

**DECOLONIZATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

**BY**

**DUROJAYE PRISCILLA OPEOLUWA**

**(ART2100427)**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**FACULTY OF ARTS,**

**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

**BENIN CITY, NIGERIA**

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**BEING A PROJECT SUMMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND  
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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this research titled “**Decolonization Process in Nigeria: A Historical Analysis.**” was carried out by **DUROJAYE PRISCILLA OPEOLUWA** with matriculation number **ART2100427** in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision

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**DR. PAT EBUKA-ONUOHA**  
**(PROJECT SUPERVISOR)**

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**DATE**

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**PROF. J. C NWAKA**  
**(HEAD OF DEPARTMENT)**

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**DATE**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to God Almighty.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

First and foremost, I give all glory and honor to Almighty God, whose Unfailing grace, wisdom and Strength sustained me throughout the course of my academic Journey. His divine guidance, protection and provision enabled me to overcome challenges and bring this work to a successful completion.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background to the Study**

Decolonization is a fundamental historical process through which formerly colonized nations attain political independence and sovereignty. Nigeria, as a British colony until October 1, 1960, experienced a unique decolonization process shaped by nationalist movements, colonial administrative policies, and geopolitical influences. The transition to independence was peaceful but marked by ethnic tensions and political restructuring.<sup>1</sup> The process of decolonization in Nigeria marks a critical period in the country's history, during which colonial rule gave way to self-governance and the formation of a sovereign nation. This chapter introduces the study by providing the necessary background, defining its objectives, and establishing its academic relevance. The decolonization of Nigeria represents one of the most significant historical developments of the 20th century in West Africa. This chapter introduces the study by exploring the complex and multi-faceted process through which Nigeria transitioned from colonial rule to an independent sovereign state. Decolonization is not merely the formal act of gaining independence; it encompasses a broader political, economic, social, and psychological transformation that

involves dismantling the structures and legacies of colonialism and constructing new systems grounded in indigenous authority, identity, and aspirations.

British colonialism profoundly affected Nigeria's political, economic, and social structures. From the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 to the implementation of indirect rule and the development of Western-style education, colonial rule shaped the framework within which Nigerians later demanded self-governance. The 1940s and 1950s witnessed the rise of political parties such as the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), the Action Group (AG), and the Northern People's Congress (NPC), which played crucial roles in mobilizing the populace and negotiating Nigeria's path to independence.

Although Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960, marked the official end of colonial rule, the decolonization process did not conclude with the lowering of the Union Jack. The post-independence period exposed unresolved colonial legacies and challenges, such as regionalism, ethnic tensions, and uneven development. Thus, a historical analysis of Nigeria's decolonization must also consider the continuity of colonial structures and the extent to which Nigerians were truly free to shape their own destiny.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite achieving independence in 1960, Nigeria has continued to grapple with challenges linked to colonial legacies, including ethnic fragmentation, economic

dependency, and political instability. Scholars such as Rodney (1972) argue that colonial economic structures led to prolonged dependency on Western economies,<sup>2</sup> while Mbembe (2001) discusses the lingering effects of colonial governance on African political systems.<sup>3</sup>

Although much has been written about Nigeria's independence, existing literature often treats decolonization as a straightforward handover of power from Britain to Nigeria. This oversimplification fails to account for the deeper historical, political, and socio-economic dimensions that influenced the process. There is a need for a critical and comprehensive historical analysis that interrogates both colonial strategies and Nigerian responses, including the roles played by political elites, ethnic nationalism, international pressures, and constitutional negotiations.

Since independence of 1960, questions persist about the extent to which decolonization in Nigeria was genuine and transformative. Scholars argue that the process was largely elite-driven and structured in a way that preserved key aspects of colonial power dynamics<sup>4</sup> (Ake, 1981). This study seeks to interrogate whether the decolonization process led to real structural change or whether it simply transferred political power to new indigenous elite within a colonial framework.

It is of note that events in Nigeria, though the most populous nation in Africa and a significant global actor, remains profoundly shaped by its experience under British colonial rule. While formal political independence was achieved in 1960, the structures,

mindsets, and inequalities established during the colonial period continue to permeate the nation's socio-economic fabric and its position within the global order.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to analyze the nature and trajectory of the decolonization process in Nigeria from a historical perspective. Specific goals include: i. To examine the nexus between Nigeria's colonial experience and contemporary global dynamics. ii. To explore the rural perspectives and the role of ordinary Nigerians in the decolonization process. iii. To analyse the long-term socio-economic consequences of colonial rule and the lived experiences of non-elite Nigerians.

### **Research Questions**

The study will address the following key research questions: i. What is the nexus between Nigeria's colonial experience and contemporary global dynamics? ii. What are the rural perspectives and the role of ordinary Nigerians in the decolonization process? iii. What are the long-term socio-economic consequences of colonial rule and the lived experiences of non-elite Nigerians?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant as it contributes to the broader discourse on decolonization in Africa and the post-colonial state. By focusing on Nigeria, it highlights

the unique blend of colonial manipulation, nationalist resistance, and global pressure that defined the country's independence process. The research is particularly relevant to scholars of African political history, post-colonial studies, and development theory, providing insight into the foundational issues that continue to affect Nigeria's governance and unity<sup>5</sup> (Young, 1994).

This research contributes to historical scholarship by providing a detailed analysis of Nigeria's decolonization process, offering insights into its political, economic, and social impacts. Findings from this study will be useful to policy analysts, historians, and political scientists studying post-colonial governance in Africa. Additionally, it serves as a resource for understanding the long-term effects of colonial rule on Nigeria's institutional development.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study focuses primarily on the period between the Nigeria's decolonization from and the attainment of independence in 1960, highlighting key nationalist movements and British colonial policies, with limited references to the post-independence years for evaluative purposes. While it emphasizes political and constitutional developments, it also touches on social and economic dimensions where relevant. A key limitation is the reliance on secondary sources, which may reflect certain historiographical biases.

