

Violence and identity in modern Nigeria

Inchoate feudalization in a failing polity

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Abstract:

Nigeria, a failing state with the second highest incidence of terrorist attacks worldwide and a simmering, low intensity civil conflict as well as protest and secessionist movements, is a place where intersectionality does not stop at class or at gender. Nigeria's structural violence and atrocities happen at the intersection of ethnic, religious, sub-religious, linguistic, and occupational groups, as well as class and sex. It is a polity where indigeneity creates a kaleidoscope of state (provincial level) apartheid, where sharia is practiced in criminal law in all but one of the Northern states, and where the law of the land, including a bastardized version of juju as well as feudal law, all remain valid sources of law along with common law, allowing for rampant thuggery and voter intimidation, and abuse of tenants by feudatories, with government sanction. The country, ostensibly democratic, is ruled by former military heads of state, with the help of the army, which is deployed in the majority of the states. The federal polity is subject to many centrifugal forces that actively threaten to fuel an explosion in the 2020s.

Keywords:

Nigeria; terrorism;
civil war;
intersectionality;
indigeneity;
feudalization.

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Introduction

The Nigerian federal polity (independence from Britain: 1960, First Republic: 1963, currently at its Fourth Republic since 1999 but governed by successive military administrations for most of its history), is a large multiethnic state, and it is an indisputable fact that it is a highly unstable one. After a multi-ethnic, or multi-national state collapses, analysts have the luxury of declaring it „an incubator of nations,” as the owl of Minerva flies only at dusk. This is definitely what happened in the case of the Napoleonic Empire, of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, the USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and in the global South to British India or to the Ottoman Empire, indeed to many multi-ethnic, multi-national states and empires historically but especially in the last two centuries when modern nation building in the Hobsbawmian sense was already an option (Hobsbawm, 2012).

The analyst’s task is incomparably more difficult when the particular multi-ethnic conglomerate is still intact. In West Africa, due to the decidedly artificial nature of the region’s borders, multi-ethnic and multi-national states are the norm, not the exception. Nigeria, the region’s giant, conforms to this regional pattern, and is archetypical in its staggering diversity. Today, a number of major ethnic, ethno-religious and class cleavages ravage the country: Boko Haram, bunkering and kidnapping in the Niger Delta by a number of groups, Fulani herdsmen (pastoralists) attacking sedentary villagers (farmers) in Yoruba areas, the Middle Belt and the South West, bandits in the North West applying Boko Haram’s tactics on an unprecedented scale (specifically *the kidnapping of schoolchildren*, see Lawal 2021), the Army and the Police resorting to more and more unorthodox methods in reacting to these challenges, and finally, recognizing federal failure, open discussion of secession in both Igbo and Yoruba circles and the setting up of regional security organs such as *Amotekun* (South West) and the *Eastern Security Network*, both with an unclear relationship to legality (see more on these later). Also the ‘normal’ functioning of the nominally liberal democratic federal state includes voter intimidation, thuggery and inter-group violence as canvassing tactics.

1960s Yoruba regional leader Chief Obafemi Awolowo’s highly accomplished daughter, who is by now also a former Ambassador of the federal nation to an EU member country, was invited in early 2021 to a definitive on line show on Nigerian politics, the *Toyin Falola Interviews*, on 21 February 2021 (Toyin Falola Interviews, 2021). Involving a number of high profile participants, the discussion after a while turned to openly weighing the pros and cons of Yoruba areas to stay or else leave, the Nigerian federation, with the Ambassador repeating words of caution in terms of avoiding secession *if and when Yoruba forces are not ready to fight a war* (in terms of combat readiness!). It is my intended point here that it would be a mistake to put such discussions down only to the legendary freedom and openness of Nigeria’s (now global and partly diaspora led) press. Nigeria’s press is vigorous even as it defies the security services (as in reporting the Omoyele Sowore incarceration cases of 2019-2021, ongoing on *Sahara Reporters*). What I am arguing here is that openly pondering avenues and expediency, as well as practicability, of armed insurgency by

Nigeria's major ethnic groups' elite representatives is now *mainstream* and not fringe discourse at all.

