highly significant ways their shared colonial roots/routes.<sup>72</sup>

A key similarity across all colonized territories is that the colonial state instituted and implemented policies that altered and artificially manufactured identity in the colonial era. Colonial policies in Africa between the scramble (1884-85) and the end of direct European rule also involved changes to vast arenas of the African polity. The objective of colonial policies however was not just the desire to exploit Africa’s resources, as has been widely claimed in earlier decades, but also, and more crucially, as argued by Mamdani, the question of how to control African natives.<sup>73</sup> Control was a particularly tricky issue in the colonial context due to the dearth of manpower available to the colonial state. One of the inherent problems of colonialism in Africa, the British in particular, was the lack of administrative and military personnel to rule the colonies directly.<sup>74</sup> Indirect rule – the system of ruling African natives through their own institutions – was thus born out of necessity and became a formal policy of British colonialism. Due to the use of native institutions, indirect rule became one of the practical aspects of colonialism responsible for shaping African identities, usually

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<sup>72</sup> Annie E. Coombes, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 1-2.

<sup>73</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "The Invention of the Indigène," *London Review of Books* 33, no. 2 (2011); "Political Identity, Citizenship and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Africa" (paper presented at the A keynote address in Arusha conference, "New frontiers of social policy" –December, 2005); "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no. 04 (2001); "Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The Africa Dilemma," *Out of One, Many Africas: Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa* (1999); *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, "The Thin White Line: The Size of the British Colonial Service in Africa," *African Affairs* 79, no. 314 (1980).

through the notion of “tribe”.<sup>75</sup> The use of native institutions and misappropriation of African identities came to explain how a small band of Europeans subjected a vast amount of Africans into inferiority of near perpetual proportions. Yet, whilst it is clear that contemporary African identity is a construct of colonialism, it must be acknowledged that there exist two sets of African identities with colonial roots. The first comprise of identities constructed and sustained by the colonial state. This set of identities existed throughout the colonial period and were carried over into the postcolonial. The second set are those that came to be formed in the post-independent era as a result of the persistent glorification of autocratic colonial policies. To understand these historical manifestations of African identity and their implications one needs to understand the nature of the policies that came to be the foundation upon which ethnic reconstructions in postcolonial Africa was based.

Rupert Emerson has noted that “nations like individuals are products of hereditary and environment...The environment enters into the heritage to change the direction of the national stream to enrich it or diminish it”.<sup>76</sup> As this chapter seeks to achieve, it is imperative in the above sense, to examine the various dimensions of ethnicity in order to appreciate how Africa’s colonial heritage enriched or diminished postcolonial Africa in relation to the continent’s ethnicisation. In this regard, the first section in this chapter attempts a diagnosis of the colonial state and its policies relevant to the formation of particular ethno-tribal identities in Africa. This section allows us to revisit the debate on the artificial “creation” of the “tribe” and its usage in the policy of indirect rule of the colonial system. The second section discusses some of the socio-political implications of tribe-based indirect rule in contemporary Africa. The third and final section before the chapter concludes addresses political identity as a colonial invention. The conclusion recaps the arguments of the above sections and sets the stage for the next chapter, which focuses on the specific experience of Nigeria.

### **1.2. The Colonial State: Indirect Rule, Tribalism and Education**

As Nantang Jua has stated in relation to British Cameroun, for effective occupation and control of Africans by the colonial state, the colonial enterprise needed a governance system that Africans would comply with without being forced to do so.<sup>77</sup> This being the basic purpose behind the political machinations of colonialism, it led to

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<sup>75</sup> F. J. Lugard, "The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa," *London: Blackwood* (1922); Ivan Thomas Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, vol. 53(California: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>76</sup> Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1960), 60.

<sup>77</sup> Nantang Ben Jua, "Indirect Rule in Colonial and Post-Colonial Cameroon," *Paideuma* 41(1995): 39.

two sociopolitical developments in the colonial period. One was that African natives would be ruled through their own indigenous institutions. Secondly, and in pursuance of the first, the colonizers had “to reduce many [African] communities to a few ‘tribes’ so as to control them more easily”.<sup>78</sup> In the process, colonialism “instituted” tribalism based on the notion that Africans belonged to “tribes” that were rooted in a timeless past. Thus tribalism became an integral part of Indirect Rule as a system of colonial governance and control. To employ the above strategies however there was also the need to take the position, classed as “foolish untruths” by Basil Davidson, that:

“Africans...are inferior. They have made no history. They have created no civilization. They cannot rule themselves: we superior Europeans must do it for them”.<sup>79</sup>

The above quote presents the policy of Indirect Rule as inherently contradictory: people who had made no history and could not govern themselves could not be expected to have *indigenous* institutions. Michael Crowder also notes of the Nigerian experience that whilst indirect rule reposed in the traditional chief enormous authority, the objective of the system was not to preserve and encourage the African institutions as such but to govern the colonised through the façade of the “traditional”.<sup>80</sup> It is upon this idea of African primitiveness that colonialism sustained the need and ability to define African tradition and culture anew.

For whilst indirect rule ensured that “colonial administrations relied to some degree on indigenous structures”,<sup>81</sup> the idea of ruling African natives through their own indigenous institutions and organisations brought, in itself, new conceptions of the African culture and “indigenous institutions”. This stemmed from who was doing the definition of what was African in the convenient parlance of colonialism and what was *truly* African within the intellectual corpus of the pre-colonial history of the continent. The notion of a tribe and its use, as mentioned above, in the colonial African society is an example. As Mafeje had noted, “the colonial authorities helped to create...‘tribes’, in the sense of political communities; [and] provided the material as well as the ideological base of what is now called ‘tribalism’”.<sup>82</sup> The understanding of tribalism in Africa by the colonial state is summed up by latter’s logic that if

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<sup>78</sup> Basil Davidson, *Modern Africa*, First ed.(London and New York: Longman, 1983), 66.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Crowder, "Indirect Rule—French and British Style," *Africa* 34, no. 03 (1964): 198.

<sup>81</sup> Ake, "What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?," 2.

<sup>82</sup> Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of Tribalism," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, no. 2 (1971): 254.

Europeans had nations, Africans were said to have tribes.<sup>83</sup> Thus colonialism transposed on Africa a Eurocentric outlook of identity, and tribalism was imposed through policies of mapping, naming, delineating territories<sup>84</sup> as well census data and in ascribing leadership and authority.<sup>85</sup> Tribalism therefore represented and still represents “a Western reification which blocks our view of African reality”.<sup>86</sup> It is at best a conceptual tool, “a crystallization at the wrong level”, “a fabrication of the foreign observer” at worst.<sup>87</sup> Kenyan literary critic and post-colonialist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o rightly asserts that “tribe, tribalism, and tribal wars, the terms so often used to explain conflict in Africa, were colonial inventions”.<sup>88</sup> He continues:

Most African languages do not have the equivalent of the English word tribe, with its pejorative connotations that sprung up in the evolution of the anthropological vocabulary of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European adventurism in Africa. The words have companionship with other colonial conceptions, such as primitive, the Dark Continent, backward races, and warrior communities.<sup>89</sup>

The creation of “African tribes” had a grand purpose: to perpetuate colonial rule. Imperial adventures of Europeans have always relied on a perceived African condition to advance this goal. Indeed, in slave and colonial conquests, Europeans would usually ally with one African community to subdue another, “not in the interest of the African ally, but in their own imperial interests.”<sup>90</sup> This way, the “Colonial states deliberately kept the colonized peoples in perpetual tension through the well-known imperial tradition of divide and rule”.<sup>91</sup>

Indirect rule also represented collaboration between colonially invented tribalism and colonial education. Once tribalism was engineered through indirect rule it became taught in African societies and it seeped deep into the colonial – and subsequently the postcolonial – education system.<sup>92</sup> This practice altered power

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<sup>83</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 665.

<sup>84</sup> Stelios Michalopoulos and Elias Papaioannou, "Divide and Rule or the Rule of the Divided? Evidence from Africa," (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2011).,

<sup>85</sup> William Malcolm Hailey Baron Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories: West Africa: Nigeria, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Gambia*, vol. 3 (London: HM Stationery Office, 1951).

<sup>86</sup> Peter Claus Wolfgang Gutkind, *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa*, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1970), 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>88</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "The Myth of Tribe in African Politics," *Transition* 101, no. 1 (2009): 20.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>92</sup> David C. Woolman, "Educational Reconstruction and Post-Colonial Curriculum Development: A Comparative Study of Four African Countries," *International Education Journal* 2, no. 5 (2001).

relations within traditional power structures and also among ethnic groups inducing intense political competition”.<sup>93</sup> Mamdani’s “bifurcated state” thesis illustrates how indirect rule divided African societies into many units and categorizations.<sup>94</sup> This was done through the use of race-based civil society in urban areas on one hand, and tribe-based customary law in rural areas. In this sense, indirect rule started and sustained division between urban Africans (who will later claim glorification in being more civilized and educated) and rural natives who are thought to be happy with (primitive) custom and at the receiving end of colonially crafted tribalism and native authority.<sup>95</sup>

Beside this, education in the colonial state was not only an administrative necessity – as the makeup of educational policies exuded the necessity of running the colonial enterprise – but also ensured that the policies, arrangements and institutions associated with colonial rule were entrenched. H E Wolff has argued that the process of rendering African languages less significant by European missionaries was a part of consolidating autocratic colonial policies such as tribe-based ethnicity.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, since indirect rule system was not interest in preserving African traditions and languages, the use of the imperial language as lingua franca in colonial societies meant that African languages lost their pre-colonial prominent roles, and the cultures communicated through those languages also lost their social significance. There is evidence to suggest that this colonial linguistic manipulation also feeds into the problem of ethnicity. Daniel Posner links colonial educational policies to ethnicity and tribalism.<sup>97</sup> For example, colonialism in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) resulted in not just “the creation of tribalism”<sup>98</sup> as Leroy Vail understands but also in the rise of two strands of ethnic identity: tribe-based and language-based.<sup>99</sup> To appreciate the consequences of the use of tribalism as a system of rule, the next section examines the variegated implications of colonialism on African identity from the colonial era into the postcolonial.

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<sup>93</sup> Ake, "What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?," 2.

<sup>94</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

<sup>95</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The Africa Dilemma."; *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

<sup>96</sup> Wolff, H. E. Wolff, "Language and Language Policies in Africa: Problems and Prospects" (paper presented at the Optimizing learning and education in Africa—the language factor: A stock-taking research on mother tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa: Conference on bilingual education and the use of local languages, Windhoek,, Namibia, 2005).

<sup>97</sup> Daniel N. Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 64.

<sup>98</sup> Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*.

<sup>99</sup> Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*, 23.



### **1.3. Socio-political Implications of Colonial Policies**

The very nature of tribalism as a system of indirect rule gives a picture of the depth of the impact of colonialism on postcolonial Africa. Sustained in the colonial era, the postcolonial state is still bearing the brunt of those autocratic policies.<sup>100</sup> Remi Clignet agrees that all colonial policies are similar in the fact that “they involve the duplication overseas of principles and regulations initially developed at home...”<sup>101</sup> The extent that Eurocentric and maliciously conceived concepts such as “tribe” and indirect rule “enriched” or “diminished” the African polity and identity is relevant to understanding the contemporary condition of the continent.<sup>102</sup> This is more so as colonizers insisted on policies that perpetuated colonial rule despite the policies’ incongruity with the African social makeup. Indeed, the colonial period was “a time of distortion through power: power was used to force Africans into distorting identities; power relations distorted colonial social science, rendering it incapable of doing more than reflecting colonial constructions.”<sup>103</sup> Sustained by colonially crafted tribal, educational, and divide and rule policies as discussed in the previous section, colonialism practically condemned African societies to its debilitating aftermaths. This makes the implications of the colonial architecture as a manufacturer of African identities the starting point in understanding contemporary Africanity.

It must be emphasised in this sense that the view that colonialism artificially created “tribalism” to advance the autocratic policy of indirect rule is not of greater interest than the socio-political ramifications of such actions. This highlights the realization that contemporary African identity, beyond the creation of enabling conditions by colonialism, is not entirely the creation of colonial imperialism. Indeed, actions such as European missionaries producing dictionaries that would turn localized dialects into the written language of a whole ethnic group; colonial officials conveying the concept of culture “as a distinct, systematic expression of the social practices and identity of particular group”; and using culture to facilitate the colonial machinery’s control of native populations laid the foundation for a constructed identity in colonial Africa and beyond.<sup>104</sup> Jean Francois Bayart rightly points out that such actions allowed a varied use of colonialism by Africans, on ideological, institutional and

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<sup>100</sup> Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism."

<sup>101</sup> Remi Clignet, "Inadequacies of the Notion of Assimilation in African Education," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 8, no. 03 (1970): 426, 42. It has been asserted “French authorities promoted the emergence of a class of ‘black Frenchmen’, with values, aspirations, and cognitive styles analogous to those of European educational institutions. In contrast, the British have been viewed as repudiating such a notion in their system of indirect rule, which attempted accommodation with Africa and aimed at perpetuating African existing social organisations” *ibid.*, 425.