The limitations of the study include a set of problems including limited access to primary archival documents on Nigeria's independence negotiations and potential bias in secondary sources, as historical accounts often reflect ideological perspectives.

## **Literature Review**

Decolonization refers to the process by which a nation transitions from colonial rule to independence, often marked by political, economic, and social transformations. Nigeria, a former British colony, underwent significant historical changes leading to its independence on October 1, 1960.<sup>6</sup>

The decolonization of Nigeria has been the subject of sustained scholarly attention, attracting historians, political scientists, and postcolonial theorists. Literature on the topic not only reconstructs the timeline of Nigeria's transition from colonial rule to independence in 1960 but also interrogates the forces, actors, and structural constraints that shaped this process. In reviewing key works, one can identify several thematic strands: constitutional and nationalist developments, political parties and federalism, economic dependency, cultural and postcolonial critiques, and regional as well as grassroots dynamics. Together, these perspectives provide a layered understanding of how Nigeria negotiated its exit from colonial subjugation.

Early scholar James S. Coleman, in his work *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, emphasizes the role of Western education, the press, and emergent elites in cultivating

nationalist consciousness that pressed Britain for constitutional reform.<sup>7</sup> His work charts the evolution of the 1922, 1946, 1951, and 1954 constitutions as stepping-stones toward independence, but it has been critiqued for privileging elite voices at the expense of grassroots mobilization. Similarly, Michael Crowder's "The Story of Nigeria" provides a chronological narrative of constitutional reforms and nationalist pressures.<sup>8</sup> It also provides a chronological narrative of constitutional reforms and nationalist pressures. It also provides a broad historical narrative but with a greater focus on political personalities and nationalist movements. Crowder underlines the significance of figures such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello in shaping constitutional negotiations and mobilizing nationalist sentiments. His account stresses the uneven nature of decolonization across Nigeria's regions, a theme that resonates strongly with later scholarship on the persistence of ethnic politics and regionalism in Nigerian democracy. It remains valuable for its clear synthesis but does not probe deeply into the structural economic and social dimensions of colonial rule.

A richer political analysis emerges in the works of Richard L. Sklar and Billy J. Dudley.<sup>9</sup> Sklar presents nationalist parties, the NCNC, Action Group and NPC as vehicles of regional and ethnic interests, suggesting that federalism became the inevitable constitutional arrangement through which independence was achieved. Sklar carefully analyzes the ideological bases and regional strongholds of the NCNC, NPC, and AG, showing how these parties simultaneously mobilized nationalist energies while also

entrenching ethnic divisions. His study reveals that independence was not the result of a united national struggle but rather a negotiated outcome shaped by inter-party competition and compromise. This insight is crucial for understanding the fragile nature of Nigeria's first republic. Dudley, in his studies of Northern Nigeria, highlights how regional politics influenced the terms of decolonization, underscoring that independence was not a straightforward national project but rather the outcome of fragile bargains between competing regions.

Beyond political negotiations, scholars have interrogated the economic underpinnings of decolonization. Walter Rodney represents a landmark Marxist critique, situating Nigeria's colonial experience within the structures of dependency and unequal exchange.<sup>10</sup> Rodney contends that independence in 1960 represented a political transfer without genuine economic sovereignty, as colonial extraction and reliance on primary commodities endured. Toyin Falola complements this view by detailing how colonial economic policies, including the use of marketing boards to control cocoa, palm oil, and groundnut prices, generated grievances that fueled nationalist agitation.<sup>11</sup> In his Cambridge edition, Falola traces Nigeria's evolution from precolonial societies through colonial administration to independence, emphasizing the layered nature of nationalist agitation. He stresses the continuities between colonial structures and postcolonial governance, particularly the persistence of regional divisions and the challenges of forging national unity.

Cultural and postcolonial critiques present a diverse narrative. For example, Chinua Achebe (1983), critiques the failures of post-independence leadership, implicitly suggesting that political sovereignty had not dismantled colonial legacies of corruption and authoritarianism.<sup>12</sup> Theoretical perspectives such as Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* and Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* are less Nigeria-specific but widely applied to its case.<sup>13</sup> Mbembe provides a later and more nuanced exploration of these dynamics. Mbembe examines how colonial power relations survived into the postcolonial period through new forms of governance, everyday practices, and political culture. His analysis of postcolonial subjectivity helps to explain why Nigerian independence did not automatically yield a rupture with colonial logics of domination. Mbembe's insights reinforce the view of decolonization as an unfinished project, shaped by both continuity and rupture, while Mamdani's model of the bifurcated state—urban citizens versus rural subjects—helps explain why Nigerian independence was marked more by continuity in modes of control than by rupture.

Claude Ake builds on structural critique, presenting colonialism as an exploitative economic project whose legacies continued to constrain postcolonial African states.<sup>14</sup> In Ake's analysis, the Nigerian state inherited the extractive and authoritarian features of its colonial predecessor, making it more accountable to external economic interests than to its citizens. His work underscores how economic structures limited the transformative potential of decolonization. Crawford Young, situates Nigeria's experience within a wider

African framework.<sup>15</sup> Young identifies the defining features of colonial states: fiscal weakness, reliance on coercion, and indirect rule, demonstrating how these shaped postcolonial politics. In Nigeria, indirect rule reinforced regionalism and produced fragmented political cultures that undermined the prospects for unified nationalism. Young's comparative approach highlights that the challenges Nigeria faced were not unique but part of a broader African postcolonial predicament.