Definitive voices in Nigerian Area Studies have long predicted Balkanization/morselization, notably a breakup into major constituting units, meta-regions with perceived potential for forming majority nation states around the major ethnic groups (lastly the former US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, 2010). It is difficult to dispute that Nigeria's meta-regions (the North-West, the North-East, the South-West, the Middle Belt/North Central and the South-East and South-South) are fundamentally divergent in many ways: in their ethnic makeup, religious composition, language, and even climate. As we shall see, trade unions, human rights movements, progressive religious circles, and progressive clusters at universities in the media are exceptional in terms of drawing attention to the dangers and possibly, the menace of resurgent ethnic micro-nationalisms and other secessionist tendencies such as championed by the fundamentalist versions of the major religions. When we weigh these issues, it is necessary to look back and engage meaningfully, with the historical roots of the aforementioned cleavages. We shall observe how these structural conflicts do *not* originate in a primordial fog but are indeed historical products, such that identities in Nigeria are constructs that require reinforcement by the historical forces in action specifically in the 21st century.

A history of identity, violence and intersectionality in Nigeria

When we delineate Nigeria's pre-independence history, it is prudent to first note how the unit was formed by the British amalgamation of different territories under the new Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria (1914), christened so by Governor Lugard's then girlfriend. In terms of meaningful unification and the subsequent historical trajectory, two different analytical frameworks are usually used, depending on the analyst's ideological outlook. Wole Soyinka, the sole Nobel Prize winner of Nigeria (Literature, 1986), voiced the more widespread one of the two when he argued that Nigeria was „cobbled together” from its ethnic/tribal building blocks (Pilling, 2018). This argument constitutes the Yoruba, the Igbo, the Hausa/Fulani, the Tiv, the Ibibio, the Ijaw, and others as proto-nations, and views those through a primordialist analytical lense. A generalized extrapolation of the primordialist argument as universal theory is presented by the excellent Israeli scholar Azar Gat (2012). A minority, notably the Nigerian radical and socialist Left has long argued that those 'tribes'/micro-nations (copyright Edwin Madunagu)/ ethnicities/ nationalities are themselves not only products of British colonial policies such as the warrant chief system, indirect rule, colonial urbanization, and Western style patriarchy (for the latter especially, see Matera, Bastian and Kent, 2011; for others see Mayer, 2016) but also post-independence, post-colonial, 'national' federal politics. Ethno-constructivists include the Nigerian radical thinkers Yusufu Bala Usman, Edwin Madunagu, Eskor Toyo, Ikenna Nzimiro, Bade Onimode, Biodun Jeyifo, Akin Adesokan, Biko Agozino, Femi Aborisade and Baba Aye, who all follow Eric



Hobsbawm's and Benedict Anderson's well known take on the *recent* and *political* genealogy of modern nations.

The primordialist school that naturally includes most champions of ethnic and other particularist causes in the country, puts forth that the key to the history of Nigeria's history of internal violence lies in how the nation's tribes are competing for resources among themselves (Metz, 1992; Kew and Lewis, 2010; and also the single largest segment of Nigerian Political Science scholarship produced within and also on, Nigeria), (for a critique of those: see Usman, no date; Usman, 1979) and that such competition makes conflict *perpetual and also natural*.

This has direct repercussions for how we look at today's politics in Nigeria. The current conflict between the (mostly) Fulani pastoralists and the sedentary Igbo villages as it plays out in 2021, may be viewed as an ethnic conflict resulting out of a primordial inevitability, or else, as a conflict with intersectional and class connotations (Baba Aye, 2021). It is *not* self-explanatory to disregard the anti-identitarian (Leftist) argument outright, especially that the same argument had been made about the most archetypical of all Nigerian inter-group conflicts, the Biafra War (civil war, fought 1967-1970, with perhaps as many as two million victims) (Nzimiro, 1982) where it could be posited that two bureaucratic elites (as opposed to two ethnic groups) were responsible for initiating the fighting, serving their particular (less than selfless) aims in the process.

Identity and cleavages in Nigeria

Identities are intensely complex in Nigeria. Yoruba families routinely have both Muslim and Christian siblings within the selfsame family, conversions happen in any direction (with a continued role of traditional Yoruba religion), and even Igbos have families where Protestants and followers of ethnic Igbo judaism coexist (Afsai, 2016) – although Igbo Judaism is a religion that has appeared on the basis of (Protestant) Christian worship in all historical probability. Naturally, variations within religious lifeworlds, such as Roman Catholics and Protestants in the same family, are more common, in Nigeria as well as elsewhere. Thus drawing any strict definitive boundary between groups (in the Middle-Eastern fashion) will be misleading.

