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Part I

Introduction

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1 Narrating Postcolonial Nigeria

Introduction

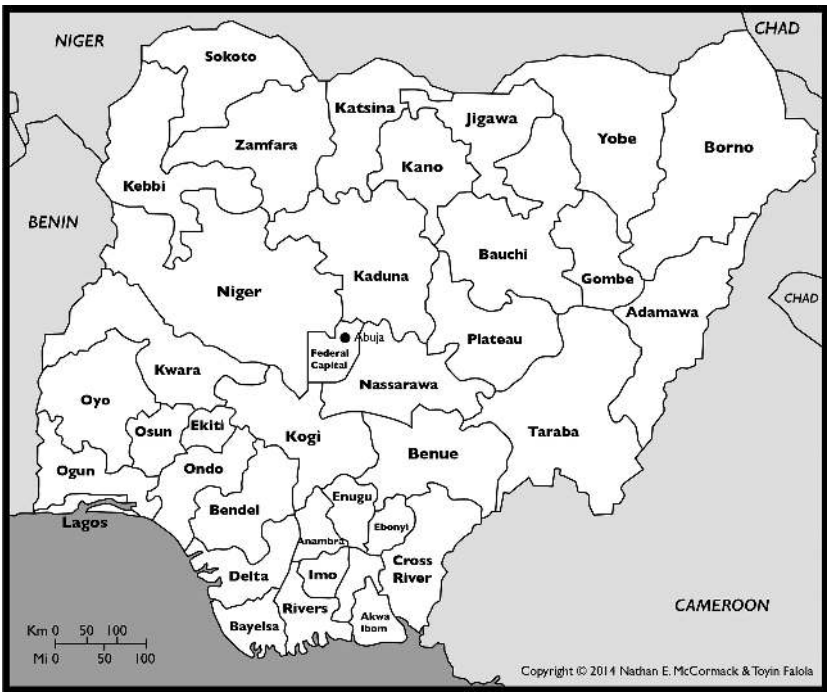
This book's opening statements are formed by the perception and projection of postcolonial Nigeria's narratives. Nigeria, like most African states after their independence, has experienced subversions, extensions, and even new projections of narratives pertinent to its survival and development. Narratives are potent, flexible devices that endure the rigorous work of organizing experiences, fashioning collective identities, and projecting sociocultural realities. Here, the postcolonial is charged with multiple meanings, spiraling beyond the notion of temporality – indicating the postindependence period – to broadly include discourse related to and following colonialism.[1] Postcolonial thinking is evident in the political, economic, and sociocultural narratives of Nigeria that express ideologies for independence, self-awareness, and collective development.

Nigeria's narratives have undergone a pronounced shift from colonial experiences and criticism to postcolonial and neocolonial ones. This change is driven by the need to address the concerns of Nigeria's postcolonial and modern realities, including poverty, neocolonialism, illiteracy, democracy, and fraud. These concerns also include the tensions of modernity and development, mismanagement and corruption, political apathy, violence, and ethnic and religious rivalries. The shared concerns of these narratives search for Nigeria within the frame of global modernity, seeking to address the impact of modernity on the sustainability of Nigeria as an evolving nation-state. The perception of modernity has been imposed on all societies through Eurocentric constructs, but these postcolonial narratives navigate the intricacies of modernity as it is imposed, perceived, lived through, and adapted to, contrary to the idea of modernity as a static end result.

[1] An often-cited example is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, which was published two years before the independence of Nigeria in 1960. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

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Map 1.1 Political map of Nigeria.

Postcolonial Nigerian narratives can be read as a microcosm of the "entire African postcolonial enterprise," in which Nigeria "continues to recommend itself as an important process of understanding,"[2] engaging, liberating, and developing Africa. There is a synchronic motion to the postcolonial temper: not only does it address immediate and emerging issues, it also reflects on colonial and precolonial issues that affect the present reality because "the postcolonial situation is about the present but a present which is not to be taken for a static moment or condition but as a dynamic reality that crosses borders of time, space, and aesthetics."[3] In grappling with its postcolonial and modern transition, "Nigeria has experimented with all sorts of political

[2] Wale Adebanwi and Ebenezer Obadare, "Introducing Nigeria at Fifty: The Nation in Narration," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 28, no. 4 (2010): 379.
[3] Klohinlwélé Koné, "Living and Narrating the Tensions of the Postcolonial Situation: Chinua Achebe Between Ambiguity and Ambivalence," *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 3, no. 11 (2016): 2944.

