Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide a general background survey of the broad themes of Nigeria's history, from the beginnings of human habitation in the region up to the early twenty-first century. The borders of modern-day Nigeria were established in 1914 by British colonizers, but the histories of the peoples that make up the Nigerian polity go back many centuries. Most general histories of Nigeria written since Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1960 tend to focus almost exclusively on political and economic themes, and almost exclusively on the twentieth century. This book, on the other hand, aims to bring a greater chronological and thematic balance to the narrative of Nigerian history. Themes such as state formation, political institutions, commercial activities, and political economy are important, and are covered extensively in this book, but these themes featured in the history of the region well before the twentieth century, and, in many ways, events that occurred prior to the twentieth century are highly relevant to an understanding of Nigerian history in subsequent periods.

Politics and the economy are not the only barometers of history. This book also makes a special effort to illustrate social and cultural themes in Nigeria's history, such as the roles of ethnicity, religion, education, urbanization, and globalization, in the lives of Nigerian peoples and states over the centuries. The goal is not only to explain the events, policies, and circumstances that have shaped the lives of people in the Nigerian region, but also to show how Nigerians themselves have understood the world in which they have lived or currently live, and how they have influenced events in their homelands and around the world over the course of human history. Before delving into the specifics of Nigeria's long history, however, it is important to have a basic understanding of the geography and people of Nigeria, and of some of the major issues that have affected the region over the centuries.

GEOGRAPHY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Nigeria is a large country in the west African region. Covering 356,668 square miles, Nigeria is roughly twice the size of California and three times the size of the United Kingdom. The country is bordered to the south by the Bights of Benin and Biafra, which are on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. On the west Nigeria is bordered by Benin, on the north by Niger, and on the east by Cameroon. In its extreme northeastern corner, Lake Chad separates Nigeria from the country of Chad. Nigeria stretches roughly 700 miles from west to east and 650 miles from south to north, covering an area between 3° and 15°E longitude and between 4° and 14°N latitude.

The territories that make up modern-day Nigeria exhibit diverse geographical characteristics, ranging from tropical to arid. The area around the Niger delta contains dense mangrove swamps, while the rest of the southern part of the country is heavily forested. The southern forests give way to hills and plateaus further north, in what is known as the middle belt. There are also mountains in the east. Further north still are the plains of the savanna and, in the extreme north, the semi-desert area known as the Sahel. Nigeria experiences two main seasons: the wet season, which lasts from May to October, and the dry season. Rainfall decreases from south to north, and temperatures are generally quite high throughout the country. During the dry season, a strong cool wind called the *harmattan* blows in from the Sahara, bringing relief from the heat but also carrying particles of desert sand, increasing the desertification of the northern savannas.

The main artery of commerce and communication in the region historically has been the river Niger, the third longest river in Africa, which runs for 730 miles through Nigeria. The Niger enters the country in Kebbi State in the northwest and pours into the Gulf of Guinea through its many branches in the Niger delta in southern Rivers and Delta States. The Niger joins with its main tributary, the Benue, which flows from the northeast, at Lokoja, in the central state of Kogi. Other important rivers include the Sokoto, Kaduna, and Anambra, all of which are tributaries of the Niger, as well as the Donga, Katsina Ala, and Gongola.

Nigeria's diverse geography yields a broad assortment of natural resources. Mineral wealth includes large deposits of coal, iron, tin, and columbite, as well as lead, copper, and zinc, much of which is found in the hills and plateaus of the middle belt. Small amounts of gold, silver, and diamonds have also been discovered in various places. Nigeria is most

famous for its large petroleum reserves, however, located in the Niger delta. Since the 1970s petroleum has become the most important single commodity in the Nigerian economy, and sales of petroleum constitute over 90 percent of the country's export earnings, and over 75 percent of public revenues.[1] The reliance on petroleum as the main source of the country's wealth has contributed greatly to economic instability since the late 1970s, as fluctuations in world petroleum prices and high levels of corruption among government officials have made sustainable development elusive and brought extreme poverty to the majority of Nigeria's citizens.

