A Case for Political Decentralisation in Nigeria

A thesis submitted in fulfilment for the degree of

Master of Arts (International Studies) by Research

Bowstock Umaroho

Bachelor of Science (Political Science)

Edo State University, Ekpoma, Nigeria

School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning

RMIT University

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is all my original work, except where due acknowledgement has been made. I further state that this work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. This work was undertaken during the period of my candidature.

Signed:

Date:

Witness:
Acknowledgements

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This thesis is dedicated to Tom Akpororor.
Abstract

This thesis examines the process of gradual political centralisation in Nigeria from the colonial period until today. It argues that since the formation of Nigeria in 1914, there has not been an effective state administrative structure in the governing of the nation. Pre-independence Nigeria (1888–1960) was characterised by a flawed structure put in place by the British colonial administration and the changes implemented by the successive military regimes and associated constitutional developments that followed independence have not changed the underlying problems established during this period.

Traditional approaches to political decentralisation in developing countries generally involve delegation, devolution and deconcentration. However, the role of traditional institutions in a decentralised governance structure is not always made explicit. Rather the potential roles of traditional institutions are assumed to be part of the local administrative system (e.g. local governments). As a result, they are defined as part of the governance process. This limits applicability of these models to a country as ethnically diverse as Nigeria. The central argument put forward in this thesis is that an ideal decentralised administrative system is practicable in Nigeria only if the traditional institutions actively participate in the governance of the country. However, a review of the administrative system for the period 1914-2005 shows that the powers of the traditional institutions have been eroded over time.

The thesis concludes by proposing a model for decentralising the complex administrative structure of Nigeria through ‘institutional reconciliation’. The model
follows previous approaches, but proposes a separation of the traditional institutions from both the administrative and governmental units (federal, state and local government). The thesis argues that the legitimacy of policies undertaken by any of the government units rests on these policies being consistent with ethnic, religious and cultural beliefs. It proposes one means of putting in place such a form of ‘institutional reconciliation’ while highlighting the potential problems that may also result.
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References
Chapter One – Introduction

Political decentralisation refers to the transfer of authority and responsibility from central to intermediate and local governments. In practice political decentralisation may entail the transfer of certain planning, financing and management tasks to units of central agencies (‘deconcentration’), to lower levels of government (‘devolution’), or to autonomous authorities (‘delegation’).

A feature of political decentralisation is that it alters the structure and systems of governance and the relationships between various levels of government and a range of social institutions. While deconcentration and delegation imply a reorganisation of central government, devolution means relinquishing political power (De Mello & Barenstein, 2001). When this geographical distribution of government institutions is absent in a state and the decision-making powers are in the hands of a small group of people in the capital, it is then referred to as centralisation.

This style of administrative governance is very common in most developing countries, including Nigeria. Nigeria has been under this system of centralised administrative governance since 1914 when the northern and the southern protectorate were coaxed under a single administrative control by the colonial government. Since then, the country’s administrative system has shown that its capacity to operate a decentralised federal system has been hampered by the rigidity and imbalance in the country’s structure. Attempts to decentralise on many occasions have been thwarted through different political strategies. Some political leaders have capitalised on a malfunctioning system to mismanage resources under state control.
This thesis explores the flaws in the current and past federal structures in Nigeria and proposes an administrative system in which traditional institutions are incorporated into the federal and state government.

1.1 Background

In the late 15th century, Portuguese navigators became the first Europeans to visit Nigeria. They soon began to purchase slaves and agricultural produce from coastal middlemen. The Portuguese were followed by British, French, and Dutch traders. A number of city-states were established by individuals among the Igbo and Ibibio peoples who had become wealthy by engaging in the slave trade. Uwechue (2004) noted that first contact with Europeans was in 1486 when the Portuguese visited the Bright of Benin and penetrated inland into the heart of the kingdom of Benin, with the English arriving later in 1539 (p.3).

There were major internal changes in Nigeria in the 19th century. In 1804, Usuman dan Fodio, a Fulani and a pious Muslem, began a holy war to reform the practice of Islam in the north. He soon conquered the Hausa city-states and maintained its independence. Usuman dan Fodio’s son established a state centred at Sokoto, which controlled most of northern Nigeria until the arrival of the British.