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systems, ideologies, economic policies and even cultural paradigms"[4] that have generated different narratives to sustain, redress, understand, and contribute to the development of the nation.

Postcolonial Nigerian aesthetics dominate the arts and humanities. Postcolonial ideology dominates the social sciences, expressed as cultural nationalism and nationalist historiography in history and political science, and postcolonial temperaments differ across regions and historical periods. Advocacy is prevalent for equality and other basic human rights in postcolonial Nigerian literary narratives. Jude Dibia, Chinelo Okparanta, Akwaeke Ameze, and others have increased the awareness of othering and criminalization imposed on lesbian, gays, bisexuals, and transgender individuals. In Nigeria, as in Africa and the rest of the world, these emerging concerns highlight the faults and intolerance of the present government, highlighting the shortcomings of democracy and the Eurocentric distortion of Africa's culture and history.

What Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Buchi Emecheta are to Nigerian literature, J. F. Ade Ajayi, Yusuf Bala Usman, Kenneth Dike, Saburi Biobaku, Adiele Afigbo, and Toyin Falola are to Nigerian history; their reconstructionist work provides several narratives repurposing the image of Nigeria's culture and development into modernity. Simon Gikandi contends that Achebe's postcolonial aesthetic "is predicated on the belief that narrative can indeed propose an alternative world beyond the realities imprisoned in colonial and precolonial relations of power."[5] Nigeria's popular culture has recently been filled with vigor that gives hope while entertaining, or penetrating, the socioeconomic realities of Nigerian society to incite change.

The fluidity, relatability, and accessibility of various media allow popular culture to resonate with millions of Nigerians, making it a focal point of postcolonial Nigerian narratives. These narratives are charged with a nationalist duty to contribute to Nigeria's development. Beyond postcolonial nationalist narratives, pressing sociocultural issues have emerged and infiltrated the narrative of Nigeria. The recent history of violence, especially the Boko Haram insurgency, has generated diverse narratives in the social sciences to scrutinize new threats to the unity, peace, and development of the nation. Such discourse had been scarce before the year 2000.[6] Before the insurgency, there was the Niger Delta militancy in

[4] Adebanwi and Obadare, "Introducing Nigeria at Fifty," 383.
[5] Simon Gikandi, "Chinua Achebe and the Post-Colonial Esthetic: Writing, Identity, and National Formation," *Studies in 20th Century Literature* 15, no. 1 (1991): 31.
[6] See one of the most expansive studies on the subject till date: Marc-Antoine Perouse de Montclos, ed., *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2014).

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the South-South region of the country. More recently, the herdsmen crises experienced throughout the nation generated narratives about the "Fulanization" and "Islamization" of Nigeria, reinforcing the narratives of Nigeria's possible fragmentation and its need for restructuring. New units, like Peace Studies, have been formed in government and tertiary institutions to address these emerging, fundamental narratives.

Digital media and social platforms are another significant dimension of Nigeria's postcolonial narrative. Digital media has been embraced in Nigeria as "sites of utilities for mobilization, sectarianism and for pursuits and practices that reflect offline tensions and grievances, but ... also where alternative ways to redress them can be sought."[7] The psychological and emotional succor offered by these platforms contribute to the scope of nation building. Frustration, anger, and agitation can be channeled into constructive expressions and yield a positive outcome. Interventions through these channels have not been widely studied, but their effects have been noticeable for reducing and curbing social violence. Moral and cultural virtues, including love, solidarity, persistence, and patience are sustained through narratives of struggle and survival shared through digital media outlets.