<sup>102</sup> Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples*, 60.

<sup>103</sup> Richard P. Werbner and Terence O. Ranger, *Postcolonial Identities in Africa* (Zed books London, 1996), 273.

<sup>104</sup> Berman, "Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa."

cultural levels, in the construction of ethnicity and nationalism.<sup>105</sup> Africans appropriated aspects of the colonial architecture that served their specific interests. This also meant that, the new political contours that colonialism fashioned in Africa would have been ephemeral had Africans not adapted them: Africans too “had to live amidst bewildering social complexity, which they ordered in kinship terms and buttressed with invented history. Moreover, Africans wanted effective units of action just as officials wanted effective units of government”.<sup>106</sup> Bruce Berman for example has asserted that autocratic policies of colonialism also:

“provided cultural resources and political contexts that Africans, particularly the class of collaborators and educated intelligentsia could deploy in the internal conflicts that resulted from the unequal and divisive impact of colonial modernity”.<sup>107</sup>

Due to the role of the “class of collaborators and educated intelligentsia”, identity in contemporary Africa has come to be seen as collaboration between direct colonialism of the colonial state, and the indirect colonialism of the postcolonial state. Direct colonialism, using the assumption that Africans belonged to tribes, sustained a creation of tribes and ethnic groups as a tool to facilitate colonial rule. This aspect of tribalism and ethnicity had two dimensions. First, as will be illustrated, colonial administrators through policies such as indirect rule and native authority embarked on an ethnicization spree necessary for the perpetuation of colonial rule. This led to artificial creation of tribes and fake cultural categorizations. Mahmood Mamdani’s *Citizen and Subject* is a seminal chronicle replete with examples of this scenario.<sup>108</sup> Secondly, colonialism also afforded African natives the incentive to create tribes. This is evidenced by John Iliffe’s very popular observation that the “British wrongly believed that Tanganyikans belonged to tribes; Tanganyikans created tribes to function within the colonial framework”.<sup>109</sup> Indirect colonialism and creation of ethnicity or identity results, firstly, from the tendency of postcolonial states to perpetuate ethnicised policies of the colonial state and secondly, from new

<sup>105</sup> J Bayart, "Africa in the World: A History of Extraversion," *African affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000).

<sup>106</sup> John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 324.

<sup>107</sup> Berman, "Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa." See also "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism."

<sup>108</sup> This work has stood up to its critiques as one of the most referenced on the subject of institutional legacies of colonialism in Africa, and elsewhere. See the reviews of this work in Crawford Young et al., "Deciphering Disorder in Africa: Is Identity the Key?," *World Politics* 54, no. 4 (2002); Krishnan, "Edward Said, Mahmood Mamdani, Vs Naipaul: Rethinking Postcolonial Studies."; Robert L. Tignor, "Mahmood Mamdani. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. (Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History.) Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1996.," *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997).

<sup>109</sup> Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, 318.

manifestations of ethnic identities that arise as a result of those colonially inspired postcolonial policies.

In what may be the most emphatic demonstration of the role of colonialism in authoring African ethnicity, Daniel Posner writes: “the institutions of colonialism generated not just ethnicity but ethnicities” as well as the shaping of their “numbers, relative sizes, and spatial distributions”.<sup>110</sup> An important point cannot escape mention here. There had been various cases of the elasticity of identity on the continent even prior to colonialism. Indeed, pre-colonial Africans moved in and out of multiple identities, “defining themselves at one moment as subject to this chief, at another moment as a member of that cult, at another moment as part of this clan”.<sup>111</sup> The position that ethnicity “begins, becomes and passes away” is also an established position, in much the same way as the colonial usage of tribalism as a tool of imperialism is.<sup>112</sup> The point here is that whilst the colonial creation and artificiality of tribes and ethnic groups is an issue in contemporary Africa, it is the politicization and transformation of tribalism and ethnicity into a socio-economic and political tool and cleavage – ethno-tribalism – that requires much explication in the context of the colonial legacies of postcolonial Africa. In this sense Claude Ake has noted that the fluidity and constructability of ethnicity and tribalism are not the reason for intellectual attention in the same way as political ethnicity.<sup>113</sup> Examples of how colonial inventions of identity and tradition translate into political identity have been provided by a number of scholars.

#### **1.4. Political Identity as Colonial Invention**

Works by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1991) have discussed how the colonial architecture designed and sustained the political traditions that ensued from colonialism.<sup>114</sup> In the specific case of Africa, examples of names that come to mind are Mahmood Mamdani, Bruce Berman, Goran Hyden and John Iliffe.<sup>115</sup> To Hobsbawm and Ranger, the invention of African political and social culture and tradition by colonialism can be understood in the following way:

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<sup>110</sup> Posner, *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*, 23.

<sup>111</sup> Gena Dagel Caponi, *Signifyin (G), Sanctifyin', and Slam Dunking*(Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 115.

<sup>112</sup> Ake, "What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?," 1-2.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*( Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1983); Terence O. Ranger and Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>115</sup> Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*; Göran Hydén, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective*(California: University of California Press, 1983); Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*; Berman, "Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa."; "A Palimpsest of Contradictions: Ethnicity, Class, and Politics in Africa," *The International*

Since so few connections could be made between British and African political, social and legal systems, British administrators set out about inventing African traditions for Africans. Their own respect for “tradition” disposed them to look with favour upon what they took to be traditional in Africa. They set out to codify and promulgate these traditions, thereby transforming flexible custom into hard prescription.<sup>116</sup>

The invented traditions of Africa by the British ensured the invitation of selected Africans into the governing class of the colonial system. This invariably led to the fact that the invented tradition came to define the difference between those favoured Africans (the leaders) and the unfortunate masses (the led). Since these African leaders were the same individuals who would take over the mantle of leadership after colonialism, the invented traditions came to be deified by many postcolonial elites of the continent. The above explanation bears directly and forcefully on political affiliations and institutions. Perhaps continuing from where Hobsbawm and Ranger left off, Anderson reminds that an “invention” of Africa’s traditions is not the only legacy of Europe’s colonial dominance of Africa. The nation itself, Anderson argues, is a socially constructed entity: “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity-genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”<sup>117</sup> Understood this way, nationalism is also an essential “product of the political history” transposed onto former colonies such as those in Africa. The African nationalism that emerged from colonialism did so as elites imagined, and subsequently formed, nations.<sup>118</sup> From this perspective, if colonial tradition was an amorphous concept, nationalism in the immediate pre- and post-colonial era came to represent its more concrete manifestation.

From this background, the role of elite intellectuals in the immediate African post colony cannot be overemphasized. It must be reiterated that what aids in the formation of such national imagination in Anderson’s understanding is that graduates of the invented tradition, the elite intellectuals and leaders, utilized favourable dimensions of that tradition such as tribalism to hold onto their relevance

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*Journal of African historical studies* 37, no. 1 (2004); “Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa,” *Development and Change* 15, no. 2 (1984); Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

<sup>116</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, 598.

<sup>117</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (Revised and Extended. Ed.) (London: verso, 1991), 6.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

and privilege, even after colonialism. This brought ethnicity and group categorizations to the forefront of the agenda to maintain power in postcolonial Africa. The ensuing struggles for ethnic autonomies, secessionist movements and tribal classifications are but some examples of what followed colonially designed political culture and tradition.

In an example from southern Africa, Leroy Vail reveals how the Luvale and Lunda people were transformed into antagonistic “tribes” because of direct European colonial intervention aimed at securing more political and economic control.<sup>119</sup> Vail also demonstrates how Zulu ethnic consciousness acted as the “ethnic answer” to modernity and urbanization, and how such ethnic pride was utilized by racial South Africa as a tool of social control.<sup>120</sup> Local chiefs assumed new political power through the practice of allowing “traditional authorities” to use “traditional sanctions” to exercise control.<sup>121</sup> Thus, trained under a system of colonial invention, the new African elite benefiting from this ideology and policy of the “tribe” became a crucial vehicle in propagating the assumed ethnic identities. From this perspective, ethnicity grew out of Southern Africa, as African elites became defenders of the system they benefitted from the most, colonialism. Other studies have shown example of this scenarios in other parts of Africa.<sup>122</sup>

### **1.5. Conclusion**

To historicise the foundations of contemporary Africanity, this chapter has given a picture of the colonial architecture as a manufacturer of ethnic and tribal identities. Firstly, it has examined the intent behind the organizational and administrative designs of colonialism. Further, the chapter has proven the artificiality and opportunism associated with both the conception and usage of the “tribe” as the nerve center of indirect rule. The chapter has also discussed the implications of the use of tribalism as a system of rule on the manifestations of identity in postcolonial Africa. Over all, the chapter has made and sustained the argument that through tribalism as a system of colonial rule, Africans – their culture, traditions and resources – were subjected to foreign domination and subsequent distortions. This

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<sup>119</sup> Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>122</sup> Justin Willis, "The Makings of a Tribe: Bondei Identities and Histories," *The journal of African history* 33, no. 02 (1992); David Wiley, "Using "Tribe" and "Tribalism" Categories to Misunderstand African Societies," *New England Social Studies Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (1982); John Lonsdale, "When Did the Gusii (or Any Other Group) Become a Tribe?," *Kenya Historical Review* 5, no. 1 (1977); Carola Lentz, "Colonial Constructions and African Initiatives: The History of Ethnicity in Northwestern Ghana," *Journal of Anthropology* 65, no. 1 (2000); Terence O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe*(Gweru-Harare-Masvingo: Mambo Press Gweru, 1985).

was to have dire consequences on the structure, organisation and harmony of Africans states even after colonialism. However, the chapter has argued that the implications of colonial aberrations on the postcolonial state did not take place at the behest of colonialism alone, but also on account of African elites who benefitted from the colonial architecture and therefore sought to maintain the colonial status quo. The argument that follows is that because Africa's political institutions have continued to be fashioned by colonial traditions, contemporary identities and political institutions are widely viewed to still be operating in the shadows of colonialism.<sup>123</sup> Yet, the chapter has only historicised "the political agency of colonialism...the colonial state as a legal/institutional complex that produced particular political identities".<sup>124</sup> It has not dealt with the implications of autocratic colonial policies in postcolonial Africa in a detailed manner. For this reason, the next section discusses the legacies of colonialism in the immediate pre and post-colonial era using the Nigerian experience. It must be stated that Nigeria was the cradle of indirect rule as envisioned by Lord Fredrick Lugard.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the case of artificiality of customary law remained a crucial part of indirect rule in Nigeria, especially in the southeastern and northern protectorates.<sup>126</sup> The present chapter therefore sets the stage for a synthesization of the implications of colonially crafted institutions and concepts on ethno-tribalism in postcolonial Nigeria.

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<sup>123</sup> Werbner and Ranger, *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*; Richard P. Werbner, *Postcolonial Subjectivities in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 2002); Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, ed. *The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology*, Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader (New Jersey: Blackwell 1997); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Pal Ahluwalia, "Out of Africa: Post-Structuralism's Colonial Roots," *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 2 (2005); Achebe, *Colonialist Criticism*; Abrahamsen, "African Studies and the Postcolonial Challenge."

<sup>124</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 651.

<sup>125</sup> Lugard, "The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa."

<sup>126</sup> A. E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929* (London: Longman, 1972).

## CHAPTER 2. THE COLONIAL INVENTION OF NIGERIA

### 2.1. Introduction

From what we know of the African colony and the extent of the social and political damage of colonial legacies, it is safe to assert that the invention of African identity is the result of both the idiosyncrasies of colonial policies as well as the complicit roles of Africans.<sup>127</sup> This means that identity formation in contemporary Africanity is not only the result of the vagaries of colonialism but also of the challenges associated with managing the legacies of autocratic colonial policies in post-independent Africa. With this background in mind, this chapter explores the “colonial invention of identity” thesis with specific reference to Nigeria. It must be noted however that this chapter does not approach the “invention” argument in the same way as the “creation of tribalism”,<sup>128</sup> the “invention of tribalism”<sup>129</sup> or the “becoming” of a particular tribe.<sup>130</sup> The chapter is rather interested in the artificiality of Nigeria’s cultural, social and political identity occasioned by the colonial architecture. The chapter also examines the political implications of such colonial constructs and particularly how the postcolonial Nigeria state responded to such implications. This chapter is divided into three substantive sections. The first section provides an overview of how autocratic colonial policies invented identity in the political and cultural realms, and attends to some defining characteristics of the colonial Nigerian society. The second section focuses on how the cultural and political legacies of colonialism impacted the political structure of the postcolonial state. The final section examines the response of the post-independent Nigerian state to the cultural and political legacies of colonialism and the limitations of that response.