That said, it is necessary to spell out the major fault lines in popular understanding, of inter-Nigerian difference, and also that of strife. *The most acutely felt kind of distinction that sometimes borders on animosity is between the South-Western Yoruba ethnic group, and the South-East's Igbos*. This harks back to the civil war, to the Asaba Massacre (1967), the deaths on the Igbo side, and the post-war federated structure that is widely seen as less beneficial to Igbos in spite of Yakubu Gowon's amnesty which was issued right after the federal victory (1970). The reader is advised to ponder that the major 'tribes' of Nigeria may, depending on counting, number up to 80 million people, so in no way do they conform to classical visions

of ethnicity and especially not to colonial era concepts of tribal identity. Any group that numbers tens of millions of people and maintains its own global diaspora, literary culture, and in the Yoruba case, even its globalized religion, is one where the out-of-vogue Soviet category of „nationality” makes much more sense than does any residual concept of a tribe. Indeed during the 1990s the veteran radicals Mokwugo Okoye and Chief Anthony Enahoro advised Nigeria to become a federation of federations along USSR lines on exactly this logic – however out of touch this might really have been, given that the USSR itself had just dissolved in the early 1990s and Nigeria was in the grip of its worst years of dictatorship under Sani Abacha, a dictatorship even less prone to respecting minority rights than other military administrations.

Despite coexistence of different religions in especially Yoruba and to some extent Igbo cases, the Muslim-Christian, North-South cleavage is also a definitive one in the country, with the North steeped in an ever more political Islam (Falola, 2001), and the South experiencing one of the most sweeping Pentecostal revolutions in any region of the world (Marshall, 2009). Since 1963, no official population census happened in the country as it was a major source of the disturbances of 1966/1967 and the Civil War itself. No one really knows how many people live in Nigeria as federal revenue allocation rules provide state governors an incentive to lie about their respective population numbers (Mayer, 2016, p. 19). Many analysts see the Christian-Muslim conflict as a primordial problem and incompatibility, even as a clash of civilizations. What is important to consider here is that levels of monotheist religiosity that we are observing today, *are very much a recent phenomenon* in both the North and the South. Today in every single Northern Nigerian state except Adamawa, *Sharia* is a valid source of law (not only in terms of family law but also criminal law). At Independence, the rural North was *not* yet effectively Islamized, and only the cities followed the religion’s tenets to a higher level of ritual observance. Grand Khadi of the North, Abubakr Mahmud Gummi, with close links to Saudi Arabia, devoted in the 1960s tremendous resources to the orthodox Islamization of rural Northern Nigeria, where the former British ban on Christian missions during colonial times had prepared the ground for these policies.

In the South, ‘animist’ traditional African religion coexisted with Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and other metropolitan based churches, giving way to Africanized versions of Christianity as the first form of cultural decolonization, still in late Victorian times (Casely-Hayford, Fargion, Wallace, 2015, pp. 66-68). Politics was *never* independent of these religious and cultural developments. In the case of Islam, intensely politicised versions of the religion appeared even with the traditionalist Sufi *jihad* (Sokoto, Usman don Fodio) in 1804 with the Sokoto Caliphate, but it is also inevitable to posit that Nigerian Shiite Islam (a movement lead by Sheik Ibrahim Zakzaky) was and today still is, a phenomenon that is a result of Iran’s Islamic Revolution in 1979. In the South, neo-Protestants, televangelists and pentecostals have had a defining influence on the population’s outlook, even in terms of strengthening Nigeria’s Anglo-American cultural and foreign policy orientation.



In 1963 Nigeria adopted the Westminster political system, and later the 1979 constitution copied the political system of the United States, which subsequent constitutions retained: Nigeria has a presidential system. The creeping adoption of the Salafi interpretation of orthodox Sunni Islam first enabled the Maitatsine revolt, of Sunni Islamist extraction in the early 1980s, and then in the early 2000, the globally known Boko Haram insurgency sprung up, later with direct ISIS links and allegiance (Besenyő and Mayer, 2015). The latter's name means „Western Education is Forbidden.“ The intensely political nature of religion in the Nigerian context may be illustrated further by the existence of a pro-Biafra, anti-Fulani, anti-federal, secessionist Igbo 'hard core' of politicised quasi-Judaism (Indigenous People Of Biafra, IPOB, is led by the fugitive leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, currently supposed to be based in Jerusalem after a fiasco by the security services in 2015).