The modernist approach of this book addresses the nation's most current challenges with updated resolutions by taking on the most dominant narrative preoccupations of postcolonial Nigeria: ethnicity, governance, democracy, and development. These interconnected frames explain the complications that shape the daily lives of Nigerians. These themes define how the country is organized by its government and evaluated by its citizens and outsiders; this book discusses the history and events that have shaped those themes and their far-reaching impact.

The common starting point is how the British laid modern Nigeria's foundations. Colonialism drove competition for resources and power, heightening tensions between the Hausa–Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo ethnic groups forced together under the British rule. Preferential treatment fostered dissent and hatred – the British administration gave critical advantages to some groups, such as formal Western education, access to infrastructure, and the privileges of modernity.

Ethnic Politics

British manipulation of boundaries created an ethnic system, and the British ruled through the dissent it created. Tensions and inequalities

[7] Sokfa John, "Genocide, Oppression, Ambivalence: Online Narratives of Identity and Religion in Postcolonial Nigeria," *Open Library of Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2018): 2.

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fueled the creation of political parties along ethnic lines in the 1940s, which persisted into the postindependence era that began in 1960. Each group served its ethnic constituents, and none fought for Nigeria's overall interests. With more than two hundred distinct ethnic groups in Nigeria, it is nearly impossible for each one to receive adequate representation. Despite the government's efforts to create a bill of rights, and political documents preserving minority representation, Nigeria still struggles with the complexities of ethnic identity and the effects of ethnic tension. Ethnic interests have distorted the allocation of state resources, and a primary source of contention is oil revenue – it is generated in the minority-occupied Niger Delta region, and there are constant concerns that it is not being allocated proportionately across the country.

Oil revenues, which allegedly lined the pockets of the same minority groups that had received preferential treatment from the British, became one of the reasons for the military coup in 1966. Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa was removed by military officers, assassinated, and replaced by Igbo General Johnson Ironsi. This sparked retaliatory violence against the Igbo people in Northern Nigeria. As the Igbo fled to southern Nigeria, the idea of Biafra was born; it was meant to be a conglomeration of southeastern states. Civil war raged for three years, from 1967 to 1970, as the Igbo endured prejudice and embargoes from the Nigerian government. Almost one million people were killed in the conflict, and as the concept of a fully free and legitimized Biafra seemed more appealing and attainable for millions of people, it further destabilized Nigerian nationalism.

Nigeria's long history of ethnic tensions and political unrest, combined with poor resource distribution, government corruption, and a relentless focus on oil production, has created systemic development issues that prevent the country from fully harnessing its natural resources. Prioritization of ethnic group identities over a united Nigerian identity has spawned mercurial government priorities; the stream of new arrivals constantly cycling through positions of power undermine long-term development efforts. As individual groups gain power, discrimination becomes institutionalized and access to education and other fundamental rights depend on the current government's attitude.

Nigeria's complex history with colonialism has deeply affected its politics, democratization, and development. It has led to years of instability, mutual distrust, conflict, and a civil war. The institution of colonialism and competition for power and resources pitted the largest ethnic groups against each other. The leaders of some groups

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supported the British crown and gained unparalleled access to the privileges of colonial power.[8] The preferential treatment they received led to disparities in access to education, infrastructure, and vital public services that included sanitation and access to electrical power grids.[9]

Some groups secured positions that allowed them to accumulate massive amounts of generational wealth and maintain dynastic advantages. The elites of dominant ethnic groups held government positions continuously through Nigeria's independence in 1960, which raised tensions to the point of civil conflict. The South's elites, who had received education in line with Western standards, believed that the Hausa–Fulani were given special dispensation within the structures maintained by Frederick Lugard, the British colonial administrator, to receive far more preferential treatment than other ethnicities.[10]

During Africa's decolonization, Nigerian political leaders conceptualized what it meant to be free, imagining a country without imperial control. It was a period of increased ethnic tension – as the institutional advantages of dominant groups became more apparent, so did the marginalization of other ethnic groups. The Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), established by the well-known publisher and civil servant Herbert Macaulay, was the first formal political organization in Nigeria.[11] Under Macaulay, the NNDP focused on semi-autonomy and representation for Nigerians within the colonial government, working to dismantle practices of racial discrimination and subjugation under British rule.[12] For these reasons, Macaulay is often considered the father of Nigerian nationalism.[13] In 1941, the NNDP began to change as different factions promoted opposing viewpoints.[14] The Igbo-dominated NNDP became the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, later becoming the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Nnamdi Azikiwe.