Across this literature, several debates stand out. One concerns the relative weight of elite negotiation versus mass mobilization. While Coleman, Sklar, and Dudley privilege constitutional elites, later works stress the roles of farmers, women, and workers. Another concern is continuity versus rupture, weighing whether independence was a true break or rather a reconfiguration of colonial structures. Rodney, Mamdani, and Mbembe lean toward continuity, while Crowder and nationalist historians emphasize rupture. Taken together, these works show that Nigerian decolonization cannot be reduced to the handover of power in 1960. It was instead a layered process shaped by competing forces: elites negotiating constitutional arrangements, regions bargaining for autonomy, masses pressing for economic justice, and colonial institutions bequeathing both structures of opportunity and constraints.

Conclusively, colonialism was not merely a historical episode but a foundational event that created path dependencies. It established an extractive economic model geared towards metropolitan needs, fractured social cohesion through artificial boundaries and

divide-and-rule tactics, and introduced administrative and legal systems that prioritized control over development. These legacies create a "triple helix" of vulnerability: an economy susceptible to global market fluctuations and neoliberal pressures, an environment degraded by historical and ongoing exploitation, and populations whose mobility (both internal and international) is often a response to these intertwined pressures. Rural communities, the backbone of the pre-colonial and colonial economy, were central sites of both exploitation and resistance, and their experiences illuminate the persistent socio-economic inequalities plaguing the nation.

A multidisciplinary approach is therefore needed in examining the post-colonial challenges. This can be achieved by synthesizing insights from history, political economy, sociology and postcolonial studies, through the use of key theoretical frameworks. For instance, Postcolonial Theory as advanced by scholars such as Frantz Fanon, 1961, Edward Said 1978, Achille Mbembe, 2001) examines the psychological and cultural impacts of colonization.<sup>16</sup> Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* 1963, in particular, emphasizes the violent and revolutionary dimensions of decolonization, arguing that true liberation must involve a radical break from colonial institutions and ideologies. It is the theory upon which Fanon, Said and Achebe premised their argument, analyzing cultural domination, the construction of identity, and the psychological impacts of colonialism. It critically examines the enduring cultural, political, and economic impacts of colonialism, challenging dominant Western narratives and power structures that perpetuate inequality.

It seeks to deconstruct colonial discourses, center marginalized voices, and imagine pathways toward genuine decolonization and cultural self-determination.

Dependency Theory articulated by Andre Gunder Frank, (1967) and later developed by Samir Amin and Walter Rodney, posits that colonialism created a dependent relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, in which African economies were structurally subordinated to those of Europe.<sup>17</sup> As inclined to by Frank, Amin and Ake, it argues that global poverty stems from the historical exploitation of developing nations (the periphery) by wealthy ones (the core), which extract resources and labor for their own benefit. This creates a perpetually unequal system where the periphery remains economically dependent and underdeveloped, enriching the core at its expense. This brought to light the structuring of Nigeria's economy within the global capitalist system in a way that perpetuates under-development.

Historical Sociology theory examines how social structures, institutions, and relationships develop and transform over extended periods through specific historical contexts.<sup>18</sup> This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding historical sequences, timing, and path-dependent processes to explain contemporary social phenomena and societal development. Ekeh and Young examine this theory and related it to the Nigeria's long-term institutional and social transformations wrought by colonial rule.

## **Methodology**

This work adopts a historical research methodology, relying on primary and secondary sources such as government records, academic publications, and historical archives. A qualitative approach is used to analyze nationalist movements and colonial policies. These include colonial documents, constitutional texts, speeches, archival materials, and scholarly works. The study applies a critical historiographical lens, comparing different interpretations of events to arrive at a balanced understanding. Key sources include books, journals, articles, and interviews with historians.

The study is structured into five chapters. Discussion is based on introduction; examination of the colonial foundations of the Nigerian state, focusing on the administrative, economic, and social transformations brought by British rule; the rise of nationalism and the struggle for political freedom; analyzes constitutional developments and the steps leading to independence; conclusion, recommendations and summarizes key findings.

## Endnotes

1. For a comprehensive overview of Nigeria's independence movement, see Tekena N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Phase of Colonial Rule* (London: Longman, 1972).
2. Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972), 224-258.
3. Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 102-128.
4. Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (London: Longman, 1981), 98-115.
5. Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 67-89.
6. This definition draws on the United Nations' approach to decolonization as outlined in Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960.
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13. Claude Ake, *Revolutionary Pressures in Africa* (London: Zed Books, 1978), 45-67.
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17. Peter P. Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17, no. 1 (1975): 91-112; Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

## CHAPTER TWO

### FOUNDATIONAL STRUCTURES OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE IN NIGERIA

#### Introduction

The literature on British colonialism in Nigeria is abundant and emphasizes the administrative framework of indirect rule, the amalgamation of territories, and the economic exploitation of resources. Toyin Falola (1999) provides a comprehensive history in *The History of Nigeria*, in which he explores how colonial policies reshaped indigenous governance and contributed to regional inequalities.<sup>1</sup> Falola and Matthew Heaton (2008) further examine colonial transformations in *A History of Nigeria*, noting that British rule privileged certain ethnic groups, thereby laying the groundwork for ethnic divisions that persisted after independence.<sup>2</sup>

Frederick Lugard's own writings, particularly *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922), offer insight into the British rationale for colonization, portraying it as a civilizing mission.<sup>3</sup> However, scholars such as A. Adu Boahen (1987) and Obaro Ikime (1985) challenge this narrative by highlighting the exploitative and coercive nature of colonial administration, including the imposition of cash crop economies, taxation, and forced labor.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Colonial Foundation of Extraction, Control and Transformation**

British colonialism in Nigeria was consolidated through conquest. For example, the Benin Expedition 1897, the Anglo-Aro War 1901-1902 and the establishment of protectorates Northern and Southern, later amalgamated Lord Lugard in 1914, was fundamentally driven by economic exploitation and political control. This foundation created structures with lasting consequences that persist in bedeviling Nigeria as a nation.<sup>5</sup>

## **The Extractive Economic Model**

Claude Ake (1981) argued that, colonialism underdeveloped Africa by integrating it into the world capitalist system on terms that exploited its resources and labor while stifling autonomous development.<sup>6</sup> This extractive model established Nigeria as a peripheral economy within the global core-periphery structure. The colonial economy was designed to serve British imperial interests, not Nigerian development. Its key features included monoculture export orientation. Colonial authorities actively discouraged diversified food production and instead promoted cash crops for export. This policy exploited palm oil and kernels in the East, groundnuts and cotton in the North, cocoa in the West<sup>7</sup> (Ake, 1981; Hopkins, 1973). This created dependency on volatile global commodity markets and undermined local food security.