Also calls for the expulsion of the North from the federation, and Igbo secession, grew in the 2010s along with Islamist calls for an emirate on the part of Boko Haram, Ansaru, and other extremist forces in the country. A more complex inter-group cleavage has also existed between Hausa-Fulani Northern Muslim, and Yoruba Muslim (and other Yoruba) forces. The North Eastern Kanuri have undergone assimilation processes to the Hausa core. There are very recently, also *regional security networks* within Nigeria, such as the Yoruba dominated, controversially legal *Amotekun* (Western Nigeria Security Network) encompassing six Yoruba majority states (2020), and the South Eastern, Igbo dominated, doubtlessly illegal *Eastern Security Network* (2020), busy battling Fulani and other pastoralists, while the Nigerian Army is widely assumed to be most responsive to Northern (Hausa-Fulani) interests along with federal ones (federal political elite interests that supercede regional ones: „oga“ network interests such as the ones belonging to former presidents Obasanjo, Babangida, and the Kaduna Mafia, as well as to incumbent president Muhammadu Buhari). The relative influence of these political overlords within the Army varies with time and is arguably as much an economic, as a political matter (meaning that *largesse* determines loyalties).

Indigeneity as it is practiced in Nigeria

An added element besides ethnicity and religion to identity formation in Nigeria, is political localism and the uniquely Nigerian concept of *indigeneity*. This originated in the 1960s. In the post-1999 'democratic' scenario, Nigerian citizens who reside in a certain state but whose ancestral roots are elsewhere, count legally as *non-indigenes in their respective states*. This means that they are not necessarily electable to political office, and cannot obtain government scholarships. Human Rights Watch sums up the situation thus: „According to common understanding in Nigeria and as a matter of government policy, the indigenes of any given locality are those persons who can prove that they belong to the ethnic community whose ancestors first settled the area. Everyone else is considered a non-indigene, no matter how strong their ties to the communities they live in.“ (Human Rights Watch 2006a). „Many spoke of being forced to abandon their hopes of university education

because of their non-indigene status, and of being locked out of scarce employment opportunities as civil servants, police officers, or military recruits.” (Human Rights Watch, 2006b). This two-tier system ostensibly protects indigenous local communities, but as it turns out, not the minority groups but *the majority ones*, constituting legally sanctioned discrimination. Some academic literature defends such legislation in the country (see Ademodi, 2012) and is also endorsed, unbelievably, by the Rapporteur of the Committee On the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the International Law Association. In reality this is a system of localized second class citizenship, fueling conflict and violence in every single state of the federation. Ademodi openly states how the notion that indigenous groups should always be non-dominant ones *should be challenged* (Ademodi, 2012, p. 237) (!), opening the door to meta-legal recognition of a multitude of local level apartheid. This system very obviously runs contrary to any normative definition of a liberal democratic polity anywhere, and in fact creates in Nigeria a patchwork of ‘dictatorships of the ethnic/religious majority.’

Effects of legal feudalism in Nigeria

Negative effects of the Nigerian legal system do not stop with indigeneity. *Sharia* is notable here but so is the continuation of the ‘law of the land’ i.e. ‘*juju*’ and other forms of traditional land law, as well as feudal land law in the North (Olong, 2011) as those are all valid sources of law along with the common law system of British extraction. Chieftaincy and royal titles have proliferated since independence not only in the Northern Emirates but all over Nigeria (Mayer, 2020a), including areas where before the British there was no system of nobility, such as most Igbo areas where *acephaly*, age grades and secret societies had once provided a political system instead of aristocratic privileges. In 1979, traditional rulers were made *a fourth tier of government* even in regions where they had to be established *ex nihilo*. Competition increased with such cases of invented tradition and jockeying for titles within and among local communities. It has become fashionable in Western academia to celebrate traditional rulers in Africa as ones that are able to step in and help govern regions where democratic politicians failed (an example is Baldwin, 2016). This is problematic generally as these traditional rulers are *ipso facto* unelected. It is however even more problematic in Nigeria where traditional rulers have consistently proved themselves to be the staunchest supporters of every single military dictatorship in the country’s history, endorsing even Sani Abacha (Jega, 2001).