Other political parties were created on the basis of ethnic identities, focused on regional instead of national interests. The Action Group (AG)

[8] Belinda Archibong, "Historical Origins of Persistent Inequality in Nigeria," *Oxford Development Studies* 46, no. 3 (2018): 325–347.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Olufemi Taiwo, "Reading the Colonizer's Mind: Lord Lugard and the Philosophical Foundations of British Colonialism," in *Racism and Philosophy*, eds. Susan E. Babbitt and Sue Campbell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[11] Bonny Ibhawoh, *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview*, www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~ibhawoh/documents/Nations%20&%20Nationalism.pdf.
[12] Ibid.
[13] "Herbert Macaulay," *ZODML*, September 19, 2014, zodml.org/discover-nigeria/people/herbert-macaulay#.XDbEzc9KhQJ.
[14] Ibid.

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was established by Obafemi Awolowo,[15] a lawyer, in 1951. AG found its roots in the Yoruba cultural movement known as the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, or the Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa,[16] believed to be the common ancestor for all Yoruba people.[17] The organization was created to address fears of Igbo and Hausa–Fulani domination, providing leadership and representation for the Yoruba through prominent chiefs, professionals and intellectuals at the time.[18] The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was established in 1949 for the Hausa–Fulani Muslims of Northern Nigeria, who sought to establish regional autonomy and preserve traditional Islamic rule.[19]

The history of ethnic politics within Nigeria is central to the country's construction because it has been a pervasive force since independence. It has shaped political organization and socioeconomic endeavors. Before Nigeria's independence, early political parties cooperated for practicality and convenience. Afterwards, they seized postindependence opportunities to create a political atmosphere that reflected their own interests.

As Nigeria's independence became less about constructing a nation and more about advancing ethnic interests through regional political parties, many began to doubt the viability of a Nigerian state. The country has an estimated 350 to 400 ethnic groups, based on linguistic classifications,[20] making it nearly impossible to arrive at an agreement while maintaining adequate representation. Leaders such as Ahmadu Bello of the NPC and Obafemi Awolowo of the AG party openly questioned the Nigerian state's sustainability and implications.[21] Obafemi Awolowo's statement touches on such issues: "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the sense as there are 'English,' 'Welsh,' or 'French.' The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not."[22]

[15] John P. Mackintosh, "Politics in Nigeria: The Action Group Crisis of 1962," *Political Studies* 11, no. 2 (1963): 126–155, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1467–9248.1963.tb01055.x.
[16] Ibhawoh, "Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview."
[17] R. C. C. Law, "The Heritage of Oduduwa: Traditional History and Political Propaganda Among the Yoruba," *Journal of African History* 14, no. 2 (1973): 207–222.
[18] Mackintosh, "Politics in Nigeria: The Action Group Crisis of 1962."
[19] "Northern People's Congress (NPC)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1773.
[20] Felicia H. Ayatse and Isaac Iorhen Akuva, "The Origin and Development of Ethnic Politics and Its Impact on Post-Colonial Governance in Nigeria," *European Scientific Journal* 9, no. 17 (2013): 178–189, eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/1165/1182.
[21] Ibhawoh, "Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview."
[22] Obafemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 48.

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The establishment of political parties only accommodated the three largest ethnic groups; it did not consider minority ethnic groups. The British colonial government attempted to address these concerns with a document known as the Willink Commission Report (1957), outlining the grievances and fears of minorities throughout the region.[23]

Many ethnic groups preferred to discard the idea of a "Nigerian" nation in favor of creating separate states, but the Willink Commission proposed creating a bill of rights to guarantee the protection of rights for minorities; the commission was wary of political power concentrating solely in one political party, ethnicity, or region. When Nigeria gained independence in 1960, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, of the NPC, became the prime minister. Awolowo was appointed as leader of parliament's opposition party, and Azikiwe, of the NCNC, became governor general[24] to cultivate a sense of unification and inclusion.