Another key feature is that of infrastructure development solely for extraction purposes. Railways, roads, and ports were built primarily to facilitate the movement of raw materials to the coast for export and the importation of manufactured British goods<sup>8</sup> (Ezeani, 2018). The famous Lagos-Kano railway, completed in 1912, epitomized this, linking the Northern groundnut belt directly to the port of Lagos, bypassing internal regional integration. This was complemented with land alienation and taxation. The colonial state asserted control over land, particularly in the South through concepts like "Crown Land", disrupting customary tenure systems<sup>9</sup> (Afigbo, 1991). The imposition of cash taxes (e.g., the Hut Tax in the North), also forced peasants into the cash economy, often compelling them to work on plantations or migrate for wage labor to pay taxes<sup>10</sup> (Falola, 2009), therefore creating a cycle of dependency and indebtedness. Indigenous manufacturing industries, such as the thriving textile industry in Kano and the metal works in Benin, were also systematically undermined through cheap imports of British manufactured goods and restrictive policies<sup>11</sup> (Amin, 1976).

### **Political and Administrative (Control) Structures**

Political and administrative structure was also put in place to subjugate and subject the existing local and traditional authority to the whims and caprice of the colonist through the legacy of indirect rule. Lord Lugard's system of indirect Rule, particularly prominent in the North, became a defining feature of colonial administration.

While framed as respecting traditional authority, its primary goals were control and cost-effectiveness. This artificial reinforcement of tradition by the colonial powers identified and often elevated cooperative Chiefs or Emirs, granting them authority they might not have traditionally possessed, while bypassing or suppressing existing democratic or consultative mechanisms<sup>12</sup> (Ekeh, 1975). This created a class of warrant chiefs whose legitimacy derived from the colonial state, not their communities.

The native authority system created also concentrated power in the hands of the colonial-backed traditional rulers and their councils, often marginalizing women, younger men, and non-dominant ethnic groups within the emirates or chiefdoms<sup>13</sup> (Mba, 1982). It entrenched patriarchal and hierarchical structures. By creating a centralization and bureaucracy, the colonial state introduced a centralized, bureaucratic administrative structure focused on tax collection, labor recruitment, and maintaining order. This model, inherited at independence, often proved ill-suited to managing a complex, multi-ethnic society and fostered authoritarian tendencies (Joseph, 1987).

To further consolidate on their control, the amalgamation of 1914 was introduced, merging the Northern and Southern Protectorates primarily for the purpose of administrative convenience for the British, driven by financial considerations and the desire to create a larger economic unit<sup>14</sup> (Tamuno, 1970). This action forcibly united diverse regions with distinct histories, cultures, levels of exposure to Islam/Christianity, and economic bases, sowing seeds for future political tensions and regional inequalities

that persist today. The "primordial public" based on ethnic, religious, or communal ties and the "civic public" which is the state apparatus was thus created<sup>15</sup> (Peter Ekeh's, 1975). By creating a state detached from the people and serving alien interests, a situation is thus fostered on the citizen where they felt little obligation to the civic public, prioritizing loyalty to the primordial public. This legacy continues to fuel corruption, ethnic chauvinism, and weak state-society relations.

### **Social and Cultural Transformation**

Despite the ugly side of colonialism, it also had its positive effect and profoundly reshaped Nigerian society. Colonization brought with it education and religion. Mission schools provided Western education, creating new western-educated elite who often filled positions in the colonial administration and later became the nationalist leaders. However, this education was often limited and designed to produce low-level clerks and assistants, not critical thinkers<sup>16</sup> (Ayandele, 1966) except in few occasions. Christianity also spread rapidly in the South, but it is often accompanied by cultural denigration of indigenous beliefs and practices, leading to social cleavages.

Colonialism also bred urbanization. Cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Kaduna grew as administrative and commercial centers, attracting migrants from rural areas seeking wage labor. This created new social dynamics and class structures but also led to the growth of informal settlements and urban poverty<sup>17</sup> (Mabogunje, 1968). Colonial

policies also strengthened patriarchal structures by dealing exclusively with male rulers. Taxation policies disproportionately burdened women. Mission education, while providing opportunities for some girls, often emphasized domesticity and reinforced Victorian gender roles<sup>18</sup> (Mba, 1982; Awe, 1992). However, colonialism also created new spaces for women's activism, particularly in response to economic hardship.

## Endnotes

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3. Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 61-95.
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4. For detailed accounts of these military campaigns, see Toyin Falola, *The History of Nigeria* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 67-86.
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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **DECOLONIZATION PROCESS: EFFECTS AND EMPHASIS ON RURAL AGENCY/ NON-ELITE EXPERIENCES**

#### **Introduction**

The conventional narrative of Nigerian decolonization often focuses on the constitutional conferences, the rhetoric of nationalist leaders like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, and the eventual transfer of power in 1960. While these were crucial, there is need to shifts the focus to the rural periphery and the experiences of ordinary Nigerians – farmers, market women, laborers – whose actions, resistances, and negotiations were fundamental to the process and whose expectations shaped the post-colonial reality.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Limits of Elite Nationalism**

The nationalist movement, led by the Western-educated elite emerging from colonial schools and professions, was primarily concerned with political independence and replacing British rulers. Their vision was often modernist and focused on building a unified nation-state along Western lines<sup>2</sup> (Coleman, 1958). However, this vision had limitations as it affects the ordinary citizenry of the Nigeria nation.