Nigeria has shifted between ‘democratic rule’ and military dictatorships; the latter 1970-1979, 1983-1985, 1985-1993, 1993-1999. In both its two different avatars, Nigeria’s political system embraced internal violence to a comparatively high degree even in a West African regional comparison and context. The political economy of resource extraction, and injustices around oil income distribution, came to add fuel to the fire from the later 1970s onwards. The colonial state, as Frantz Fanon argued, was built on violence in the first place (Fanon, 1961; 2001). The post-colonial state inherited this trait from its predecessor. In its



military avatar, the Nigerian state was obviously a violent institution. During the years of Nigeria's First, Second, Third and currently, Fourth Republic, Nigerian elections have been systematically marred by violence, godfatherism, voter intimidation, thuggery, 'area boys', and fraud (Ellis, 2018). The Nigerian political system since 1999 is intensely oligarchical (Campbell, 2010), the system also being called the '*oga system*', and described as *prebendal* (Joseph, 1987; 2014). Both *prebendia* and the *oga system* constitute also a special kind of political economy, where customs officers become billionaires and Vice Presidents (Atiku Abubakar), where former generals own oil rigs, and where the law is the handmaiden of monopolistic economic interests *down to chicken farming* (as in the case of former military head of state and former democratically elected President Obasanjo).

Oil incomes have defined Nigeria since the late 1970s. Oil income distribution methods that first concentrate incomes at the federal center in Abuja, and then re-distribute those resources to states according to their population figures, originally gave no extra compensation to states, regions and ethnic areas where the negative externalities of oil extraction had been so severe that they practically ended agriculture altogether, through oil spills and other environmental damage. During the worst years of the military dictator Sani Abacha (1993-1998), Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine were captured, tried and executed for demanding exactly such compensation. Locals in the Niger Delta had little choice but to earn their living by illegal means, which meant bunkering (tapping into oil pipelines without authorization) and by joining the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and other Delta-based rebel groups that practiced kidnapping oil industry expatriates *as a form of livelihood*.

The North faced not only the consequences of its own feudal socio-political system (where emirs and aristocratic title holders retain their traditional role *even in the legal sense*) but a near-absence of modern industry and underdevelopment of other modern sectors. This was as true during the import substitution industrialization years (1950s-1983), as during the post-1983 years of self-managed neoliberal and then openly IMF-oriented Structural Adjustment Programmes, austerity and privatization. The North also had to bear the consequences of the *almajiri* system, whereby economically destitute Muslim boys attach themselves to religious instructors who take care of their livelihood by sending them to beg in the Northern cities' traffic jams. These *almajiri* boys have repeatedly proved themselves to be recruiting grounds for Islamist forces of extremism, and also banditry, apart from suffering terrible human rights abuses while in their particular form of bondage.

In the South, similar underclass elements have become 'area boys' (lumpen elements and outright criminals) with deindustrialization in the post-1983 political economy. Albeit Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida officially kicked off Nigeria's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) only in 1986, his predecessor Muhammadu Buhari initiated the first austerity measures as early as 1983 after an oil crisis hit the economy in 1981. The South has also had to rely on what is sometimes called a 'miracle economy' with neo-Protestant pastors preaching a prosperity gospel, often very vicariously applicable to the average adherent while pastors

and apostles become millionaires in US dollar terms. Internationalized prostitution rings, internet scams, and campus cults (Ellis, 2018) complete this picture, with cults taking over campuses since the mid-1990s when radical student movements, hitherto important, gave way to campus cults that practice an inauthentic form of *juju*. Those cults also became the recruiting grounds of important segments of the Nigerian elite to such an extent that Braude calls this tier “the cultist bourgeoisie” (Braude, 2019).

Radical movements in Nigeria

Dissatisfaction with the lack of elementary security and pay arrears also strengthen labour movements and trade unions in the country, which then find ways of cooperation with middle class, human rights centered resistance (Omoyele Sowore, presidential candidate in 2019; Lekki Toll Gate Massacre in 2020). Trade union activism, and general strikes, centered on the piecemeal elimination of fuel subsidy since the early 2000s, most famously in 2012 with Occupy Nigeria (Chido Onumah should be mentioned in relation to those). Radicals at times seek links with certain representatives of particularist ethnic causes. In the years 1963-1966, many activists of the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party in Nigeria were ethnically Tiv (an underrepresented Middle Belt minority). In 2019, radical presidential candidate Omoyele Sowore met with Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, the exiled leader of IPOB - and this was a highly publicized meeting. This very occasion precipitated Sowore’s first arrest by the country’s security infrastructure in late 2019.