Beneath the budding nationalism and symbolic acts of unity, Nigeria still struggles with the complexities of ethnic identity and the associated tensions. Efficient and fair resource allocation is vital to the stability of any country, especially one with multiple ethnic divisions, but ethnic concerns continued to subvert the allocation of state resources.

Significant amounts of oil are present in Niger River Delta land that has historically belonged to the Ijo and other groups. In the 1960s, Igbo leaders believed that discrimination was preventing them from receiving meaningful amounts of the oil revenue that originated in their territory.[25] Oil, which accounts for a substantial amount of the Nigerian economy, is the backbone of the nation. It affects foreign exchange earnings, export production, and the nation's overall revenue. However, the Ijo region receives the least benefit from the proceeds, which is reflected in the nation's revenue sharing formula, the lack of development in the region, and the devastating destruction of the region's environment. From 1960 through 1966, the Northern Region received a larger portion of federal funds than the Western or Eastern Regions. This could have been due to several reasons, but Balewa, a Muslim from the North, was Prime Minister at the time. Resource distribution evokes the memories of the alleged preferential treatment received by those in the North and strengthens the deep-seated distrust among ethnic groups.

[23] Secretary of State for the Colonies by Command of Her Majesty, *The Willink Commission Report: Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Fears of Minorities and the Means of Allaying Them* (Adaka Boro Centre, 1958), https://ijawnation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Willink-Commission-Report_conc_recom_lt.pdf.

[24] Molefi Kete Asante, *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[25] Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, "Biafra 1966–1970," *Combat Genocide Association*, n.d., combat-genocide.org /?page_id=90.

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In 1966, Prime Minister Balewa was ousted in a military coup, which was organized primarily by Igbo soldiers. Balewa was assassinated along with Ahmadu Bello, and Igbo General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi claimed power.[26] The sudden, violent shift of power shook the country and magnified preexisting weaknesses in national cohesion. In retaliation for the coup, many of the Igbo in northern Nigeria were killed. As thousands of Igbo fled the predominantly Hausa–Fulani north, the idea of Biafra was born.

In 1967, Lieutenant Colonel C.O. Ojukwu declared a conglomeration of southeastern states in southern Nigeria to be sovereign and autonomous, naming it Biafra. This new Igbo nation sought to defend itself from violence, injustice, and discrimination at the hands of the Nigerian government.[27] The Biafra movement ended after three years of embargo-induced famine[28] and other acts of war carried out against the group in Eastern Nigeria.[29] As a movement, Biafra represented more than an Igbo desire for succession; it inspired others with their own dreams of autonomy and independence from the Nigerian government. In this role, Biafra was the biggest threat to Nigerian nationalism since the country's conception.[30]

Governance and Democracy

The words "good governance" and "Nigeria" are often used as antonyms. Widespread corruption, involving money laundering, misallocated funds, political nepotism, and paternalism, have made it almost impossible to identify a time when Nigeria was a truly functional democracy. These conditions did not develop overnight, and they do not need to remain chronic issues within the state.

Before Nigeria's independence in 1960, the British exerted total control over the colony without seeking input from its subjects. Their indirect rule system used existing ethnic structures to exert power without requiring a physical presence on the ground,[31] and this set the tone for Nigeria's

[26] Ibhawoh, "Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview."
[27] American Historical Association, "Biafran Declaration of Independence," American Historical Association, n.d., www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/through-the-lens-of-history-biafra-nigeria-the-west-and-the-world/the-republic-of-biafra/biafran-declaration-of-independence.
[28] World Peace Foundation, "Nigeria: Civil War." *Tufts Mass Atrocity Endings*, August 7, 2015, sites.tufts.edu/atrocityendings/2015/08/07/nigeria-civil-war/.
[29] Ibid. [30] Ibhawoh, "Nations and Nationalism."
[31] American Historical Association, "England's Indirect Rule in Its African Colonies," American Historical Association, n.d., www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/teaching-and-learning-in-the-digital-age/through-the-lens-

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