### 2.2. The Invention of Nigerian Identity

Perhaps due to the fact that Nigeria was “home” to British indirect rule, the most authoritative description of the system had come from former colonial administrators and anthropologists of the Nigerian colony. Examples include the works of Fredrick Lugard;<sup>131</sup> Donald Cameron;<sup>132</sup> Charles Meek<sup>133</sup> and Anthony Kirk-Green.<sup>134</sup> Together,

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<sup>127</sup> Although as Ali Mazrui of blessed memory has argued in regards to the slavery and subsequent colonization of Africans, the African native himself was a victim of the imperial system and it is difficult, sometimes nonsense, to prove the guilt of his role in the negativities of imperial adventures. See his works such as Ali Al'Amin Mazrui et al., *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (London: BBC Publications, 1986); Ali Al'Amin Mazrui, *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); *Towards a Pax Africana: A Study of Ideology and Ambition* (University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>128</sup> Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*.

<sup>129</sup> Ranger, *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe*.

<sup>130</sup> William Robert Ochieng, *A Pre-Colonial History of the Gusii of Western Kenya from Cad 1500 to 1914* (Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1974).

<sup>131</sup> Lord Lugard, "Report of the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria," (1919); Frederick John Dealtry Lugard Baron Lugard, *Nigeria: Report on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria, and Administration, 1912-1919* (HM Stationery Office, 1920); Lugard, "The Dual Mandate in

these works paint a picture of the key features of the Nigerian colonial experience. Indeed, when European nations recognised British claims to its “spheres of influence” in West Africa in 1885, Nigeria went through a number of stages. It moved from its empires fighting defensive wars against British conquest; coming under the administration of the Royal Niger Company Limited; becoming a British protectorate in 1901; and finally to becoming a united colony in 1914.<sup>135</sup> Needless to say, a “united” Nigerian colony was determined by the policies adopted by imperial Britain. The point must also be made that what was termed a “colony” in imperial parlance was not a unitary politico-cultural whole made up of homogeneous institutions and traditions. An illustration of this, in the Nigerian case, is the dissimilarity between northern and the southeastern protectorates.<sup>136</sup> From this background of dissimilarity Steven Pierce notes that the Nigerian colonial state “attempted to achieve the state-effect in and through a reification of tradition. Retaining indigenous government institutions, ‘indirect rule,’ was to provide political legitimacy through its appropriation of tradition, ideological work analogous to metropolitan state-effects”.<sup>137</sup> Margery Perham noted that indirect rule worked especially in northern Nigeria because it was:

...a kind of inversion of the constitutional trick we have learned in England; the autocratic Emir retains nearly all his powers in theory while in practice, behind the curtain, he is checked and propelled, not by a ministry, still less by a democracy, but by an unobtrusive, kindly, middle-aged Englishman who derives

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Tropical Africa.”; Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene and F. J. Lugard, “Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria: A Document Record,” (1968).

<sup>132</sup> Donald Cameron, *My Tanganyika Service and Some Nigeria* (University Press of America, 1939); *Native Administration in Nigeria and Tanganyika* (London: Brown & Sons, 1937).

<sup>133</sup> Charles Kingsley Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (Barnes & Noble, 1970).

<sup>134</sup> Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene and Margery Perham, *The Principles of Native Administration in Nigeria: Selected Documents, 1900-1947* (Oxford University Press London, 1965); Kirk-Greene and Lugard, “Lugard and the Amalgamation of Nigeria: A Document Record.”; Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Britain's Imperial Administrators, 1858-1966* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); S. J. Hogben and A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *The Emirates of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of Their Historical Traditions* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>135</sup> Johnson U. J. Asiegbu, *Nigeria and Its British Invaders, 1851-1920: A Thematic Documentary History* (New York: NOK International Publishers, 1984); Arthur Norton Cook, *British Enterprise in Nigeria* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1943).

<sup>136</sup> This has been extensively argued by Adiele Afigbo, detailing the consequences of the British attempt to impose northern structures in the south of which the popular Aba Women's riots is an example. See Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*; “The Warrant Chief System in Eastern Nigeria: Direct or Indirect Rule?,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 4 (1967).

<sup>137</sup> Steven Pierce, “Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria,” *Comparative studies in society and history* 48, no. 04 (2006): 900.



his authority from the military power and wealth of Great Britain.<sup>138</sup>

Whilst Perham suggests the success of the system of indirect rule in Nigeria, she also points to the fact that cultural and traditional structures suffered most from the colonial system of indirect rule. Pierce has further stated “the very fact that ‘tradition’ was a label rather than a consistent matrix of rules meant that its ideological effects could persist through the substantial institutional changes to local administration across the century”.<sup>139</sup> Nigerian identity, understood to illustrate the African puzzle, has also come under the “invented” discourse.<sup>140</sup> At the heart of colonial inventions in Nigeria, and indeed their far-reaching implications on contemporary power and ethnic struggles, is the issue of colonially crafted customary law. Mamdani rightly notes “colonially crafted customary authority had two big African homes in the colonial period”: Nigeria and South Africa.<sup>141</sup>

Chieftaincy institutions in Nigeria saw the earliest impacts of colonial rule, especially in the northern and southeastern protectorates. For example, the northern protectorate under Sir Frederick Lugard adopted the existing, well-established and expedient political institutions, “co-opting local rulers,” as the formal policy of indirect rule.<sup>142</sup> In southeastern Nigeria, contrary to popular scholarly view, Adiele Afigbo recounts how Lord Lugard attempted to impose the northern variant of indirect rule on southeastern Nigeria.<sup>143</sup> This, of course, aroused reactions among local administrators and inhabitants who saw in this an attempt to pacify their tradition.<sup>144</sup> As noted by Sir Donald Cameron, indirect rule “altered” tradition by ignoring the need to find the true leaders of the people but instead used any willing African collaborator to the colonial course.<sup>145</sup> It is significant to note that pre-colonial Nigeria, that is the political structures, empires, and city-states that came to make up the Colony and Protectorate in 1914, consisted of highly complex politico-legal systems with extensive economic and diplomatic reach. The sophistication and resistance of the Benin Kingdom, the Oyo Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate in the

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<sup>138</sup> Margery Perham and Anthony Hamilton Millard Kirk-Greene, *West African Passage: A Journey through Nigeria, Chad, and the Cameroons, 1931-1932* (London and Boston: Peter Owen Publishers, 1983), 66.

<sup>139</sup> Pierce, "Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria," 900.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 887.

<sup>141</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 662.

<sup>142</sup> Pierce, "Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria," 901.

<sup>143</sup> The popular view is that indirect rule was started in southern Nigeria by Lord Lugard who had come into office later. See Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Cameron, *Native Administration in Nigeria and Tanganyika*.

north against colonial conquest are notable examples.<sup>146</sup> The existence of these pre-colonial advanced societies make the appropriation of tribe by indirect rule suggests an intention by colonialism to recreate African societies for imperial motives.

In northern Nigeria where indirect rule is seen to have worked as planned, changes to pre-colonial traditions were still conspicuous.<sup>147</sup> This is apparent in the fact that “the powers of the emirs under colonial rule were so weakened that what remained of the emirship, as an institution, was a caricature of its former stature.”<sup>148</sup> Donald Cameron also explains how his indirect rule policy forcibly merged pagan tribes into Muslim emirates, hence changing Nigeria’s pagan identity.<sup>149</sup> The same trend is conceivable in Yorubaland where, as in the North, the colonial system was seen to be least exploitative, courtesy of a number of treatises that the Yoruba empires established with the British.<sup>150</sup> These laws constituted a foundation for colonial rule, and also led to the introduction of English law into that African society. Adewoye specifically explains how those legal ideas in Yorubaland became the basis for social change.<sup>151</sup> Joseph Atanda chronicles how subsequent to Captain Bower’s bombardment of Oyo in 1895, the colonial establishment created a new Oyo Empire.<sup>152</sup> In that “recreation” of Oyo, Atanda reconstructs how the Alaafin Ladugbolu used Yoruba traditions and history to convince the colonial resident Captain William Ross – who also saw an opportunity to consolidate colonialism and his career – to enhance his personal power.<sup>153</sup>

How the colonial “patronisation” of the chieftaincy tradition impacted on established tradition has been thought to be severe in southeastern Nigeria and mild in the North. Olufemi Vaughan states that “the British, in seeking to apply the indirect rule system to the Igbos and the minority groups in the area, appointed “warrant chiefs” who assumed executive and judicial powers which were novel in degree and

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<sup>146</sup> A. F. C. Ryder, *The Benin Kingdom: Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980); S. A. Akintoye, "The North-Eastern Yoruba Districts and the Benin Kingdom," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 4 (1969); Babatunde A. Agiri, "Early Oyo History Reconsidered," *History in Africa* 2(1975); Rowland Adeyemi Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria, 1804-1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and Its Enemies* (London: Longman, 1971).

<sup>147</sup> In the north, the pre-existence of the Sokoto Caliphate (1804-1903) and its institutions had made it easier to sustain colonial indirect rule.

<sup>148</sup> Peter Kazenga Tibenderana, "The Role of the British Administration in the Appointment of the Emirs of Northern Nigeria, 1901-1931: The Case of Sokoto Province," *The Journal of African History* 28, no. 02 (1987).

<sup>149</sup> Cameron, *Native Administration in Nigeria and Tanganyika*, 4-5.

<sup>150</sup> O. Adewoye, "The Judicial Agreements in Yorubaland 1904-1908," *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 04 (1971).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894-1934*.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

territorial scope in these communities.”<sup>154</sup> Afigbo also traces the origin of recent administrative systems under native authority in southeastern Nigeria where the first chiefs, most of whom were not the traditional rulers, were issued with “warrants” which “qualified” them to be chiefs anyway.<sup>155</sup> From the incident of the warrant chiefs system, several other accounts have shown that in pursuance of imperial interests colonial administrators “not only manipulated tradition, but even ventured to invent new ones in several African communities.”<sup>156</sup> Indeed, “this distorted indigenous political system redefined power relations among individual chiefly rulers and local communities in various colonial administrative jurisdictions.”<sup>157</sup> The link between the colonial inventions of chieftaincy institutions and the artificiality of Nigerian identity can be envisaged. This is due to the

“existing mechanisms of administration and political mobilization already tended to accentuate ethnic identity, self-rule heightened these ethnic cleavages, politicized them, and made them simultaneously integral to and injurious of good governance”.<sup>158</sup>

Moreover, “chiefs... as the main repository of indigenous political and legal authority within the native authority and native court structures” meant the entrenchment of the accentuated ethnicity.”<sup>159</sup> Consequently, “current manifestations of chieftaincy politics in Nigeria have firm historical roots in the nature of colonial domination in British Africa”.<sup>160</sup> A number of current kings in Nigeria occupy such positions due to their progenitors being beneficiaries of the “Warrant Chiefs” system, underscoring the “fake” colonial foundation of contemporary *igweship* or *ezeship* (kinship) in the Igbo and Ibibio lands.<sup>161</sup> Equally, chieftaincy conflicts in postcolonial southeastern Nigeria have been explained through their colonial origins.<sup>162</sup> The point is that machinations of colonialism and indirect rule in the North (Hausa land), southeast (Igbo land) and the southwest (Yoruba land) invented Nigerian tradition and

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<sup>154</sup> Olufemi Vaughan, "Chieftaincy Politics and Social Relations in Nigeria," *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 29, no. 3 (1991): 310.

<sup>155</sup> A. E. Afigbo, "Indirect Rule in South Eastern Nigeria: The Era of Warrant Chiefs, 1891–1929," (1974); *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*; Femi Adegbulu, "From Warrant Chiefs to Ezeship: A Distortion of Traditional Institutions in Igboland," *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 2(2011).

<sup>156</sup> Vaughan, "Chieftaincy Politics and Social Relations in Nigeria," 309-10.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Pierce, "Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria," 895.

<sup>159</sup> Vaughan, "Chieftaincy Politics and Social Relations in Nigeria," 309-10.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Henry Kanu Offonry, *Royal Eagle: Eze Onu Egwunwoke* (Pretoria: New Africa Publishing Company, 1993), 33-37; Adegbulu, "From Warrant Chiefs to Ezeship: A Distortion of Traditional Institutions in Igboland," 11.

<sup>162</sup> Princewill Ebere Okonkwo, "Chieftaincy and Kinship Tussle in Igboland: A Case Study of Ogidi Community Anambra State, Nigeria" (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, 2010).

disorientated and politicized its identities. To understand contemporary Nigerian society, therefore, it is instructive to navigate the contours of implications of colonial rule on national identity.

### **2.3. Implications of Invented Identity**

Due to the implications of imperial machinations, Crawford Young has argued that when it comes to the challenges of cultural pluralism in Africa, the Nigerian story “lies close to the heart of the drama”.<sup>163</sup> Indeed, the alteration of the foundation upon which Nigerian custom stands as well as the success of the colonial enterprise present cultural pluralism as one of the enduring challenges of colonial rule.<sup>164</sup> Without downplaying the significance of the socio-political implications of colonialism and indirect rule in the colonial society, it is the implications on Nigerian political discourse and structure in immediate pre- and post-independent era that is of interest here. Mahmood Mamdani in his work *Citizen and Subject* (1996), has provided a succinct argument of how postcolonial African states have continued to glorify the structures of indirect rule.<sup>165</sup> The invention of Africa’s sociopolitical tradition by the colonial statecraft, in the way Hobsbawm understands and the imagination of its nations and communities by elites as in Anderson’s theory, have also been at the core of such implications.