Chief among these limitations was that of urban bias. The leadership and activities of parties like the NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons), AG (Action Group), and NPC (Northern People's Congress) were largely concentrated in urban centers and administrative capitals. Class interests rather than the interest of the general populace was the preoccupation of the elite. These elite often represented their own class interests and those of the emerging commercial and professional middle class. Their demands for self-rule were intertwined with desires for greater access to economic opportunities previously monopolized by Europeans and Lebanese<sup>3</sup> (Skinner, 1963).

Neglect of rural grievances was also a notable limitation. While paying lip service to the masses, the nationalist leadership often failed to adequately address the core grievances of the rural majority. The rural masses had to endure land alienation, oppressive taxation, low cash crop prices, lack of infrastructure, and the authoritarianism of the Native Authority system<sup>4</sup> (Afigbo, 1991).

### **Rural Resistance and Negotiation**

Rural Nigerians were not passive recipients of colonial rule or elite nationalism. They engaged in diverse forms of resistance and negotiation that constantly challenged colonial authority and shaped the decolonization landscape. For example, tax revolts and protests against taxation was a persistent feature. The famous Aba Women's Riot of 1929, though primarily sparked by fears of taxation on women, was a broader rebellion against

colonial economic exploitation, warrant chief corruption, and the erosion of women's economic autonomy in the palm oil trade<sup>5</sup> (Mba, 1982; Gailey, 1973). Similar protests occurred elsewhere, such as the 1937 Iseyin Riot in the West against increased cotton taxes and low prices. These revolts demonstrated the potential for mass rural unrest and forced colonial authorities to reconsider policies.

Resistance also came in the form of Labor Unrest. While often associated with urban workers (e.g., the 1945 General Strike), rural laborers on plantations, mines (e.g., Enugu coal mines), and infrastructure projects also engaged in strikes and slowdowns demanding better wages and conditions<sup>6</sup> (Ananaba, 1969). These actions highlighted the exploitation inherent in the colonial economy. Cooperation was also withheld by the farmers, as they frequently resorted to silent resistance. They smuggled produce across borders to get better prices than offered by the British marketing boards, refusing to grow designated cash crops, or migrating to avoid taxation or forced labor<sup>7</sup> (Hopkins, 1973). This economic sabotage undermined colonial revenue and control.

Religious and cultural movements also spring up in resistance. Movements like the Hausa Islamic Mahdist rebellions (e.g., the Satiru Revolt 1906) and Aladura churches in the Yoruba Southwest often incorporated anti-colonial sentiments, offering alternative sources of authority and community solidarity that challenged the colonial order<sup>8</sup> (Peel, 1968). The rural populations were also not entirely disconnected from nationalism. They engaged selectively, often supporting parties that promised specific local benefits like

schools, roads, or markets, or that seemed to challenge oppressive local chiefs backed by the colonial state<sup>9</sup> (Baker, 1998). Their votes (where elections were held) and their potential for unrest made them a crucial constituency that nationalist leaders had to consider, even if imperfectly.

As Toyin Falola (2009) emphasizes, Nigerian history is replete with examples of 'history from below', showing how ordinary people navigated, resisted, and shaped colonialism.<sup>10</sup> Rural agency was crucial in making colonial rule expensive and difficult to sustain, creating the pressure that made decolonization inevitable.

### **Non-Elite Experiences and Expectations**

For the vast majority of Nigerians, decolonization meant something different than it did for the elite. For example, farmers hoped for hope for economic relief through fairer prices for their produce, an end to exploitative taxation, and access to credit and inputs. Market women hoped for improved infrastructure and reduced harassment by authorities. Many rural communities desire for local autonomy and sought for greater control over their local affairs, free from the dual oppression of the colonial district officer and the unaccountable warrant chief or emir. They wanted a return to more participatory forms of local governance<sup>11</sup> (Afigbo, 1991).

There was a strong demand for schools, clinics, clean water, and roads. These are basic services that colonialism had largely failed to provide outside urban centers and

administrative headquarters. The fear of further land alienation and the desire for secure tenure over ancestral lands were paramount concerns. These expectations were often articulated not through high politics but through local protests, petitions, and the choices made at the ballot box (when applicable). The failure of the post-independence state to adequately meet these expectations – due to the persistence of colonial-era structures, elite capture, and later neoliberal pressures – is a key source of ongoing disillusionment and conflict.

The decolonization process, therefore, was not simply a handover orchestrated by elites. It was a complex, contested process shaped significantly by the actions and aspirations of rural and non-elite Nigerians. Their resistance made colonial rule untenable, and their hopes for a better future defined the benchmarks against which independence would be judged. Understanding this is vital for grasping the profound sense of unfulfilled promise that characterizes much of post-colonial Nigerian history.

### **Socio-Economic Consequences and Lived Experiences**

The structures established during colonial rule did not vanish with independence in 1960. Instead, they were adapted, perpetuated, and often exacerbated by the post-colonial state, leading to profound and persistent socio-economic consequences. This section analyzes these long-term effects, focusing explicitly on the lived experiences of

non-elite Nigerians – the rural poor, urban informal sector workers, women, and youth – who continue to bear the heaviest burden.