Army deployment and its discontents

The Nigerian Army is *deployed, not stationed*, in 22 of the 36 states of Nigeria as of 2021 (!). Both the Army and the Police operate in a violent manner. It may be said that they maintain a dynamic equilibrium of violence with rebel forces and armed robbers that rule most roads at night. Drug abuse, and irregular operational methods characterize both forces (Hansen, 2015) to an uncanny extent.

The most remarkable fact about the Fourth Republic is its counterintuitive longevity. Despite all expectations to the contrary, formal democracy has *not* been overthrown in a coup for twenty-two years. This is the single longest period of civilian rule in the country by far. The Republic’s president since 2015 (Muhammadu Buhari) is *a former military head of state* (1983-1985), with other former military heads of state (Olusegun Obasanjo, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida) also retaining their unofficial but central role in the system. Levels of insecurity and violence have recently been rising to a level where the legitimacy of the state is called into question with increasing frequency by the country’s long suffering populace. In early 2021, Nigeria recorded the second highest level of deaths caused by terrorism worldwide, after Afghanistan (Varrella, 2021). At the same time, the heavy handed responses of the organs of the Nigerian state have been credited with kickstarting not only



Boko Haram itself (Hansen, 2015) but also reinvigorating the Indigenous People of Biafra under Nnamdi Kanu, who was unjustly harassed by the authorities before he restarted agitation for Biafra from exile in 2015 (Soyombo, 2017).

It is probably fair to say that fears of domination by the major ethnic group of any given geopolitical region in Nigeria, is a strong antidote to secessionism almost everywhere. At the same time, it is difficult to predict when the dynamic of ever increasing violence, including terrorist violence, would create its own momentum and enforce its logic on events. Losing the oil producing regions adjacent to, and within the Delta would probably hit the North hardest. Northern interests however, are perceived to dominate the Army. This is the essential factor that makes wishes for peaceful secession (of Igbos, Yorubas or anyone else, such as discussed by Soyombo 2017) a *mere pipe dream*. Any secession would most definitely carry with itself violence that would exceed today's levels of constant low intensity conflict and terrorism. The ten years preceding 2019 brought 23,500 deaths caused by terrorism in Nigeria, a number that was higher than the aggregate figures for the next ten African countries on the list combined, when that list included Somalia and the entire Sahel region (Varrella, 2021)!

Inchoate feudalization in prebendal Nigeria

Conceptualizing Nigeria's political economy, it has been customary to make use of Richard Joseph's masterful analysis that attributed a prebendal system to the country's Second Republic in 1987 (Joseph, 2014). It is not my intention to question the applicability of his model to Nigeria, as client-network systems of intricate detail have so obviously characterized how Nigeria spends its billions of oil money every year since then, with no major change in the structure that prompted Joseph's initial framing of this system. What I do call for is an examination of the social formation surrounding those prebendia (patron handouts to clients) in Nigeria's politico-economic system. In a recent article of mine (Mayer, 2020a) on the radical feminist writer Ifeoma Okoye's novel *Men Without Ears* (Okoye, 1984), I employed the concept of inchoate feudalization, originally found in Sir Charles Tupper's *Our Indian Protectorate* (Tupper, 2015, p. 98) and in Charles W. Nuckolls' article *The Durbar Incident* (Nuckolls, 1990, p. 531 ff.) (also quoted by Apter, 2005, p. 180). Their feudalism is inchoate as consensual selection practices are preventing a wholesale shift towards heredity for their titles (Harneit-Sievers, 1998). Far from an all-encompassing mode of production in a Marxian sense, but equally far from the a historical parody that Baldwin resents as the role of traditional rulers in today's Africa (Baldwin, 2016), chieftaincy and royal titles today are often the worst gems in the mosaic of neocolonialist rule on the continent – going as far as banditry with ideological sanction. Attahiru Jega (2001) focuses on the cementing role that traditional rulers played for the successive military administrations of Muhammadu Buhari (1983-1985), Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993) and even the military dictator who

made Nigeria an international pariah, Sani Abacha (1993-1998), underwriting their every false step towards elusive promised elections and democracy along the way.