The implications of invented Nigerian identity started with graduates of the colonial system. In Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa, individuals who may have been selected, empowered and imposed on communities by colonialism were equally glorified by the post-colonial state.<sup>166</sup> These individuals who benefitted from the power structure of colonialism therefore succeeded in translating “their colonial power-bases into a quite profound authoritarianism” in the postcolonial era.<sup>167</sup> Three leaders emerged in the lead up to Nigerian independence. In the northern protectorate emerged the Sardauna of Sokoto Ahmadu Bello whereas Chiefs Obafemi Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe rose to lead the interests of the southwest and southeast respectively in the three-state federal arrangement of 1954. With that precedent set, ethno-state divisions that followed, especially that of 1963, represented the vision, campaigns and imaginations of these traditional cum political leaders. This development formed the second phase of the ethno-tribal challenges of Nigeria, the first being the incidence of

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<sup>163</sup> Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 274.

<sup>164</sup> Indirect rule was deemed to have been so successful in Nigeria that it was introduced in the Gold Coast (Ghana) by Governor Guggisberg, and in other colonies in East and southern Africa.

<sup>165</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.

<sup>166</sup> Pierce, “Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria,” 909.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 908.

colonialism itself. Since these individuals represented ethnic and regional groupings, federalism as a colonial invention or an imagination of colonial origin facilitated a sudden relevance of ethnic and tribal affiliations in the post colony in relation to the politics of “who gets what”.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, “minority tribes, feeling neglected by this tripartite arrangement, became a new source of national discord that compounded the divisions in Nigeria.”<sup>169</sup> In the ensuing schism among competing ethnic and tribal groupings, political competitions become the inevitable corollary of colonial rule. For this reason, Joseph Aryeh argues, “the emergence of politicized ethnic groups in Nigeria is intimately tied to logic of government in which politicians are expected to deliver goods to their increasingly ethnicized constituencies.”<sup>170</sup> Eghosa Osaghae and Rotimi Suberu state this succinctly:

“by cobbling the different Nigerian groups into a culturally artificial political entity for instance, the British stimulated inter-group competition and mobilization for power and resources in the new state, thereby fostering ethnic conflicts”.<sup>171</sup>

The above artificiality of the Nigerian state and the ensuing ethno-tribal disunity arising out of competition for economic and political space also facilitated the emergence of three political parties in the immediate pre- and postcolonial era. In Western Nigeria, the Action Group Political Party (AGPP) became the dominant political party whilst the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the Northern People’s Party (NPP) represented Eastern and Northern Nigeria respectively. This three-region political arrangement became the foundation upon which the later stages of Nigerian politics stood. In this regard, postcolonial Nigeria has operated within the characteristics of what Hobsbawm, Anderson and Mamdani describe of post colonies in Africa. Political traditions in postcolonial Nigeria therefore constitute a replica of what British colonialism designed of the Nigerian society. The artificial bedrock of statehood as well as autocratic colonial policies facilitated the resort to ethno-federalism, which in turn saw a reversion to pre-colonial Nigerian identities. Nigeria’s federal response to the colonial legacy of belligerent ethno-tribal politics itself was founded on the three-region tradition of

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<sup>168</sup> Harold Dwight Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: P. Smith 1950)..

<sup>169</sup> Mohammed Sulemana, "Centenary of Failure? Boko Haram, Jihad and the Nigerian Reality," *Australasian Review of African Studies* 35, no. 2 (2014): 75.

<sup>170</sup> Joseph Richard, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Cited in Pierce, "Looking Like a State: Colonialism and the Discourse of Corruption in Northern Nigeria," 895.

<sup>171</sup> Osaghae and Suberu, *A History of Identities, Violence and Stability in Nigeria*, 16.

departing colonialists. This may have spelt the limits of ethno-federalism as the nerve center of Nigeria's postcolonial statecraft.

#### **2.4. Postcolonial Nigeria and the Limits of Federalism**

From the above background, the postcolonial Nigerian state has had to respond to the implications of two sets of colonial legacies. The first are those that originate directly from autocratic policies of colonialism such as indirect rule and native authority. The second are those that arise out of the perpetuation of colonial traditions in the postcolonial era, usually by African beneficiaries of the former colonial system. Perhaps the postcolonial version of what Bruce Berman calls local "Big Men" of the colonial state, these beneficiaries sought to incorporate ethnically defined administrative units in much the same way as did colonial indirect rule.<sup>172</sup> The Nigerian response to the first set of legacies was the resort to consociational ethno-federalism. Yet whilst the grant of ethnically defined and autonomous political units aided the settlement of the legacy of ethnic difference and weak national cohesion, ethno-federalism itself typified the second variant of colonial legacies. This is because autocratic traditions of the colonial rule still constituted the socio-legal foundation of Nigeria's federal response. Its legal basis, for example, was colonially defined ethnic boundaries and indigeneity.<sup>173</sup> This meant that the Nigerian response to colonially invented tradition failed to address the second set of implications of colonial legacies as ethno-federalism continued to glorify the social, cultural and political legacies of colonialism.

In the spirit of the original amalgamation of dominant tribes into one colony by British colonialism, the immediate pre-independent Nigeria in the lead up to independence also facilitated semi-autonomous amalgam of the northern, western and southern regions. With this in mind, postcolonial Nigeria, justifiably but wrongly, assumed that the only way forward to avoid ethnic clashes would be the granting of ethnically defined autonomies in the new state. Desperate, perhaps, to contain a legacy of disunity, the newly independent Nigeria further created more states and local government units in 1963.<sup>174</sup> The Nigerian postcolonial state has since then continued throughout its fifty years of independence to design its

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<sup>172</sup> Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism," 305.

<sup>173</sup> M. E. Noah, "After the Warrant Chiefs: Native Authority Rule in Ibibioland 1931-1951," *Phylon* (1960) (1987); Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism."; S. Egwu, "Beyond "Native" and "Settler" Identities: Globalization and the Challenges of Multicultural Citizenship in Nigeria" (paper presented at the Another Nigeria is Possible, Abuja: Nigeria Social Forum, 2004).

<sup>174</sup> Elaigwu, "Federalism in Nigeria's New Democratic Polity."

statecraft based on this colonial legacy.<sup>175</sup> Once made up of the original three states, and later expanded to contain the many subgroups that existed within the first three, the Nigerian federation now consists of thirty-six states. Despite this “the first element that strikes any observer of Nigerian political history and present-day political demands is a vigorous and continuous campaign for sub-division of units”.<sup>176</sup> Additionally, this ethno-tribal politics continue to blight the Nigeria state. Due to this, ethno-tribalism has been blamed for the failures of postcolonial Nigeria.

Yet not many authors have illustrated what aspects of the post-colonial state underlie the wanton propensity for ethnic re-categorizations and separate ethnic identity within the Nigerian federation. In this sense what sets Mamdani apart from other authors on post-colonial political institutions in Africa is his attempt to locate Africa’s, and Nigeria’s, recurring identity problem in colonially defined indigeneity as the yardstick for recognition and resource entitlement in post-colonial Africa.<sup>177</sup> To Mamdani the utilization of colonially crafted indigeneity in postcolonial Nigeria created a growing tendency for that notion of indigeneity to become the litmus test for rights under the post-colonial state, as it had under the colonial.<sup>178</sup> Colonially defined indigeneity remains a basis for recognition under the Nigerian federation: <sup>179</sup> the “dilemma of indigeneity as the legal basis for entitlement is perhaps best illustrated by the Nigerian case”.<sup>180</sup> As Obi Igwara notes, since the above character of the Nigerian federation was enshrined in the constitution as its legal basis it has,

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<sup>175</sup> Suberu, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria*; Osaghae, "Ethnic Minorities and Federalism in Nigeria."; Jinadu, "Federalism, the Consociational State, and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria."; J. Isawa Elaigwu, "Federalism in Nigeria's New Democratic Polity," *ibid.* 32(2002); Ayoade, "Secession Threat as a Redressive Mechanism in Nigerian Federalism."; Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State."; *Federal Character: Its Meaning and History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1989).

<sup>176</sup> Martin Dent, "Ethnicity and Territorial Politics in Nigeria," in *Federalism: The Multiethnic Challenge*, ed. Graham Smith (London: Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd, 1995), 129.

<sup>177</sup> Mamdani, "The Invention of the Indigène."; "Identity and National Governance," *Towards a New Map of Africa* (2005); "Political Identity, Citizenship and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Africa."; "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism."; "Ethnicity in Rwanda: An Interpretation," *Race and Ethnicity* (1999); "Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The Africa Dilemma."; "Historicizing Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and Its Reform," *Social Research* 66, no. 3 (1999); *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*; "Nationality Question in a Neo-Colony: A Historical Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly* (1984).

<sup>178</sup> "The Invention of the Indigène."; "Identity and National Governance."; "Political Identity, Citizenship and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Africa."; "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism."; "Ethnicity in Rwanda: An Interpretation."; "Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The Africa Dilemma."; "Historicizing Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and Its Reform."; *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*; "Nationality Question in a Neo-Colony: A Historical Perspective."

<sup>179</sup> "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 657.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 660.

Provides a scale against which political actions, decisions and motives are popularly assessed. It influences political appointments, the formation of political parties, the election of the president, the allocation of senatorial seats, the recruitment and promotion of personnel into the armed forces, the police, the bureaucracy and state agencies, the location of universities and institutions of higher learning, admission into universities and federal secondary schools, share-out of federated revenues, the siting of industries and economic ventures. Methods of application vary. They can take the form of either the quota system or positive discrimination.<sup>181</sup>

Igwara and Mamdani indeed link indigeneity to the allocation of resources. Within an atmosphere of intense competition for scarce resources, Martin Dent is right to note “Nigeria could almost be compared to a biological cell which sub-divides and sub-divides again, creating more and more replicas of itself”.<sup>182</sup> What is apparent from above is that whilst the structure of postcolonial state institutions in Nigeria were meant to check the country’s ethnic challenge, they have rather played significant roles in facilitating a more combative manifestation of ethnicity. This suggests that a high political response to the challenges of identity, such as federalism, constitutes an aspect of the solution.

The solution should include, crucially, how everyday Nigerians respond to political arrangements at the high levels of society. The argument is that whilst ethno-federalism may have been a solution to ethnicity, it also created ethnic sentiments on the lower levels of society. Julie MacArthur has noted that possibly tribes come into being when ethnic architects “take up arms to defend an imagined homeland”, “when a problem for one becomes a problem ‘for all’” and when they “succeed in subsuming the plurality and dissent inherent in all community under one cultural idea”.<sup>183</sup> British colonialism machinations and the postcolonial architecture that ensued have provided all these possibilities in the contemporary Nigerian society. How did Biafra culminate into a cultural idea and a social categorization with the motivation and capacity to campaign for secession from Nigeria? In the same stead, how did the Hausa come to be seen as the “leaders” of Nigeria and in peaceful relations with the Yoruba’s to the chagrin of the Igbos? Were these identity-based conceptions inspired by just national and high level arrangements or by everyday needs and aspirations of

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<sup>181</sup> Obi Igwara, "Dominance and Difference: Rival Visions of Ethnicity in Nigeria," *Ethnic and racial studies* 24, no. 1 (2001): 101.

<sup>182</sup> Dent, "Ethnicity and Territorial Politics in Nigeria," 129.

<sup>183</sup> Julie MacArthur, "When Did the Luyia (or Any Other Group) Become a Tribe?," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines* 47, no. 3 (2013): 359.



common Nigerians? Answers to these questions lie in the limits ethno-federalism as a high politics response to colonial legacies. The inability of the postcolonial state to envisage the implications of postcolonial policies on the lower everyday levels of society has not advanced the cause of national unity. Put simply, postcolonial Nigeria, instead of checking ethnic belligerence, has sustained, accentuated and essentialised ethnic sentiments.

The inability of ethno-federalism to foresee the creation of ethnic sentiments on the lower levels of society also manifests in the failure to focus on the multiple arenas of the postcolonial Nigerian society. Any political system is a two-level structure and accordingly the political interactions within that system involve two-level processes. Nigeria's political system, like any other, is made up of high politics, which involves the ruling, the state system, and the makers of policy, as well as low politics – the “cultural politics of everyday life” of the ruled.<sup>184</sup> It is conclusive that any holistic appraisal of a political system cannot escape a thorough consideration of this dual domain of politics. And definitely the Nigerian political condition, having gone through various phases of farcical inventions and intellectual imaginations, cannot be wholly conceived without it. Starting in the 1970s and 1980s, a focus on “high politics”, or politics from above, in the analysis of African society gradually gave way to “low politics”, or politics from below or what is sometimes called deep politics.<sup>185</sup> This followed a realisation, by mainly academics, of Africa's obsession with high politics in designing policy responses to the continent's problems. In his analysis of the relative relevance of high and low politics Patrick Chabal notes thus:

The truth about much current analysis of postcolonial African politics is that it is singularly ill-informed about anything other than the overt, explicit discourse of high politics. And it seems to have escaped the notice of many who write on Africa that the discourse of high politics is, always and everywhere, the smoke screen behind which the real business of politics is conducted. As for the focus on high politics, it is necessarily at the expense of the examination of ‘low’ politics, the politics of everyday life.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Werbner and Ranger, *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, 7-8.