Historically, however, petroleum has not been the lifeblood of the economies of Nigerian communities. Until recent years, agriculture formed the basis of the economic activity and lifestyle of most Nigerians. Nigeria boasts a wide variety of agricultural landscapes, yielding a broad spectrum of agricultural goods. Food crops include yams, cassava, bananas, plantains, rice, maize, millet, citrus fruits, groundnuts, cocoa, and palm produce (oil, kernels, and wine). These products are produced both for domestic consumption and for export. Cocoa production in the southwest, palm oil production in the southeast, and groundnut production in the north provided the basis of the "cash crop" economy of the colonial era, during which the production of these items was exponentially increased for the sole purpose of exportation. Non-food products are also abundant in Nigeria. Cotton, rubber, and timber, in particular, have been important products, used both in domestic manufacturing and as export commodities over the years. Animal husbandry has also been a major occupation throughout Nigeria. In the savannas of the north, in particular, cattle-rearing has been an important aspect of the economy, providing beef and milk as well as hides. Goats, guinea fowl, snails, and eggs have been major protein sources and items of trade as well. In coastal communities, fishing has been a major economic activity. Agriculture remains the main activity of the rural population; however, the contribution of agriculture as a percentage of GDP has declined since the expansion of the oil economy in the 1970s.

Another major natural resource of Nigeria is its abundant labor force. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. The results of a census conducted in 2006 placed the population at over 140 million people.[2] Throughout history, the labor and ingenuity of Nigerians themselves have been the primary driving force of the economy. Agricultural labor has been complemented by local craftsmanship and artisanry in such areas as blacksmithing, leather-working, construction, textile manufacturing,

beer brewing, building, boatmaking, and so forth. Merchants and traders have also been important in keeping goods flowing between regions, diversifying and developing local economies. For a long time, human labor was itself a commodity that could be bought and sold. Slaves were a major item of trade for many centuries in parts of Nigeria, and played important roles in the domestic economies of many states in the Nigerian region in the centuries before the 1900s. With the onset of colonial rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, domestic slavery was slowly eradicated; the colonial government itself used forced labor to build much of its own infrastructure, however. The instability and underdevelopment that has characterized the Nigerian economy for much of the time since independence has led to high unemployment levels, leaving Nigeria unable to utilize its labor resources effectively.

PEOPLES AND CULTURES

Nigeria's large population is very diverse, consisting of over 200 different ethno-linguistic groups. Three main ethnic groups make up the majority of the population. The Hausa, located in the northern savannas, account for roughly 21 percent of the population, while the Yoruba, located in the southwestern part of the country, make up 20 percent, and the Igbo of the southeast 17 percent.[3] Other ethnic groups with relatively large populations include the pastoral Fulani of the savannas, the Ijaw of the Niger delta region, the Kanuri of the Lake Chad region, the Ibibio in and around Calabar in the southeast, and the Nupe and Tiv of the middle belt region. Although over 250 different indigenous languages are spoken in Nigeria, English has been the official language of the country since 1960. Pidgin, a combination of indigenous languages and English that developed through hundreds of years of contact with British traders and later with colonial authorities, is also commonly used.

Nigerians belong to many different religions as well, but the vast majority identify with either Islam or Christianity. About 50 percent of the Nigerian population is Sunni Muslim.[4] Muslims are most heavily concentrated in the northern savannas, where Islam first appeared between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries CE. Until the jihad of Usman dan Fodio and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early nineteenth century, Islam had been primarily a religion of the elite. Kings and wealthy merchants adopted elements of Islam in order to claim mystical powers and to build strong commercial and diplomatic ties with Islamic states in north Africa and the Middle East. Since the nineteenth

century, however, the vast majority of the Hausa, Fulani, and Kanuri have come to identify religiously with Islam. About a third of all Yorubas are Muslim as well. Christians make up roughly 40 percent of the population, and are concentrated most heavily in the south and middle belt. Christianity first became a popular religion in the Nigerian region in the nineteenth century, as the presence of European missionaries on the coasts grew. From about the 1840s Christian missionaries began to move into the interior. The spread of Christianity was aided by the influx of "recaptive" slaves from Sierra Leone, who had converted to Christianity and returned to their communities of origin to spread the gospel, as well as to preach the virtues of anti-slavery. Approximately 10 percent of the population practices indigenous religions, which are most commonly based in conceptions of ancestor worship and reverence for both natural and supernatural phenomena.