The post-colonial state inherited and largely maintained the colonial economic model of extraction and dependency. Despite efforts at diversification, Nigeria's economy remains heavily reliant on oil exports, making it extremely vulnerable to global price shocks. Non-oil exports (cocoa, rubber, sesame, etc.) still suffer from value chain issues and limited processing, mirroring the colonial pattern of exporting raw materials<sup>12</sup> (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2003). The deindustrialization initiated under colonialism was never fully reversed. Import substitution industrialization policies in the 1970s had limited success and collapsed under structural adjustment. This had continuously made Nigeria a net importer of manufactured goods, perpetuating dependency<sup>13</sup> (Forrest, 1995).

The colonial legacy of infrastructure was built for extraction, and not integrated national development. When the above when combined with decades of post-independence underinvestment and corruption, has resulted in a severe infrastructure deficit. This greatly affect economic activity and disproportionately affects the poor who rely on public transport and cannot afford generators or private water sources<sup>14</sup> (World Bank, 2022). The colonial legacy also fostered corruption, rent-seeking, and the neglect of non-oil sectors and agriculture. This has led to enrichment of a tiny elite while failing to translate into broad-based development or poverty reduction, deepening inequality<sup>15</sup> (Karl, 1997).

For the non-elite, this translates into precarious livelihoods. Smallholder farmers face unpredictable markets, lack of access to credit and modern inputs, and competition from cheap food imports. Urban informal sector workers (estimated at over 65% of the workforce) operate with no job security, social protection, or access to credit, surviving hand-to-mouth<sup>16</sup> (ILO, 2018). Unemployment and underemployment, particularly among youth, are chronically high, fueling frustration and social unrest.

### **Deepening Inequality and Social Fragmentation**

Colonialism created and entrenched inequalities that persist and evolve overtime. The amalgamation and differential colonial investments, for example, the presence of more infrastructure in the South, created stark regional disparities. The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta further complicated this, leading to intense competition over resources and revenue allocation, fueling ethnic tensions and conflicts<sup>17</sup> (Osaghae, 1998). The colonial also create a small Western-educated elite class whom evolved into a powerful post-colonial political and economic elite. These elite captures state resources and opportunities, while the majority remains poor. Nigeria has one of the highest rates of inequality in the world<sup>18</sup> (World Bank, 2022).

Similarly, the colonial policies reinforced patriarchal structures. Post-independence, despite constitutional guarantees, women face significant barriers such as limited access to land ownership (especially under customary systems), lower educational

attainment (particularly in the North), restricted economic opportunities and high rates of gender-based violence<sup>19</sup> (Awe, 1992; Okojie, 2001). The colonial policy of divide-and-rule, coupled with the arbitrary creation of a unified state from diverse groups, fostered identities based on ethnicity and religion as primary markers of political competition and access to resources. This fragmentation continues to undermine national unity and fuel conflicts<sup>20</sup> (Ekeh, 1975; Joseph, 1987).

The non-elite experience is one of marginalization and vulnerability. For example, a farmer in the Niger Delta will suffer environmental degradation from oil spills, while seeing little or no benefit from the wealth. A young man in Kano faces limited job prospects and may be drawn into ethnic or religious conflict. A woman trader in Lagos struggles daily against harassment, extortion, and lack of social safety nets. These groups often feel excluded from the benefits of the Nigerian state and its resources.

### **Institutional Weakness and Governance Deficits**

The colonial state was designed and setup for control, not participatory development or service delivery. Its legacy includes prioritization of order over justice. Post-independence, this evolved into a system where the law is frequently applied selectively, favoring the powerful and making corruption endemic, while undermining trust in state institutions<sup>21</sup> (Smith, 2007).

The colonial centralized administrative structure was retained and is often strengthened by military rule. This has stifled local initiative, accountability, and effective service delivery at the grassroots level<sup>22</sup> (Suberu, 2001). There is also an inefficient and unresponsive bureaucracy, a leftover of the colonial legacy. Its main focus is on extraction and control, evolving into a bloated, inefficient, and often predatory post-colonial civil service, hindering development efforts<sup>23</sup> (Ake, 1985).

Flowing from the above, this brought about the sense of insecurity and powerlessness to the ordinary Nigerians. Accessing basic services often requires bribes or connections, while the various government agencies are extortive and security apparatus are often seen as oppressive rather than protective. Disputes over land, resources or other relationship are rarely resolved fairly through the courts. This institutional failure forces people to rely on informal networks, ethnic/religious associations, or even vigilante groups for security and justice.

The long-term socio-economic consequences of colonial rule, therefore, are not abstract historical phenomena. They are the daily reality for millions of non-elite Nigerians, from economic uncertainty, deep inequality, social fragmentation, and a pervasive sense of disempowerment in the face of weak and often predatory state institutions. This context is essential for understanding Nigeria's current entanglement with contemporary global dynamics.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE COLONIALISM NEXUS WITH CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL DYNAMICS

#### Introduction

The structures and vulnerabilities established during colonialism create a powerful nexus with three defining contemporary global dynamics which are migration, climate change, and neoliberalism. These forces do not impact Nigeria in a vacuum; they interact with and amplify the colonial legacy, shaping the lives and choices of ordinary Nigerians in profound ways.<sup>1</sup>

Migration formed the major part of colonial roots of contemporary flows. Nigeria serves as a major source, transit and destination country for migration in Africa. Contemporary patterns therefore have deep colonial origins. Colonialism established patterns of labor migration for plantations, mines and infrastructure projects. These networks persisted and evolved post-independence<sup>2</sup> (Adepoju, 2005). Colonial railways and roads, while built for extraction, inadvertently facilitated internal migration. Post-independence colonial legacy of neglect of rural infrastructure continues to push people towards cities.

The colonial education system created aspirations for white-collar jobs often unavailable domestically. Post-independence economic stagnation and underinvestment in education/higher skills fuel the "brain drain" of highly skilled professionals (doctors,

engineers, academics) to Europe and North America, depriving Nigeria of critical human capital<sup>3</sup> (Adepoju, 2006). The era also created ethnic manipulation and arbitrary borders, laying the groundwork for post-independence conflicts (e.g., Biafra, Niger-Delta agitation, Boko Haram insurgency, current farmer-herder clashes and banditry). These conflicts, rooted in historical grievances over land, resources, and political marginalization, are major drivers of internal displacement (IDPs) and refugee flows<sup>4</sup> (IDMC, 2023).