<sup>185</sup> J Bayart, "Introduction," in *The Politics from Below in Black Africa*, ed. Jean-François Bayart, J. A. Mbembe, and Comi N. Toulabor (Paris: Karthala, 1992); Naomi Chazan et al., eds., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992); Filip De Boeck, "Postcolonialism, Power and Identity: Local and Global Perspectives from Zaire," in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, ed. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (London: ZED Books, 1996).

<sup>186</sup> Chabal, "The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation," in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, ed. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (London: ZED Books, 1996), 52.

Analysis of the African polity would be expected to move away from Chabal's two-decade old observation. Yet the need to reiterate the significance of high and low politics in diagnosing political systems and interactions is still relevant in the continent. This need has been reinforced partly due to the interconnected and mutually reinforcing issues like ethnicity, social categorisations, socio-political entitlements, and how governments deal with these policy questions. From this angle, ethno-tribal politics continue to haunt contemporary Nigeria because the ethno-federal response to Nigeria's ethnic identity challenge has mostly been perceived from the political institutional level (macro or high politics) with little regard to how such political institutions facilitate the creation and making of ethnicities among ordinary individuals (micro or low politics). Due this lacunae, ethno-federalism as a response to Nigeria's colonial legacy of ethno-tribal belligerence has not achieved its intended objective.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

Ethno-federalism as a high politics response to ethnicity in postcolonial Nigeria may have been the result of what Hobsbawm and Ranger call "invention" of Nigerian tradition by British colonialism led by various nationalist leaders whose perceptions of nationhood within the bigger Nigerian polity "imagined" the inevitability of ethno-federalism. The persistence of negative tendencies of ethnicity in Nigeria seems to suggest however that federalism or ethno-federalism as an antidote to ethnic rivalry has not yielded much positive result. This may be due to the fact that, firstly, postcolonial Nigeria saw ethnic difference within a politically defined polity as a cause, or perhaps the only cause, of ethnic conflicts. In response, the new Nigerian state carried over the traditions and practices inherited from colonialism. Secondly, in resorting to ethno-federalism, postcolonial Nigeria did not foresee any other sources of ethnic sentiments, or at best underestimated such sources. The next chapter asks: how did colonially inspired postcolonial institutions such as ethno-federalism lead to the creation of ethnic categorizations, unsheathe their combative competitiveness and perpetuate Nigeria's ethnic burden. In other words, whilst this chapter has illustrated how colonial policies shaped Nigeria's federal political system, both as a solution to and a cause of the enduring problem of ethnicity, the next chapter focuses on how autocratic colonial policies and the ethno-federal response to it created (and still creates) ethnic motivations and sentiments on a lower level of the society. The chapter revisits Mamdani's works to draw a link between colonially inherited policies and traditions, and everyday creation of ethnic identities by ordinary elements within Nigerian society.

## CHAPTER 3. POSTCOLONIAL NIGERIA: ETHNICITY AND LOW POLITICS

### 3.1. Introduction

Given that ethno-federalism was meant to be a solution to Nigeria's identity challenge, the socio-political upheavals and the continuing economic inequity associated with ethnicity illustrate that in Nigeria federalism has not succeeded in solving the identity problem. What may have escaped postcolonial Nigeria is that consociational ethno-federalism works only in some cases, and the system comes with significant socio-political ramifications. Henry Hale describes two versions of ethno-federal states each of which may apply to different stages of postcolonial Nigeria.<sup>187</sup> The first is an ethno-federal state with a dominant core ethnic region. The other is where one ethnic group dominates but not confined to a core geographic region but instead found within different federal regions.<sup>188</sup> Hale states that the first example of ethno-federal states is more likely to collapse because core ethnic regions (1) promote the rise of "dual power" situations that are frequently at the heart of state breakdown and revolution; (2)...reduce the capacity of central governments to credibly commit to the security of ethnic minority regions, and; (3)...facilitate the collective imagining of a core-group nation-state separate from the union state.<sup>189</sup> In the second example also:

...the dominant group faces major obstacles to collective action that inhibit it from creating the most serious dual-power situations, that reduce the threats perceived by minority ethnic regions, and that hinder the efforts of political entrepreneurs to promote the collective imagining of an independent core nation-state.<sup>190</sup>

The two types of ethno-federal states identified by Hale apply to Nigeria in equal relevance. And the source of each is situated in the politico-historical legacy of colonialism. The first category is an ethno-federal state that contains a *core ethnic region*. This describes the Nigerian state immediately after independence, where northern Nigeria became "a single ethnic federal region that enjoys dramatic superiority in population". In northern Nigeria, the conduct of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Ahmadu Bello – two leaders who were awarded with the country's leadership after their loyalty to the departing colonialists – may be seen to fit Hale's

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<sup>187</sup> Henry E. Hale, "Divided We Stand: Institutional Sources of Ethnofederal State Survival and Collapse," *World Politics* 56, no. 02 (2004).

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 166-67.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

description.<sup>191</sup> The dominance of northern Nigeria tended to facilitate an “us-them” relationship with the western and eastern regions. Consequently, this has been blamed for a number of tendencies of state breakdown and revolutions such as the Biafran secessionist campaign.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, one of the reasons given for the first coupe d’état of 1966 was that the northern and Hausa-Fulani led government of Tafawa Balewa had allegedly ignored the security and welfare of ethnic minority regions such as the Igbo dominated southeastern and Yoruba-led southwestern regions.<sup>193</sup> Inevitably the above characteristics have led to “the collective imagining of a core-group nation-state separate from the union state”.<sup>194</sup> This is why perhaps the nations-within-a-nation character of Nigeria has engulfed growing areas of the state, and in the process hardening and widening the web of negative ethnicity. From this point of view, there exist the challenge of locating new ways of responding to ethnicity within the postcolonial political system. This leads us to an aspect that may well be true for Nigerian identity as it may for other pluralistic societies in Africa or elsewhere: a focus on how bottom-up, everyday routines forge ethno-tribal categorizations.

It is conceivable from previous discussions that in responding to the challenges of identity, strategies do need to include, but should not be limited to, the role and response of high politics. However, any response must include, with utmost priority, the role of low-level interactions and politics among ordinary citizens. The primary role of everyday interactions in Nigeria is due to two reasons. The first is that everyday interactions among citizens have a stronger and deeper social and low-level effect than high politics. The second reason is that the resilience of identity politics in everyday life in Nigeria suggests that ethnicity is an everyday phenomenon as much

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Henry Alapiki, "State Creation in Nigeria: Failed Approaches to National Integration and Local Autonomy," *African Studies Review* 48, no. 3 (2005); Olayemi Akinwumi, *Crises and Conflicts in Nigeria: A Political History since 1960*, vol. 52 (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2004); Olajide O. Akanji, "The Problem of Belonging: The Identity Question and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria," *African Identities* 9, no. 2 (2011); Omolade Adejuyigbe, *Social Factors in the Development of the Political Map of Nigeria*, A Geography of Nigerian Development. (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1983); Government of Nigeria, "About Nigeria: People," <http://www.nigeria.gov.ng>.

<sup>193</sup> Turaki, "The British Colonial Legacy in Northern Nigeria: A Social Ethical Analysis of the Colonial and Post-Colonial Society and Politics in Nigeria."; Eghosa E. Osaghae, "Managing Multiple Minority Problems in a Divided Society: The Nigerian Experience," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 36, no. 1 (1998); E. Edlyne Anugwom, "Ethnic Conflict and Democracy in Nigeria: The Marginalisation Question," *Journal of social development in Africa* 15, no. 1 (2000); Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966-1976)* (Algora Publishing, 2009); Ben Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors: Coup D'etat of 15th January 1966, First inside Account* (Lagos: Africana Educational Publishers (Nig), 1981).

<sup>194</sup> Godwin Onuoha, "Cultural Interfaces of Self-Determination and the Rise of the Neo-Biafran Movement in Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 40, no. 137 (2013); Mudoola, "Biafra: The Question of Recognition and African Diplomacy."; Ejiogu, "Chinua Achebe on Biafra: An Elaborate Deconstruction."

as it is the creation of the postcolonial Nigerian state. These lead to two main objectives in this chapter. Firstly, I discuss those aspects of the postcolonial state that have direct bearings on how individual responses to everyday circumstances fuel or create ethnicity. I shall revisit Mamdani's work in this instance, especially his analysis of indigeneity and custom as a legal basis for socio-political recognition in postcolonial African states. Secondly, and building on the first, I examine how those policies create ethnic categorizations and violent identity confrontations. The analyses that follows provide the evidence for the need to holistically re-appraise Nigeria's political system in an attempt to finding solutions to the continuing centrality of ethnicity.

### **3.2. Postcolonial policies and low politics**

The colonial imposition of geographical, political and economic framework for Africa as a whole has had a profound impact. In Nigeria, colonial policies that directly related to culture and legality – such policies on custom, tradition, social stratification and belongingness – have had major impact on the postcolonial state.<sup>195</sup> Whilst contemporary writers have discussed at some length the role of colonialism in shaping Africa's cultural foundation,<sup>196</sup> Mamdani's ideas have stood up to critics and have made important contributions in postcolonial institutional repositioning of African cultural identity.

Mamdani's starting point was the limit of political economy as a framework for political analysis, especially ethnic conflict and postcolonial political violence, in Africa.<sup>197</sup> According to Mamdani, political economy as an existing analytical yardstick could only explain conflicts if they originated from market-based identities.<sup>198</sup> Whilst there exists a political economy dimension of identity conflicts that require investigation, Mamdani's ideas deepen understanding of resource-based struggles and how they fuel conflicts by drawing attention to socio-historical and cultural aspects. This way, Mamdani reintroduces culture as a basis for explaining political

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<sup>195</sup> This dissertation, borrowing from the likes of Ann Swidler, is sticking to the simple yet practical definition of culture as the "way" a particular group of people lives. This includes their traditions, customs, symbols, skills, norms and practices etc. See Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American sociological review* 51, no. 2 (1986).

<sup>196</sup> Axel Harneit-Sievers, "Igbo'traditional Rulers': Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria," *afrika spectrum* 33, no. 1 (1998); Peter Geschiere, "Chiefs and Colonial Rule in Cameroon: Inventing Chieftaincy, French and British Style," *Africa* 63, no. 02 (1993); Stephen C. Lubkemann Roy Richard Grinker, Christopher B. Steiner, ed. *Ethnicity in Southern African History*, Perspectives on Africa. A Reader in Culture, History and Representation (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1996); Heinrich Albert Wieschhoff, *Colonial Policies in Africa* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1972); Berman, "A Palimpsest of Contradictions: Ethnicity, Class, and Politics in Africa."

<sup>197</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism."

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 651.

conflicts, especially those that recall the political resurgence of ethnicity.<sup>199</sup> In his view, it was necessary to historicise the political agency of colonialism; “the colonial state as a legal/institutional complex that produced particular political identities”.<sup>200</sup>

In reigniting debates on “the institutional legacy of colonialism, particularly the political institutions of colonial rule”,<sup>201</sup> Mamdani introduces dialectical arguments that seek to recast, synthesize and unpack a number of dualities: institutional segregation-territorial segregation, indirect rule-direct rule, civil law-customary law, urban-rural and citizen-subject. Within these dualities, Mamdani’s relevance for understanding the destructive cultural policies is evident with his analyses of how native authority and its manipulation of custom continue to impact ethnic and or tribal identities in the contemporary era. Indeed according to Mamdani, “the time of the Scramble, that hypocritical “civilizing mission” had given way to a wholly avaricious “incorporation mission” and an obsession with “law and order” in the colonies by any means.<sup>202</sup> This was the genesis of custom as a legal concept. The point emphasized here is that since ethnicities “were governed through customary laws,” the “language of custom...did not circumscribe power, for custom was enforced”.<sup>203</sup>

Mamdani and Ake agree on the observation that practices such as those that transformed the culture and legal basis of colonies “altered power relations within traditional power structures but also among ethnic groups inducing intense political competition”.<sup>204</sup> In the words of Mamdani, prominent among such traditional power structures that seeped into postcolonial Africa, and those that had lasting effects on ethnic identity formations are the concept of indigeneity and resource entitlements.<sup>205</sup> It has been stated elsewhere in this thesis that there exists only a thin line between the traditions or customs conjured by colonialism and those that are free from such colonial manipulations.<sup>206</sup> This has sustained the tendency to link nativity to colonially defined customs. Mamdani identifies three postcolonial dilemmas resulting from this tendency:

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 652.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 651.