Nigeria's feudatories, beloved by the BBC (2013) are no ancient regime style patrons of arts who protect Venetian rococo architecture and build art collections in country homes. Most of them live in villas and mansions that look every bit as horrid as the narco mansions of other segments of the country's financial elite. But their grandezza is not without its ideological fortifications. Their religious fervor is notable, and in the decades of independence, fervor has also espoused radicalisms of hitherto unimaginable notions of exclusion. Amidst the general radicalization of the North, Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau revels in its extremity, "we rape, we take slaves" thunders its leader. But in the South, a less extremely articulated but nonetheless implied Christian supremacist ideology has also gained ground. Even Mazi Nnamdi Kanu's ethnically Igbo, self-styled Judaism is on the *stricter side* of Judaism, always preferring from among G-d's Jewish names the less obvious choice "Elohim" (the Hebrew term is more remembered in 'Bible criticism' oriented circles for implying a polytheist creation narrative – but in Jewish Orthodoxy and its Kiruv outreach, "Elohim" refers to the Creator who disciplines and punishes with justice, as opposed to the Creator with *khesed*, mercy). Noted for his love for US president Donald Trump, Nnamdi Kanu does operationalize his version of the religion as somewhat anti-Islamic in its general orientation. In Southern Christian majority areas, employing Muslims even as guards has become controversial. Traditional elites do not necessarily act as agents of moderation, or the preservation of cultural values as well as we would suppose they could. Modern Nigerian art, including modernist paintings have a following in Lagos creative and cultural elites and the diaspora (an Enwonwu artwork just sold for millions of pounds) (BBC, 2018) but business elites and most feudatories exist in a world of neophyte and aggressive religion, capable and eager to support every invented tradition that supports those selfsame neocolonial elites, and care little about authentic art and culture. Northern Salafism with its Arabic style covering of women is an invented tradition (along with most other trappings of the Wahabiyya) but so are most other royal and aristocratic traditions in other regions and religions.

When I emphasize Nigeria's fascination with titles, chieftaincy and "royalty," (I use inverted commas here because, with some exceptions in the North, legitimacy in the sense of heredity is very far from most of these 'houses'), nothing is further from my intention than the demented claim that Nigeria would "live in the Middle Ages." Nigeria, as the now late Professor Tejumola Olaniyan always emphasized so pertinently, lives entirely in modernity. Not only that: it is one of the most important life worlds that constitute modernity in the 21st century. In fact Nigeria is one of the most fashion conscious, trendy, and up-to-date countries in the world, with no fondness of the quaint. It is not only the fact that months after Childish Gambino's *This is America* rap song was released, there appeared *This is Nigeria* by the incredible Nigerian rapper Falz. The even more interesting aspect to



this is that the original song *This is America* itself, was co-produced by a Nigerian-American music entrepreneur, none other than the radical Nigerian social scientist Claude'd Ake's son!

It is no accident that Nigeria today claims the richest person of Africa (Aliko Dangote), Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is WTO's director general, and Netflix's *Dynasty* series sports a half-Igbo American bourgeois dynasty. Mainstream Anglo-Saxon feminism's most important public intellectual is Chimamanda Adichie - worldwide. It seems only a matter of time before Nigerians enter the private space race a la Elon Musk. Unlike in many other African countries where local elites are exclusively compradores, Nigeria's financial elite has significant economic power, one on a global scale (Mayer, 2020b).

Ideologies of a strict, exclusivist and identitarian nature (including extreme religion) thus support the democracy of former military dictators (Obasanjo, Buhari) ever since 1999. With its indigeneity, law of the land, sharia, and feudal law, as well as non-participatory, exclusivist practices that hinder elections (thuggery, voter intimidation, godfathers, campus cults, client networks, prebendalism), Nigeria is in effect maintaining a faux system of liberal democracy teetering on the edge with higher and higher (one would imagine elsewhere untenable) levels of violence and a number of casualties that may not be sustained indefinitely. However, it is important to note that as the new, enlightened order of Code Napoleon revoked the Jacobin abolishment of slavery, today's international system is also tolerant of local conflicts that have low incidence of blowback effects in metropolitan countries.

Many actors within Nigeria cling desperately to decency, from trade union activists to politically committed religious personalities (such as the well-known Bishop Matthew Kukah, or the Interfaith Community Center in Kaduna, a bastion of Muslim-Christian communication, cooperation and understanding). Simple people of faith in the Christian South, mainstream Muslims, or simple Igbo Jews of faith and principle, will not fall to siren voices of intercommunal hatred. But it is very important to note that they all have to cling to a moral imperative in a robber baron world of brutality and inhuman existence, where institutions whose main function would be the protection of life (such as the armed forces) are also part of a now generalized, and tragically multifaceted problem that might explode into civil war in the 2020s.

Conflict of interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exist for this manuscript.

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