The majority of Nigeria's population is rural, although urbanization is occurring at a rapid pace. The United Nations has estimated that, whereas in 1950 over 88 percent of Nigeria's population was rural, by 2005 only 51.7 percent lived in rural areas. Many of Nigeria's cities are becoming large and overcrowded. The two largest cities in the country are Lagos in the southwest, with a population estimated at over 9.2 million, and Kano in the north, with a population estimated at over 3.8 million.[5] Lagos is the largest cty in west Africa, and based on current growth rates it will soon be among the most populous cities in the world. Other major urban centers in Nigeria include Ibadan, Benin City, Onitsha, Ilorin, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Abuja, Jos, Kaduna, Yola, Sokoto, and Maiduguri. Agriculture remains the way of life in rural areas, where communities remain largely homogeneous, while, in urban areas, lifestyles and economic activities are more heterogeneous. Cities are places where people from many different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds interact on a regular basis. In this way, mutual understanding and respect between people can be fostered; at the same time, however, cities tend to be places where ethnic, religious, and class tensions often erupt. One of the main factors leading to the rapid growth of Nigerian cities is the migration of young people from rural areas to urban areas for education or employment opportunities, or simply for a taste of a more cosmopolitan atmosphere.

The population of Nigeria is overwhelmingly young. As of 2005, it was estimated that 64.7 million of Nigeria's population were under the age of twenty-four, while only 2.9 percent were over the age of sixty-five. The average life expectancy in Nigeria was forty-six years, as poverty,

malnutrition, and the lack of basic health care facilities and services keep life expectancies low. Nevertheless, the average population growth rate stands at around 2.5 percent, which means that the ratio of young to middle-aged and older persons continues to rise.[6]

Culturally, Nigerians are influenced both by their indigenous traditions and by newer values and lifestyles that have been incorporated from the West. Traditional reliance on extended family and kinship networks remains strong throughout Nigeria, but a growing focus on smaller, nuclear families and on individual achievement is recognizable, particularly in urban areas. While polygamy is still a common practice in the country, monogamous marriage is also common, particularly among Christians and the educated elite. Traditional forms of entertainment, such as indigenous musical styles such as juju and palm-wine music, the telling of stories or "moonlight tales," and theatrical performances, coexist with radio, television, video cassettes, movies, computers, and other high-tech forms of entertainment, again in urban areas in particular. Modern media forms such as television and Nigeria's home-grown movie industry, known as Nollywood, function in multiple cultural milieus. Some television programs and movies are based on traditional stories of long-standing local significance, while others mimic the plots found in Western movies and television programs, blending them with Nigerian surroundings and situations; this illustrates the extent to which Nigerians identify both with their traditional pasts and with the modern, global age in which they live. The wildly popular Afrobeat music of Fela Kuti and other musicians, which melds traditional forms of music with American jazz and funk, and the growing popularity of hip-hop as a musical style also serve as indications of Nigerians' capacity to combine local, indigenous cultural aspects with newer, Western influences. Incorporating Western ideas and styles while retaining a strong foundation in indigenous traditions has been more successful in the cultural realm than it has been in politics, however.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

The borders of the modern state of Nigeria were established in 1914 when the British colonial government amalgamated the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria to form a unified colonial state. The northern and southern protectorates themselves had been the creations of British colonial administrators, but prior to British colonial rule the diverse societies of the Nigerian region had ruled themselves as independent states. Many large, centralized states, such as Kanem-Borno, Benin, Oyo,

and the Sokoto Caliphate, had risen and fallen over the centuries, and many of these states had been quite strong regional powers for extended periods. Other states were smaller, and governed by decentralized political structures of local councils, chiefs, and other kinds of elites, but not by a single, central administration.