<sup>201</sup> *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. For some of the key arguments of this work, see “Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism.” Also delivered at a World Bank Arusha Conference, “New Frontiers of Social Policy” – December 12-15, 2005.

<sup>202</sup> *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, 49-50.

<sup>203</sup> “Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism,” 654.

<sup>204</sup> Ake, “What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?,” 2.

<sup>205</sup> See particularly Mamdani, “The Invention of the Indigène.”; “Identity and National Governance.”

<sup>206</sup> Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*; Mafeje, “Africanity: A Combative Ontology’.”; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

The first arises from the growing tendency for indigeneity to become the litmus test for rights under the post-colonial state, as under the colonial state. The second dilemma rises from the fact that we have built upon this foundation and turned indigeneity into a test for justice, and thus for entitlement under the postcolonial state. The third dilemma rises from the growing tendency to identify colonially constructed regime of customary law with Africa's authentic tradition.<sup>207</sup>

By bringing to the forefront those aspects of postcolonial African society which have direct bearings on the actions of everyday Africans, Mamdani forcefully emphasizes the low level aspects of African postcolonial society. Critiquing the works of Ranger, Hobsbawm and Anderson for example, Mamdani notes that “richly detailed as these studies are, they still offer a top-down and partial view of the creation of ethnic identities” in Africa.<sup>208</sup> He continues that:

In assuming that only those ethnicities are real which have always existed, they presume ethnicities to be transhistorical phenomena and thereby miss the fact that ethnicities have a social history. This is why, rather than conceiving of an ethnic identity as simply ‘invented’ by statecraft or ‘imagined’ by intellectuals, it would make more sense to speak of the ‘making’ of ethnicity.<sup>209</sup>

Perhaps in lending credibility to Mamdani’s criticism of the above authors, Thomas Spear has stated that Terence Ranger did re-examine the “invented” in the *Invention of Tradition in Africa* in a less-cited follow up to the work he co-edited with Hobsbawm.<sup>210</sup> In *The Invention of Tradition Revisited (1993)* Ranger revised his earlier position.<sup>211</sup> In this self-critique:

Ranger went further to doubt the utility of using the term ‘invention’ at all. Invention, he noted, implied a conscious construction of tradition, focused on colonial power and agency. Further, it essentialized tradition and disregarded historical processes of reinterpretation and reformation. Finally, a focus on invention construed Africans as gullible subjects. In

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<sup>207</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 657.

<sup>208</sup> *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, 184.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>210</sup> Thomas Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," *Journal of African History* 44, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>211</sup> O. Vaughan and T. Ranger, *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1993).

short, Ranger saw the term as misleading and ahistorical, and he chose to substitute Benedict Anderson's term, 'imagined', to better convey what he now saw as multi-dimensional, interactive historical processes.<sup>212</sup>

Spear's account of Ranger's self-assessment draws attention to Mahmood Mamdani's conception of ethnic identity as a perpetual phenomenon with colonial roots; the result of a multi-dimensional, interactive and historical processes. Spear's statement suggests an agreement with Mamdani on the fact that "ethnic boundaries became more or less opposed or permeable. All were dynamic historical processes that reconstituted the heritage of the past to meet the needs of the present".<sup>213</sup> This sums up Mamdani's conception of tribe and ethnicity, and their derivatives, tradition and nationalism, as a bottom-up phenomena resulting from autocratic socio-political legacies of colonialism. He adds to the constructivist interpretations of Hobsbawm, Anderson and Vail a "made" ethnicity – implying a more active, participating and processual procedure, which somewhat differs from a structural "inventing" and "imagining" by the colonial system and elite intellectuals respectively.

To put Mamdani into perspective however, it is crucial to revisit Vail and Berman.<sup>214</sup> Vail makes a crucial point that is perhaps a precursor to Mamdani's understanding of ethnicity in Africa. He states that ethnicity exists today and will continue to be a potent force in the future, and deems it dangerous, looking at the transformation of ethnicity since independence and the neglect of tribalism by scholars.<sup>215</sup> Bruce Berman, for his part, reasserts the emergence of African ethnic identity:

through internal struggles over moral economy and political legitimacy tied to the definition of ethnic communities—moral ethnicity; and external conflicts over differential access to the resources of modernity and economic accumulation – political tribalism.<sup>216</sup>

These arguments, especially Berman's, goes back to the three dilemmas identified in postcolonial Africa by Mamdani. Mamdani notes that indigeneity as a prerequisite for rights and entitlements, and indigeneity based on a colonially constructed custom mean that there is a re-demarcation of "yesterday's natives into postcolonial settlers

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<sup>212</sup> Spear, "Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa," 5.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>214</sup> Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*; Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism."

<sup>215</sup> Vail, *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*.

<sup>216</sup> Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism," 305.



and postcolonial natives”<sup>217</sup>. Because the above tendency allows Africans who reside in other than their ancestral homes to be considered non-indigenous to the lands they reside in, the propensity to politicize and essentialize ethnic fault lines is high. Inevitably, each ethnic group starts a campaign for its own ethnic home.

Other authors have advanced similar lines of argument in explaining tribalism in postcolonial Africa. <sup>218</sup> In Nigeria, it is due to the continuing colonial imprints on postcolonial society that, according to Chinua Achebe, Nigerians swore at independence to stand in brotherliness despite subscribing to different tribes and tongues, only to be “soaked in fratricidal blood” later on in their history.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, Adiele E. Afigbo, one of the most authoritative writers of postcolonial Nigeria, has provided substantial Nigerian examples of the above scenario especially in the southeast.<sup>220</sup> Mamdani has been right therefore to maintain that the “dilemma of indigeneity as the legal basis for entitlement is perhaps best illustrated by the Nigerian case”.<sup>221</sup> The next section gives examples of cases that strengthens Mamdani’s argument above.

### **3.3. Federalism, Indigeneity and Ethnicity**

To delve into how the use of and response to colonially defined indigeneity provides the motivation for ethnic sentiments and categorizations in postcolonial Nigeria, it is imperative to make two points. The first is that since decision-making in post-independence Africa has tended to be top-down, with little or no input by ordinary people, interactions among African citizens on the everyday level have also tended to be a reactionary response to imposed policies. The second point is that since those everyday interactions are on a broader level of engagement, their effects are understandably more widespread and far-reaching. These points apply to the decision, and the response, to resort to federalism by the postcolonial Nigerian state and the use of colonially defined indigeneity and native-settler dichotomy as a basis of recognition in the federal system. Mamdani makes a leading point in how Nigeria’s

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<sup>217</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 660.

<sup>218</sup> Noah, "After the Warrant Chiefs: Native Authority Rule in Ibibioland 1931-1951."; Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, 53; Egwu, "Beyond “Native” and “Settler” Identities: Globalization and the Challenges of Multicultural Citizenship in Nigeria."; Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa*, vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

<sup>219</sup> Nigeria, "About Nigeria: People" 6.

<sup>220</sup> Afigbo, "Indirect Rule in South Eastern Nigeria: The Era of Warrant Chiefs, 1891–1929."; *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891-1929*; "The Warrant Chief System in Eastern Nigeria: Direct or Indirect Rule?."; "Revolution and Reaction in Eastern Nigeria: 1900-1929:(the Background to the Women's Riot of 1929)," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 3 (1966); "The Warrant Chiefs System in Eastern Nigeria 1900-1929" (University of Ibadan, 1964).

<sup>221</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 660.

federal character fuel and motivate ethnic tendencies:

I am referring specifically to the ethnic character of the Nigerian federation, as embodied in the constitutional provision that key federal institutions—universities, civil service, and, indeed, the army—must reflect the “federal character” of Nigeria. This means that entrance to federal universities, to the civil service, and to the army is quota driven. Where quotas are set for each state in the Nigerian federation, only those indigenous to the state may qualify for a quota [...] The effective elements of the Nigerian federation are neither territorial units called states, nor ethnic groups, but those ethnic groups that have their own states.<sup>222</sup>

Since the *effective* elements of Nigeria’s federal system is not just its states nor ethnic categorization, the original basis and rationale for the federal system is defeated. This character of Nigeria’s federation, in fact, shifts focus to indigeneity, since indigeneity is what makes a political demarcation into a *proper* state under the federal arrangement. This further illustrates a point on a much lower level. Since entry into federal educational, public and military institutions is quota driven, and since “only those indigenous to the state may qualify for a quota” resource motivated ethnicity increases amongst everyday Nigerians as a matter of survival. Scholars such as Toyin Falola have agreed with Mamdani on this point.<sup>223</sup>

The above arrangement ensured that the stratified ethnic identities entrenched by colonial rule have been brought into political discourse in Nigeria and have caused many Nigerians to believe that they have clear, present, and longstanding enemies within Nigeria's borders, and therefore owe more responsibility to the survival of their lineage than to their country.<sup>224</sup> This point has been illustrated further to argue that the history and culture of ethnic groups in Nigeria rests on the distinction between natives and settlers.<sup>225</sup> Akanji is one Nigerian scholar that takes a similar perspective, arguing that Nigeria’s post-colonial constitutions, and consequently, the use of indigeneity as a basis of the federal system has become a hindrance to national unity, and, in effect, has been a major cause of ethnic strife. J. O Akande also states that:

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, "The Works of A. F. Afigbo on Nigeria: An Historiographical Essay," *History in Africa* 33, no. 1 (2006); Akanji, "The Problem of Belonging: The Identity Question and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria."; J. O. Akande, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979: With Annotations* (Sweet & Maxwell, 1982).

<sup>224</sup> Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); "The Works of A. F. Afigbo on Nigeria: An Historiographical Essay."

<sup>225</sup> Akanji, "The Problem of Belonging: The Identity Question and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria."

If ethnic and state considerations have to be the salient factors in determining public appointments, it is more than likely that hankering after power and high federal offices would lead to inordinate and aggressive identification with the ethnic group to the detriment of higher loyalty to the nation.<sup>226</sup>

As can be expected, the above characteristics of Nigerian politics and everyday life have produced a number of ramifications for sociopolitical engagement. The first is that every ethnic group in Nigeria has the motivation to seek its own ethnic home.<sup>227</sup> Secondly, the number of people considered foreign and non-indigenous within Nigerian states continues to rise.<sup>228</sup> The ramifications of making cultural identity the prerequisite of political identity, grants ethnicity the force and potency as everyday political currency.<sup>229</sup> The results of that renewed relevance of ethnic identity lay at the heart of Nigeria's challenges of ethnicity and tribalism. The force behind this political version of ethnicity is not the federal state or high politics but individual and everyday identity categorizations that see ethnicity as suddenly becoming key to their survival. By this realization, political identity enlivens ethnic sentiments, as there exist stronger allegiance to ethnic groups instead of to the nation.

The native-settler foundation upon which Nigeria's political superstructure stands therefore goes further than just being a tool for the containment of ethnic differences inherited from colonialism. The actual impact over the last five decades has been on the everyday level. Umar Danfulani's opening words to his submission to a Jos Peace Conference attests to this very issue. He asserts:

Labels such as 'settler', 'native', 'non-native', 'host community', 'foreigner', 'native foreigner', 'stranger element', 'squatter', 'non-squatter', 'immigrant', 'migrant', 'indigene', 'non-indigene', mbák, Gambari, Hausa-Fulani, nyamiri, nasara, ngwa, arna, kirdi, and baro among many others are used daily in Nigeria to describe, stigmatise or stereotype the 'other' as a category who 'does not belong'.<sup>230</sup>

At the heart of Danfulani's description of "otherness" is ethnicity and the motivation for material ownership of cultural possessions such as land, farming and commercial rights. Accordingly, the native-settler dichotomy has been at the core of countless

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<sup>226</sup> Akande, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979: With Annotations*, 15.

<sup>227</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism."