The stark global inequality rooted in the colonial world system makes migration to the Global North a perceived escape from poverty and lack of opportunity at home. Neoliberal globalization facilitates information flows about life in the West, fueling aspirations while simultaneously making legal migration increasingly difficult, pushing people into irregular and dangerous routes<sup>5</sup> (de Haas, 2007). Hence, migration served as a complex survival strategy for many non-elite Nigerians. For example, a young man from Benue State who had been displaced by herder-farmer conflict will naturally become an IDP in a camp or migrate to a more secure location. While a woman from Delta State, frustrated by environmental pollution and lack of jobs, will risk the Sahara and Mediterranean to reach Europe, a skilled doctor leaves for the UK for better pay and working conditions. These choices are direct responses to the failures and vulnerabilities rooted in the colonial past and perpetuated by contemporary global and national structures.

## **Colonial Vulnerabilities in Relation to Climate Change**

Nigeria is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, for instance desertification in the North, flooding along the Niger-Benue trough and coastal areas, rising sea levels in the Niger Delta, and erratic rainfall patterns. Colonialism significantly shaped this vulnerability through land degradation and deforestation. The colonial cash crop expansion (e.g., cocoa, groundnuts) and unsustainable land use practices degraded soils and reduced forest cover, while the post-independence population pressure and poverty have exacerbated same, reducing resilience to drought and desertification<sup>6</sup> (Mortimore, 1998).

Colonial resource extraction (timber, minerals) and the post-colonial oil industry have caused severe environmental degradation such as oil spills and gas flaring in the Niger Delta, and elsewhere, destroying livelihoods (farming, fishing) and reducing ecosystems' capacity to adapt to climate change<sup>7</sup> (Okonta & Douglas, 2003). Colonial infrastructure and settlement patterns: mandated that cities and infrastructure were often built with little regard for long-term environmental risks. The rapid but unplanned post-independence urbanization, driven by rural poverty (itself a colonial legacy), has led to settlements in floodplains and other hazardous areas prone to adverse climate and environmental condition, increasing exposure to floods and sea-level rise<sup>8</sup> (Adelekan, 2010).

The colonial state's focus on extraction over environmental management, combined with post-independence governance failures, means Nigeria lacks the institutional capacity, financial resources, and technical expertise for effective climate adaptation and mitigation<sup>9</sup> (Nwankwo et al., 2020). In conclusion, climate change impacts are felt most acutely by the rural and urban poor. As farmer in Sokoto watches his farmland turn to desert, so was a fisherman in Bayelsa sees his nets come up empty due to oil pollution and changing ocean currents. Similarly, residents of Makoko, a sprawling Lagos waterfront slum built on stilts, face constant flooding and displacement. These communities contributed least to global emissions but bear the brunt of the consequences, their vulnerability deepened by historical and ongoing marginalization rooted in the colonial experience.

### **Neoliberalism as A New Form of The New Colonialism**

Neoliberal globalization characterized by free markets, privatization, deregulation, fiscal austerity, and the dominance of international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank has profoundly shaped Nigeria since the 1980s. Its impact is deeply intertwined with the colonial legacy. In 1986, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) was introduced and imposed by the IMF and World Bank as a condition for loans during Nigeria's debt crisis. It was implemented in response to a national economic crisis and was designed to restructure the economy. SAPs mandated currency devaluation,

removal of subsidies (especially on food and fuel), privatization of state-owned enterprises and cuts in public spending on health, education, infrastructure<sup>10</sup> (Olukoshi, 1998).

These policies amplified colonial dependency. The devaluation made imports such as food and medicine more expensive, hurting the poor and privatization often led to asset stripping and job losses without improving service delivery. It also brought with it eroded social services and cuts to health and education spending, reversing modest post-independence gains, disproportionately affecting the poor and women who rely most on public services. It also increased poverty and inequality, with SAPs widely credited with worsening poverty and inequality in Nigeria during the 1980s and 1990s<sup>11</sup> (Aigbokhan, 2000).

Neoliberalism emphasized on deregulation and the free market has coincided with the massive growth of the informal sector, conversely, the formal sector fails to create enough jobs. While providing survival, this sector offers no security or benefits, therefore reflecting a return to the precarious labor conditions often seen under colonialism<sup>12</sup> (Meagher, 2010).

There is also the problem of financial and capital flight, despite neoliberal policies in facilitating the opening of Nigeria's financial markets. However, this also enabled massive capital flight by the elite and multinational corporations, draining resources that could be used for development – a modern form of resource extraction echoing colonial

times<sup>13</sup> (Sylla, 2021). The conditions attached by foreign financial institutions for loans and the influence of neoliberal ideology have constrained the policy space of the Nigerian state, undermining sovereignty, limiting its ability to pursue developmental or redistributive policies, reminiscent of colonial external control<sup>14</sup> (Ake, 1996).

The end product of neoliberalism translates into intensified hardship for non-elite Nigerians and the removal of fuel subsidies leads to sudden spikes in transport and food prices. Privatization of electricity leads to higher tariffs and worse service for the poor. Cuts to healthcare mean clinics lack medicines and staff. The informal worker faces even greater insecurity. The Nigerian state, weakened by SAPs and neoliberal orthodoxy, is less able or willing to mitigate these impacts or provide a social safety net. As Claude Ake (1996) argued, neoliberalism represents a new form of imperialism, reinforcing the underdevelopment initiated by colonialism.