As British forces brought Nigeria under colonial rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they went about adapting local political institutions to meet the needs of the British themselves. Dubbed "indirect rule," the British system of governing through indigenous political institutions allowed local chiefs and elites to maintain their local authority while submitting themselves to the authority of a central apparatus of British colonial administrators. Colonial rule altered the political landscape of the region in several important ways. First, it brought together what had previously been hundreds of autonomous, independent groups of people under the single administrative umbrella of an amalgamated Nigeria. Second, the process of "indirect rule" resulted in changes in the powers of traditional political leaders. The British often misunderstood the traditional political institutions through which they governed, and often had difficulty identifying the legitimate traditional authorities. Also, the British sometimes extended powers to local rulers that they had never previously held, and in all cases they took away the sovereignty that local rulers had enjoyed previously. If an "indirect ruler" displeased the British, he would not be the local authority for long, regardless of the "traditional" basis of his authority.

Finally, the bureaucracy and economics of colonial rule dictated that a small class of English-speaking, European-educated Nigerians were needed to hold lower-level positions in the government and in European businesses. These European-educated elites enjoyed a higher standard of living than most Nigerians, but they also found that their ability to rise to the level of their capabilities was obstructed by the racist ideology of colonial rule, which viewed Africans as culturally and intellectually inferior to Europeans. It was these European-educated elites that began to organize to pressure the colonial government for greater representation for Nigerians in their own governance and for an eventual end to colonial rule in Nigeria. Leaders such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa emerged to lead large-scale nationalist movements, which ultimately became full-fledged political parties that negotiated for independence from British rule in the years after the Second World War.

Nigeria gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1960. The nationalist leadership that won independence opted to retain Nigeria's

colonial borders and to govern the country as a federated republic. Originally, the independent state of Nigeria was divided into three regions, with the Federal Capital Territory at Lagos. In 1991 the federal capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, located in a new FCT in the center of the country. The government bureaucracy has three tiers – federal, state, and local – with each tier guaranteed certain responsibilities by the Nigerian constitution. The creation of new states has been a common theme in Nigerian politics. Nigeria was split into twelve states in 1967; this increased to nineteen in 1976, twenty-one in 1987, and thirty in 1991. Since 1996 Nigeria has been divided into thirty-six states, but clamor continues from ethnic minorities for the creation of still more.

Currently Nigeria is in its Fourth Republic, and is experiencing its longest uninterrupted period of civilian rule ever. For most of the period since independence in 1960, however, the Nigerian polity has been wracked with instability. Regional, ethnic, and religious identities have become heavily politicized. Christians from the south fear domination by the slightly more populous northern Muslims at the federal level. At the state level, ethnic minorities fear domination by larger ethnic groups: the Hausa–Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the southwest, and the Igbo in the southeast. These ethnic and religious tensions have resulted in one civil war in Nigeria, from 1967 to 1970, as well as countless episodes of both organized attacks and spontaneous riots in which ethnic and religious minorities have been targeted. Religious and ethnic violence continues to be a regular occurrence today and shows no signs of abating.

The government has done little to mitigate the social tensions in the country; in fact, control of the government has often been at the root of ethnic and religious tensions. Control of the federal and state governments translates into access to government funds, which politicians have used corruptly to extend their own power and gain support in their own local communities. By stealing government funds for personal use and by distributing money and government contracts to cronies and allies, politicians can claim to be "taking care of their own," while at the same time growing excessively wealthy and powerful themselves. Under such a system, only those who have power or influence in the government have access to government funds, and, as such, it has become imperative for civilian politicians to maintain their positions of political power at all costs, because to lose office means being cut out of the system of patronage. As a result, elections in Nigeria have typically been characterized by high levels of violence and intimidation, as well as by manipulation of the election process and outright vote rigging, as incumbent politicians

have typically preferred to guarantee their election through undemocratic means rather than allow free and fair elections, or, worse still, allow their opponents to steal elections.