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Umar Habila Dadem Danfulani, "The Jos Peace Conference and the Indigene/Settler Question in Nigerian Politics," in *unpublished paper*(2006).

number of conflicts among ordinary Nigerians. These conflicts have arisen due to the conflicting claims to indigeneity by different groups in the states of the federation.<sup>231</sup> The evidence given provides strong claims to state that the above arrangement is a primary reason behind Nigeria's inability to foster and sustain unity and integration among its citizens.<sup>232</sup>

The seed of the fear of living together, the above fear of the ethnic "other", may have already been obvious in the immediate postcolonial era. The Northern Nigerian Delegation to a Constitutional Conference held in Lagos in September 1966 stated that:

We all have our fears of one another. Some fear that opportunities in their own areas are limited...Some fear the sheer weight of numbers of other parts, which could be used to the detriment of their own interests. Some fear the sheer weight of skills and the aggressive drive of other groups which they feel has to be regulated, if they are not to be left as the economic, social and possibly political under-dogs in their own areas of origin...These fears may be real or imagined; they may be reasonable or petty. Whether they are genuine or not, they have to be taken account of because they influence to a considerable degree, the actions of the groups towards one another and, more important perhaps, the daily actions of the individuals from other groups.<sup>233</sup>

Particularly significant here are phrases like "under-dogs in own areas of origin" and "aggressive drive of other groups" because they show the inherent "fear" of the ethnic 'Other' in relation to resources and political space. The reality of scarce resources, the destructive relevance of ethnic categorizations and who-you-know scenarios make ethnicity and tribalism crucially important to the survival of the most impoverished and socially lowest and unaware. Daniel Smith remarks that:

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.; Ogo Alubo, "Citizenship and Nation Making in Nigeria: New Challenges and Contestations," *Identity, culture and politics* 5, no. 1 (2004); Sam G. Egwu, "Bridging the Indigene and Settler Divide: Challenges of Peace-Building in Nigeria" (paper presented at the A Paper Presented at a Seminar for Opinion Leaders to Provide Inputs into Conflict Management Discourse in Jos, on Wednesday 9th February, 2005); Egwu, "Beyond "Native" and "Settler" Identities: Globalization and the Challenges of Multicultural Citizenship in Nigeria."; Philip Ostien, "Jonah Jang and the Jasawa: Ethno-Religious Conflict in Jos, Nigeria," *Muslim-Christian Relations in Africa* (2009). These conflicts include "the oil wars by the militants in the Niger Delta region over resource control, the Boko Haram religious uprising in four northern states in July 2009, the ethno-religious crises in Jos, Plateau state between 2009 and 2010, and the Sharia crisis in 2000. Some other examples include the 1967–1970 civil war, the ethnic conflicts between the Yoruba and the Hausa-Fulani in Sagamu, Ogun state and other similar cases in Kano and many northern states between 1999 and 2010, as well as the protracted conflicts between the Tiv and Jukun in Benue state, and the Umuleri and Aguleri conflicts in Anambra state." See Akanji, "The Problem of Belonging": The Identity Question and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria," 118.

<sup>232</sup> "The Problem of Belonging": The Identity Question and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria."

<sup>233</sup> Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information, *Nigerian Crisis 1966: The Ad Hoc Conference on the Nigerian Constitution*, vol. 4(1966), 1.

While the millions of very poor people in Nigeria are left out of the struggle for resources that occurs at the nexus of the state and the networks of the patronage that vie to control it, . . . even the extremely poor are remarkably aware of the fact that it is through the social connections of patron–clientism, and increasingly corruption, that people control wealth and power in Nigeria.<sup>234</sup>

References to “groups” in the above statement by the Northern delegation refers to ethnic groups, and along with Smith’s statement above, such fears have continued to rage on to fuel some of the bloodiest ethnic conflicts in Nigeria in recent times. The deepest allegiance in Nigeria has been ethnic and regional, and nationalism has been constructed within such atmosphere of charged ethnic attachments.<sup>235</sup> Such developments have undermined the mutual interrelationships, unity and integration among Nigeria’s ethnic groups.<sup>236</sup> In the light of this, Peter Ekeh has been right to state that:

The dynamics of African politics have been generated from the fact that individuals have fought to expand their ethnic spheres of influence by controlling the state so as to be able to dominate the public realm and use its resources for the benefit of their own primordial public.<sup>237</sup>

This has facilitated dialectical relationships between Nigeria’s ethnic groups and the state and further facilitated the use of ethnicity as an “exit point” for marginalized ethnic groups.<sup>238</sup> It further caused “the emergence of civil groups that undermine democracy and national stability by constructing platforms for ethnic militancy and violent confrontation with other groups and the state.”<sup>239</sup> The actual point here is the making of ethnicity as a powerful political tool on the ordinary level of engagement, the frustrated character of citizenship in Nigeria as well as the persistent crisis of national integration and belongingness.<sup>240</sup> Indeed, everyday experience occurs because of the high politics that has created federal system and put in place policies

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<sup>234</sup> Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>235</sup> Noah Echa Attah, "Contesting Exclusion in a Multi-Ethnic State: Rethinking Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria," *Social Identities* 19, no. 5 (2013).

<sup>236</sup> Akanji, "The Problem of Belonging: The Identity Question and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria."

<sup>237</sup> Peter P. Ekeh, "Historical and Cross-Cultural Contexts of Civil Society in Africa" (paper presented at the Civil society, democracy and development in Africa: Proceedings of a workshop for development practitioners Washington, DC, 1994), 12.

<sup>238</sup> Godwin Onuoha, "Contemporary Igbo Nationalism and the Crisis of Self-Determination in Nigeria," *African Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>239</sup> Augustine Ikelegbe, "The Perverse Manifestation of Civil Society: Evidence from Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 39, no. 01 (2001).

<sup>240</sup> Onuoha, "Contemporary Igbo Nationalism and the Crisis of Self-Determination in Nigeria."

that forces Nigerians into an ethnic politics to progress and survive.

The foregoing discussion highlights Osaghae's definition of ethnicity in Nigeria as "the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflicts and cooperation".<sup>241</sup> Noah Attah states that this definition puts ethnicity in Nigeria beyond the sheer manifestation of conflicts manifestation to encompass the social categorization involving the ascription of identity to groups distinct from others.<sup>242</sup> In addition to this, Nnoli and also Brubaker et al. posit that in the case of Nigeria, ethnicity is not just about belonging to the same culture but by the interaction between identities and external categorizations.<sup>243</sup> The last definition brings all the above definitions into another perspective. It explains why there has been an increase in the number of conflicts that have ethnic appearances yet have non-ethnic motivations in Nigeria. Attah adds that the above situation is aggravated by political and economic exclusion of many Nigerians, and has subsequently caused the rise of movements that fight for ethnic and regional aspirations.<sup>244</sup> The ethnic conflicts explored above are examples. Thus ethnic debates and disputes are indeed not only about who have power to belong to the federation in the legal sense but also about morality of such power and the ensuing movements that seek to empower civil society.<sup>245</sup> This explains the centrality of everyday interactions, politics and mobilizations in attempt to demand and receive a share of recognition – material or legal – within the postcolonial Nigerian state.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

Two points are worthy of emphasis in this chapter. Firstly, the failure of high politics and institutional arrangements in addressing Nigeria's ethnic burden is evident. Secondly, there is a strong case that low-level manifestations of ethnicity due to postcolonial policies of colonial origins make up a larger part of the problem of identity politics. This makes a compelling case for Nigeria to give priority to those everyday creations of ethnic sentiments that arise from colonially crafted legal foundations. That is, it is essential for a response to take into account how such historical "distortions of convenience" had created "active" tribal identities through Nigerians' response to the concept of indigeneity and resources entitlements in the federal makeup.

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<sup>241</sup> Osaghae, "Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria," 11.

<sup>242</sup> Attah, "Contesting Exclusion in a Multi-Ethnic State: Rethinking Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria," 603.

<sup>243</sup> Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov, "Ethnicity as Cognition," *Theory and Society* 33, no. 1 (2004); Nnoli, "Ethnic Politics in Nigeria."

<sup>244</sup> Attah, "Contesting Exclusion in a Multi-Ethnic State: Rethinking Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria."

<sup>245</sup> Igwara, "Dominance and Difference: Rival Visions of Ethnicity in Nigeria."

Indeed, the policies inherited by Nigeria from colonialism have been so far-reaching that a high politics solution has been inadequate if not misapplied. Giving that individual members of society, in responding to state policies, have played a significant role in casting wide the web of ethnicity, it is conceivable that within the context of Nigeria's colonial legacy discussed above, the solution should include, crucially, how everyday Nigerians respond to such political arrangements. Nigerian society, firstly, has to be understood from an historical perspective. Chloe Ahmann, in her assessment of Mamdani, puts it in the following terms: "the lingering symptoms of indirect rule need to be actively fought in order to revitalize post-colonial nation-states; for each, the first step in healing the state stems from direct diagnosis of the source of its ailments".<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Chloe Ahmann, "Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity by Mahmood Mamdani (Review)," *Anthropological Quarterly* 86, no. 3 (2013).

## CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

### 4.1. Recapping the Nigerian question

The first phase of the making of contemporary Nigeria, that is the era before 1914, saw a land peopled by ethnically and politically distinct empires.<sup>247</sup> The period approximately two decades prior to 1914 had imperial Britain at the center-stage of the area of Niger and Benue rivers. From 1885 when European nations recognised Britain's spheres of influence in West Africa, Nigeria went through a number of stages.<sup>248</sup> It moved from its empires fighting wars of resistance with the British into a period in which the region came under the administration of the Royal Niger Company. It then became a designated British protectorate in 1901 and then was finally "united" into one colony in 1914. The end result of these colonial processes was that a number of previously distinct political and cultural groups were brought together under one colonial power.<sup>249</sup>

The second phase of the history of modern Nigeria – from 1914 to 1960 – was an era of autocratic manipulation and sociopolitical transformations as British colonialism rolled out a number of policies in order to control the colonised African "native". As illustrated in this thesis, this ensured that the socio-cultural make-up of African societies was perpetually altered.<sup>250</sup> With evidence from the works of scholars like Adiele Afigbo, Claude Ake, Peter Ekeh and A.L. Jinadu, this phase in Nigeria witnessed Britain adopting specific imperial techniques and technologies designed for exploitation and repression. This included certain sociocultural and political tactics which has left historical and contemporary consequences regarding ethno-tribal identity formations.<sup>251</sup> The third phase of the making of contemporary Nigeria,

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<sup>247</sup> Rex Niven, *A Short History of Nigeria* (Lagos: Longmans, 1965); Ian F. Nicolson, *The Administration of Nigeria, 1900-1960: Men, Methods and Myths* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1969).

<sup>248</sup> Saadia Touval, "Treaties, Borders, and the Partition of Africa," *The Journal of African History* 7, no. 02 (1966).

<sup>249</sup> Tekena N. Tamuno, "Separatist Agitations in Nigeria since 1914," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 8, no. 04 (1970).

<sup>250</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*; John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, "Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895–1914," *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 04 (1979); Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*; Hobsbawm and Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*; Chabal, "The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation."; Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*; Berman, "Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa."; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>251</sup> Ekeh, "Historical and Cross-Cultural Contexts of Civil Society in Africa."; "Social Anthropology and Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa."; "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement."; Ake, "What Is the Problem of Ethnicity in Africa?"; *Political Economy of Nigeria*; Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State."; *Federal Character: Its Meaning and History*; "Indirect Rule in South Eastern Nigeria: The Era of Warrant Chiefs, 1891–1929."; "The Consolidation of British Imperial Administration in Nigeria: 1900-1918," *Civilisations* 21, no. 4 (1971).



the post-independent era after 1960, was just as decisive as the previous phases, if not even more. As was the mandate of African nationalist leaders, decolonization in the immediate pre- and post-independence era was to promise a new Africa on the social, political and cultural fronts. How the postcolonial Nigerian society responded to negative implications of imperial policies of the first and second phases of modern Nigeria determined the success or otherwise of repairing the damage done by colonialism in the modern era.

This thesis has demonstrated that, like all former African colonies, Nigeria did not step out of British colonialism with its pre-colonial sociopolitical fabric intact. Rather as demonstrated, ethnic identity suffered most from the destructive agenda of imperial nativism. Obsessed with the need to check its negative implications the postcolonial Nigerian state adopted different approaches to address the challenge posed by ethnicity and tribalism.<sup>252</sup> To negotiate a legacy of divisive ethnic politics in particular, Nigeria's postcolonial political elites adopted the federal spirit upon which British colonialism founded its colony in 1914. This thesis has argued that the reason for this was twofold. Firstly, federalism was an admission that the Nigerian colonial state was an amalgam of distinct, autonomous and at times competing and conflicting communities. Secondly, following the British colonial tradition of granting semi-autonomy to Nigeria's ethnic groups, political elites in post-independent Nigeria also saw ethnically defined federalism – ethnofederalism – to be a necessary arrangement for national cohesion in the postcolonial state. As can be seen, in prescribing federalism as a solution to ethno-tribal colonial legacy, the postcolonial Nigerian state still operated under the traditions of colonialism. Further, federalism was more about high politics at the detriment of how federal institutions and structure may create ethno-tribal sentiments on the lower levels of society. Consequently the thesis argued that the continuous tenacity of ethnicity and tribalism in Nigeria represents the sum of, firstly, a lopsided understanding of the political system that the postcolonial Nigerian state inherited from colonialism and, secondly, the limitations of focusing on high (macro) politics, at the detriment of low (micro or deep) politics in responding to the legacy of ethnicity and tribalism in the postcolonial state.

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<sup>252</sup> Jinadu, "The Dialectics of Theory and Research on Race and Ethnicity in Nigeria," 166.