The nexus is thus clear. Neoliberal economic policies exacerbate the poverty and inequality rooted in colonialism, driving migration. Simultaneously, climate change impacts, made worse by colonial and post-colonial environmental degradation and weak governance, destroy livelihoods, further fueling migration and deepening poverty. Neoliberal globalization facilitates the flow of capital and information but also restricts the movement of people and constrains the state's ability to respond to climate challenges or support its citizens. This creates a vicious cycle, where the vulnerabilities inherited

from the colonial past are continuously reinforced by contemporary global forces, trapping millions of non-elite Nigerians in a dire state of uncertainty.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### **Summary and Recommendations**

Nigeria's contemporary realities are inextricably linked to the structures, inequalities, and mindsets established during British colonial rule.<sup>1</sup> The nexus between this historical experience and current global dynamics such as migration, climate change, and neoliberalism is not merely coincidental, it is causal and constitutive.<sup>2</sup> Colonialism created an extractive, dependent economy; a centralized, often illegitimate state; and deep social fractures.<sup>3</sup> These legacies render Nigeria particularly vulnerable to global economic shocks, environmental degradation, and the pressures of neoliberal globalization.<sup>4</sup>

Crucially, discussion centered on the perspectives and agency of rural and non-elite Nigerians.<sup>5</sup> During decolonization, they were not passive bystanders but active agents whose resistance (tax revolts, labor strikes, smuggling), made colonial rule unsustainable and whose hopes for economic relief, local autonomy and basic services defined the promises of independence.<sup>6</sup> Their lived experiences in the post-colonial era reveal the most enduring and damaging consequences of colonialism.<sup>7</sup> The reality is persistent poverty, deep inequality, social fragmentation, environmental degradation and a pervasive sense of disempowerment in the face of weak and often predatory

institutions.<sup>8</sup> Migration, for many, is a direct response to these unfulfilled promises and amplified vulnerabilities.<sup>9</sup> Climate change impacts are felt most severely by those already marginalized by historical and ongoing injustices.<sup>10</sup> Neoliberal policies have often intensified their hardship rather than alleviating it.<sup>11</sup>

The above scenario underscore the centrality of history.<sup>12</sup> It is revealed that understanding Nigeria's present challenges requires a deep engagement with its colonial past, as contemporary crises cannot be addressed in historical isolation.<sup>13</sup> The importance of Rural/Non-Elite Perspectives is also established.<sup>14</sup> National narratives and policy-making must move beyond elite urban centers. The experiences, grievances, and aspirations of the rural poor, women, youth, and informal sector workers are fundamental to understanding the nation's trajectory and forging solutions.<sup>15</sup>

There is also the interconnectedness of crises.<sup>16</sup> For example, migration, climate change and economic vulnerability under neoliberalism are not separate issues but deeply intertwined manifestations of Nigeria's position within the global system, shaped profoundly by its colonial legacy.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, solutions must be holistic and integrated.<sup>18</sup> The Nigerian state, inheriting colonial structures and later constrained by neoliberalism, has largely failed to transform the colonial economy, reduce inequality, provide basic services, or protect its most vulnerable citizens from global shocks.<sup>19</sup>

The implications and the way forward in addressing Nigeria's challenges require confronting this colonial legacy and its contemporary manifestations.<sup>20</sup> There is need for

economic restructuring, moving beyond extractive dependence towards genuine economic diversification, value addition, and industrialization.<sup>21</sup> This requires strategic state intervention, not blind faith in free markets, and significant investment in infrastructure, education, and technology.<sup>22</sup>

There should also be an institutional reform by building a more decentralized, accountable and responsive state capable of delivering services and upholding the rule of law.<sup>23</sup> This includes strengthening local governance and tackling corruption head-on.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, social justice and redistribution should be encouraged through the implementation of policies that explicitly address historical and contemporary inequalities.<sup>25</sup> This should include progressive taxation, social safety nets, land reform, and targeted investments in marginalized regions and groups especially women and youth.<sup>26</sup>

Demanding climate finance and technology transfer, climate justice and adaptation can be attained, recognizing Nigeria's vulnerability and the historical responsibility of industrialized nations.<sup>27</sup> Environmental degradation particularly in the Niger Delta and other sundry related issues should be addressed through the implementation of locally-led adaptation strategies that prioritize the resilience of poor and rural communities.<sup>28</sup> It is also important to address humane migration governance by developing policies recognizing the root causes of migration (e.g. poverty, conflict, climate change) and protecting the rights of migrants, both internally and

internationally.<sup>29</sup> This will create favorable conditions at home that make migration a choice, not a necessity.<sup>30</sup> Nigeria needs the policy space to pursue development strategies tailored to its specific needs and history, prioritizing human development and social welfare over narrow fiscal targets.<sup>31</sup>

In essence, colonialism established an exploitative economic base, a centralized and often illegitimate political structure, and deep social and cultural fractures.<sup>32</sup> These foundations laid the groundwork for the challenges Nigeria would face during decolonization and long after.<sup>33</sup> The unfinished business of decolonization in Nigeria is the creation of a truly sovereign, equitable, and prosperous nation where the promises made to ordinary Nigerians like farmers, traders, laborers, women, youth – during the struggle for independence are finally fulfilled.<sup>34</sup> This requires not just political independence, but economic independence, social justice, and the dismantling of the colonial structures of mind and practice that continue to constrain the nation's potential.<sup>35</sup> Only by confronting this complex legacy can Nigeria navigate the challenges of the 21st century and build a future worthy of its people.<sup>36</sup>

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## APPENDIX

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NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	LOCATION	DATE
MR. DUROJAYE AUSTINE ADEDOYIN	42	IMMIGRATION OFFICER	AKURE	15-10-2025
MR. ANTHONY OSAHON IKPON- IZEVBOKUN	28	BUSINESS MAN	BENIN	17-10-25

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