The failure of civilian administrations to promote stability and rule responsibly has opened the door for the military to take a strong role in the governance of the country. In fact, Nigeria has been governed by military regimes for twenty-eight of its first forty-seven years of political independence. Military coups have been a common occurrence in Nigeria. There have been two military interventions that have brought an end to civilian regimes, and three that have replaced one military regime with another, as well as many failed coup attempts. Military regimes in Nigeria have always taken over claiming that their intent is to restore stability, end corruption, and prepare the country for a transition back to civilian rule. Military regimes themselves have proven just as irresponsible as civilian administrations, however. Military regimes are accountable only to themselves and, accordingly, are just as out of touch as, if not more so than, civilian politicians with the issues that affect the everyday lives of average Nigerians. Military regimes have been very autocratic and authoritarian, and have been more than willing to use violence to silence criticism. Military regimes have been every bit as corrupt as civilian regimes as well. Military rulers have spent lavishly on ostentatious public works projects, have stolen public funds, and have provided lax oversight of public expenditures. For much of Nigeria's post-independence history, the massive inflow of oil revenues and external loans has facilitated the corrupt and irresponsible management of public funds that has characterized both civilian and military governments.

ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Nigerian communities have had long-standing inter- and intranational commercial networks dating back to well before the creation of the country in 1914. The river systems served as major avenues of trade throughout the region, but beyond this there were many major roads connecting villages, towns, and regions dating back many centuries. In the northern savannas, people traded goods across the Sahara desert to north Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. The trans-Saharan trade trickled to a halt in the twentieth century with the advent of British colonial rule. The savannas were also commercially connected to the states of the forest zone, which themselves traded with the coastal states. Nigerian communities also traded east and west throughout west Africa,

as well as with each other, in ways that led to historical linkages between distinct, independent states in the region that long pre-dated colonial rule. Important items of trade in the pre-colonial period included food items, salt, leather goods, weapons, horses, and textiles, all of which could be traded by barter as well as for beads, iron and copper rods, and cowry shells, which were commonly used currencies. Slaves were also an important item of trade dating back many centuries in the savanna regions of the north. After the arrival of Europeans on the coast in the fifteenth century CE, slaves became a major item of trade in the south as well. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries CE, the trade in slaves with Europeans was the single most important economic activity of many states in the area in and around what is now southern Nigeria.

With the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807 came economic transformations, particularly in southern Nigeria. The slave trade continued to exist until about the 1850s; alongside the slave trade, however, there was the growth of "legitimate" commerce, or trade in non-human commodities. The most important item of "legitimate" commerce quickly became palm oil, which had long been an item of internal trade in southern Nigeria and which had been experiencing a growth in export sales since the late eighteenth century. As the British took direct political control over the territories of southern and northern Nigeria in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, trade in "legitimate" commodities became the basis of the colonial economy. The colonial economy was extractive in nature, designed to mine and harvest the raw materials of Nigeria and export them in ways that profited the colonial government and European businesses. Alongside palm oil, which came mainly from the southeast, cocoa cultivation expanded in the southwest, and groundnut and cotton cultivation boomed in the north. Mineral extraction, particularly of tin, also expanded under the colonial economy, and local coal deposits were mined primarily to provide a fuel source for the railways that the colonial government built to link the sources of production with the coasts, from which raw materials were exported.

Building an infrastructure to serve the purposes of the extractive economy was an important goal of colonial rule in Nigeria. The colonial government dredged harbors, expanded riverways, and built thousands of miles of railways and roads to allow products to move more quickly and freely to the coast for export. Over time, air travel became an increasingly important method of travel as well. As of 2006 Nigeria boasted sixty-nine airports, 120,791 miles of highway, of which 37,324 miles are paved, and 2,178 miles of railways.[7] Much of the infrastructural development during