#### 4.2. Managing Ethno-tribal legacies in Africa

In exploring the above problem the thesis has departed from an established position in ethnogenesis that colonialism shaped every facet – especially the ethnicities – of former colonies.<sup>253</sup> As Nugent notes,

“particular ethnic groups were indeed the product of an interplay between European interventions – by administrators, missionaries, employers, and colonial ethnographers and selective African appropriations – through the agency of Christian converts, educated elites, urban migrants, and rural patriarchs”.<sup>254</sup>

It would be expected that any response to ethnicity and tribalism in the Nigerian post-colony will take account of the cultural, social and political legacies of colonialism on ethno-tribal categorizations, motivations for nationhoods and resources allocations. To do this, the thesis has used the theories of key postcolonial and Africanist writers such as Eric Hobsbawm, Terence Ranger, Benedict Anderson, Bruce Berman and Mahmood Mamdani.<sup>255</sup>

The thesis has established that ethnic heritage and ethno-tribal categorizations in postcolonial societies manifest in two ways. The first set are those ethnicities farcically created during the colonial period in perpetuation of colonial control. The second set includes those ethnic and tribal categorizations borne out of postcolonial policies of colonial persuasions. Whilst the first strand continually impedes the development agenda of former colonies in Africa, it is the second category of colonial legacies that require greater attention due to their contemporary relevance.<sup>256</sup> In responding to the vicissitudes of postcolonial policies in creating and sustaining the negative identity formations in contemporary Africa, it is imperative to understand

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<sup>253</sup> Identity is now understood as constructed. See Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*; Sharp, *Ethnic Group and Nation: The Apartheid Vision in South Africa*; Saul, *The Dialectics of Class and Tribe*; Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology." Often associated with the view of a 'constructed' ethnicity is the notion that the existence of the ethnic group is not cast in concrete, but a figment of human thoughts and processes such as the imperial policies of colonialism. See Berman and Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya & Africa*, 65. Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*; Sharp, *Ethnic Group and Nation: The Apartheid Vision in South Africa*; Saul, *The Dialectics of Class and Tribe*; Cohen, "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology."

<sup>254</sup> Paul Nugent, "Putting the History Back into Ethnicity: Enslavement, Religion, and Cultural Brokerage in the Construction of Mandinka/Jola and Ewe/Agotime Identities in West Africa, C. 1650–1930," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 04 (2008): 921.

<sup>255</sup> Ranger and Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*; Bruce J. Berman, "Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa," (2010); "A Palimpsest of Contradictions: Ethnicity, Class, and Politics in Africa."; "Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa."

<sup>256</sup> Olaniyan, "Africa: Varied Colonial Legacies," 270.

how African political traditions and systems were invented, or shaped at best, in perpetuation of colonial rule. The thesis has drawn on the works such as Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) to advance this argument.<sup>257</sup> Additionally, and in the light of Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991) postcolonial societies have the challenge of understanding how colonially trained elite individuals and groups create, advocate for or lead "nations" based on their own imaginations of identity and legitimate autonomous existence.<sup>258</sup> Finally, crucial to the main argument of this thesis, as the works of Mahmood Mamdani and Bruce Berman have demonstrated, there is the need to focus on the political institutions that emerged from colonialism and their effects on everyday politics and social interactions.<sup>259</sup> In this sense, the thesis has drawn rather copiously from Mamdani's works that brings to the fore the socio-legal basis of postcolonial institutions and their implications on social categorizations and identities.<sup>260</sup> Using the above trajectories to understand postcolonial societies, as the thesis does, has illustrated the exposition that to "understand the varied legacies of colonialism in Africa with any measure of depth, we must specify the particular nature of colonialism experienced by the continent".<sup>261</sup> Indeed, as Olaniyan further states, studying "colonialism needs specific details in particular instances for productive illumination".<sup>262</sup> The thesis has also argued the position, held by Richard Werbner and Terrence Ranger, of postcoloniality as the contemporary state of former colonies and the efforts being made to meaningfully describe them.<sup>263</sup> For discernible and productive illumination of the ethno-tribal legacies of colonialism in the postcolonial state, there is the need, in the words of Robert Young, to understand "the economic, material and cultural conditions that determine the conditions that post-independence states operate in..."<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Ranger and Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*.

<sup>258</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>259</sup> Lonsdale and Berman, "Coping with the Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Kenya, 1895–1914."; Berman, "Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism."; "Structure and Process in the Bureaucratic States of Colonial Africa."; Mamdani, "Political Identity, Citizenship and Ethnicity in Post-Colonial Africa."; *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*; "Historicizing Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and Its Reform."; "Africa: Democratic Theory and Democratic Struggles," *Economic and political weekly* (1992).

<sup>260</sup> *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Harvard University Press, 2012); "The Invention of the Indigène."; "Identity and National Governance."; "Ethnicity in Rwanda: An Interpretation."; "Indirect Rule, Civil Society, and Ethnicity: The Africa Dilemma."

<sup>261</sup> Olaniyan, "Africa: Varied Colonial Legacies," 270.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Werbner and Ranger, *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*.

<sup>264</sup> Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*.

#### **4.3. The Limit of the Nigerian response**

The thesis illustrated that the postcolonial Nigerian state, in responding to its heritage of combative ethnic difference with consociational ethno-federalism, has not only misread the consequential extent of the legacies of British colonialism. Indeed, it has also applied a political system with a distorted socio-legal basis and makeup. Federalism has since the pre-independent era represented an obsession with checking ethnic differences through the granting of ethnically defined autonomous states. This way the country indirectly continued the “invented” traditions of colonialism, created states or nations based on the “imagination” of Nigerian elites. The contention here is seen in the fact that since the social, political and legal basis of Nigerian federalism was autocratic colonial policies the possibility existed for negative identity-based ramifications. Federalism has therefore come to stand for a postcolonial reincarnation, and an overflow, of colonial policies. This is why the utilization of federalism based on an “invented” political tradition of colonialism led by a notion of “imagined” ethnic communities called states has been problematic. The above character of federalism meant that it failed in taking into account the implications, on ethnic identities, of political institutions and arrangements on the everyday levels of society. Mahmood Mamdani summarizes this when he wrote:

In assuming that only those ethnicities are real which have always existed, they presume ethnicities to be transhistorical phenomena and thereby miss the fact that ethnicities have a social history. This is why, rather than conceiving of an ethnic identity as simply ‘invented’ by statecraft or ‘imagined’ by intellectuals, it would make more sense to speak of the ‘making’ of ethnicity.<sup>265</sup>

The “making of ethnicity” from the argument of this thesis refers not to kin-based identities or to identities that existed during colonial rule. It refers to how postcolonial political institutions accentuate and essentialize ethnic sentiments through after colonialism. In assuming that the major ethnics groups – the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and the Igbo-Ibibio – are the real components of the federal solution, Nigeria missed other manifestations of ethnicity that could arise from this ethnic make-up. The socio-historical dimension of ethnicities, which in the words of Thomas Spear, allows “dynamic historical processes that [reconstitute] the heritage of the past to meet the needs of the present” was overlooked.<sup>266</sup> In other words, the nagging problems of ethnicity according to the thesis is the result of the presence in

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<sup>265</sup> Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, 185.

<sup>266</sup> Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” 25.

contemporary Nigerian society of a more active, participating and processual cases of ethnic resurgence borne out of the negative implications of postcolonial institutions. The limit of the Nigerian response is illustrated by the inability to appreciate that to reclaim postcolonial societies from negative implications of autocratic colonial policies also requires a focus on the socio-legal basis of postcolonial institutions that makes it possible for ethnicities to be formed on the lower and participating spheres of society.

Examples of such socio-legal foundations in Nigerian federalism include the use of indigeneity and quota-driven resource and political allocations. As Obi Igwara notes, enshrining indigeneity and quota-driven allocation arrangements in the Nigerian constitution as the legal basis of federalism has allowed every sphere of the Nigerian society to be view under the ethnic lens.<sup>267</sup> Indeed, linking ethnicity and indigeneity to political actualization and resources allocation, as the Nigerian federation does, entrenches the culture of “hankering after power and high federal offices” and “inordinate and aggressive identification with the ethnic group to the detriment of higher loyalty to the nation”.<sup>268</sup> This has further established a divide between ‘natives’ and ‘settlers’ as ethnically defined quota system and indigeneity brings Nigerians or ethnic groups against one another in a feud of survival under the federation. Federalism became a platform for engagements that defeated its purpose as it ignored those low-level interactions, competitions and categorizations. Federalism was based on “invented” colonial political tradition of Hobsbawm and Ranger, and fashioned by the “imagined” communities of elites tribal elites as in Anderson’s theory but it failed to account for how such political institutions would affect identity creation on the lower levels of society according to the theory of Mamdani. This character of postcolonial political institutions shifts Nigeria’s identity question considerably away from being a question of the high politics reminiscent of federalism, to being primarily a question of politics on the micro level.

This, according to this thesis, sums up Nigeria’s failure in checking the stagnating effects of ethno-tribalism throughout the pre-independent era. Anthony Kirk-Greene calls this Nigerian identity challenge a case of “*damnosa hereditas*”; a burdensome inheritance that has set the country against its own development and unity.<sup>269</sup> As the thesis argues, in order to reverse the negative implications of colonially designed

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<sup>267</sup> Igwara, "Dominance and Difference: Rival Visions of Ethnicity in Nigeria," 101.

<sup>268</sup> Akande, *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979: With Annotations*, 15.

<sup>269</sup> Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, "‘Damnosa Hereditas’: Ethnic Ranking and the Martial Races Imperative in Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 3, no. 4 (1980).

federalism, the search for holistic response to the tenacity, and indeed centrality, of ethno-tribalism in Nigeria must acknowledge that the locus of a solution, just as forms the core of the problem in the first place, is the colonial state “as a legal/institutional complex that produced particular political identities”.<sup>270</sup> Indeed, in a postcolonial society that has carried its colonial legacies for more than half a century, there is the need in the words of Mahmood Mamdani “to historicise the political agency of colonialism” in order to address problems associated with it.<sup>271</sup> Whilst such attempts must place the political system that emerged out of colonialism at the core, there is the expectation that any reappraisal of Nigeria’s sociopolitical system would take into account how colonialism shaped all facets of the society, from the colonial era to the postcolonial.<sup>272</sup>

#### **4.4. Questions of Policy and Research**

Through discussing, analysing and theoretically exploring vast amount of literature and the debate taking place within the field, this thesis has hypothesized that ethno-tribal politics continue to haunt contemporary Nigeria because response to Nigeria’s ethnic identity question has mostly been perceived from the political institutional level (macro or high politics) with little regard to how such political institutions facilitate the creation of ethnicities among ordinary individuals (micro or low politics). Ethno-tribal politics in Nigeria therefore represent a unique case of postcolonial reconstructions (or making) of combative, belligerent and competitive ethnicities based on autocratic colonial foundations. If the enduring hindrance to national unity in Nigeria is not only as the result of the existence of colonially created ethnicities per se but also of the negative implications of postcolonial political institutions, might postcoloniality then be seen as a policy-relevant concept in contemporary Nigeria? Looked from Rita Abrahamsen’s argument, this question rather attracts an answer in the affirmative. There seem to be a need for the utilization of postcoloniality as a policy relevant consideration in responding to contemporary challenges of colonial persuasions. In this sense, postcoloniality must not reflect just the indices of Nigerian society after independence, but particularly of how colonialism shaped the postcolonial Nigerian state. This allows for critiquing and tracing of the trajectories of imperialism in order to provide relevant and practical solutions to the challenges of ethno-tribalism.

In addition to postcoloniality as policy-relevant concept, policy must also focus on the

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<sup>270</sup> Mamdani, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism," 651.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> In line with Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient*.

dual domains of political action and interactions.<sup>273</sup> In Nigeria over the years, as in Africa generally, analysis of politics, to recap Patrick Chabal, “is singularly ill-informed about anything other than the overt, explicit discourse of high politics” which is “necessarily at the expense of the examination of ‘low’ politics, the politics of everyday life.”<sup>274</sup> In reversing this trend, a policy that is meant to respond to the enduring and negative manifestations of ethno-tribalism must be seen both in the multiple arenas of high politics – that is Nigeria’s political infrastructure, departments and institutions that are vital to the survival of the Nigerian state, and low politics – the policies and actions of individuals, groups in everyday life. In the latter instance, the key policy factor, indicated through Mamdani, must be the implications of political institutional arrangements on identity formation and categorisations. Finally, in the light of all the above issues in Nigeria; national disunity, ethno-tribal riots, violent conflicts and indeed economic and religious insurgencies, future research into why the Nigerian state has not tipped over into total failure might also be legitimate.

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<sup>273</sup> The need to understand the nature and character of the postcolonial political system in Africa has been reiterated by a number of Africanist scholars, activists and revolutionary figures. Names like George Padmore, Frantz Fanon and Kwame Nkrumah come to mind. More contemporary one includes Valentine Y Mudimbe, Kwame Anthony Appiah and Chinua Achebe. See Padmore, *Africa: Britain's Third Empire; How Britain Rules Africa*.

Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks; The Wretched of the Earth*, 390.

Nkrumah, *Class Struggle in Africa; Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization; I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology*; Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*; "The Idea Of Africa," London: Curry (1994).

Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity; In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*; Achebe, *Colonialist Criticism*; "An Image of Africa."

<sup>274</sup> Chabal, "The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation," 52.

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