Nigeria’s current borders were determined by European colonial powers at the Berlin conference in 1885 when Africa was arbitrarily demarcated and the coastal area where Nigeria is now situated was entrusted to Britain. This was as a result of the presentation by the British of signed treaties collected from the people of these regions. The inhabitants of these areas were Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo and other
tribes. The major livelihoods of these tribes were farming and the rearing of animals, along with trade in agricultural commodities including palm oil, yams, pepper, cocoa and groundnuts with the Europeans after the collapse of the slave trade (Agbodeka 1974, pp. 72 & 89).

Nigeria was apportioned to Britain for administrative purposes in order to facilitate their economic activities and transportation of commodities from regions for onward shipment to Britain by sea. The encroachment of the British government on Yoruba land resulted in the Lagos government signing treaties with the traditional rulers (the Alaafin) who put all Yoruba land under the British protection. The Yoruba protectorate and the Lagos Colony were then jointly administered as the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos.

Following a series of confrontations with the Alaafin over several years, the British were able to exert authority and extended their control to the southern portion of the Niger territories. The British then amalgamated this territory with the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, so that all of southern Nigeria came under one administration as the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Lagos became the headquarters of the whole region.

Effective British control of northern Nigeria was achieved after three years of hard fighting with the emirates and in 1900 the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria was established, with Lord Lugard as the first high commissioner. With the conquest of the northern Nigeria accomplished, Lord Federick Lugard then amalgamated the southern and the northern parts of Nigeria in 1914.
The differences between the peoples from different regions were not considered in establishing these structures. However, while the British Colonial authority did nothing to integrate these different political units, the Richards Constitution of 1946 did recognise three regions—the northern, western and eastern regions, along with the Colony of Lagos. Affirming this view, Okhaide (1996) declares that:

The colonisation of Nigeria brought about the unification of these diverse groupings into a single geo-political entity now known as the Nigerian state without due regards to the district and autonomous existence of these groupings…. it has gone down as an important landmark in Nigerian political history and also formed the seed bed on which to be planted the seeds of Nigeria federalism (pp.10, 25).

Nevertheless, Nigerian nationalists were dissatisfied with the level of indigenous participation in government. This led to a number of constitutional reforms between 1951 and 1957. These reforms saw the gradual federalisation of Nigeria’s unitary colonial state. As the prospects of independence became clearer, Nigerian politicians withdrew into their ethnic regions to mobilise support for competitive politics. Mutual fear and suspicion of domination among geo-ethnic groups generated intense pressure on the colonial administration for a federal Nigeria.

In 1956, the eastern and western regions secured self-governing status, while the northern region’s self-government had to wait until 1959. By 1957, a political diarchy had been established which saw Nnamdi Azikiwe (from the Igbo tribe in the eastern part of Nigeria) became a ceremonial head of government. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa
from the Hausa tribe in the Northern region was made prime minister after a controversial general election of 1959. Nigeria was then granted its independence in 1960.

From 1960 until today, the Nigerian state has lurched from one political crisis to another, with a series of military coups, civil war and ethno-religious conflicts. This has been seen as a result of the centralised administrative structure of the country, which had its origins in the colonial administration before Nigeria gained independence (Kanu 2004).

According to Ajayi (2003), the flawed administrative structure has had three serious implications: it has hindered development by disempowering and under funding local authorities; it has limited democratic participation to the mere casting of votes during elections; and it has fuelled corruption in the polity (p. 1).

Conflict between the political parties and party conflict within the Action Group Party (AGP), which formed the official opposition in the federal parliament, dominated the first three years after independence. The leadership of the AGP favoured the adoption of democratic socialism but its leader, Obafemi Awolowo was jailed for treason. Amidst this confusion, the military under Major General Aguiyi Ironsi took power in February 1966 and implemented Decree No. 8, which transformed the country into a unitary state. The centralisation of Nigeria became more pronounced as a result of this decree, which unified the federal and regional civil services. Under this structure, the states were reduced to little more than administrative units of the federal government, while the federal government made
several uniform laws for the country. The federal government also operated a federal account system in which it controlled all funds raised through agriculture and mineral resources. This structure has prevailed regardless of whether civilian or military governments have been in power (Library of Congress 1991).

The model of governance in Nigeria promotes a system in which the federal government has overwhelming power in all areas of political, economic and financial affairs, while the subordinate levels are tasked with implementing federal government policies and programs. This is a distortion of the usual practices of a federal system in which the fundamental and distinguishing characteristic is that neither the central nor the regional governments are subordinate to each other. Rather, the two are co-ordinate and semi-independent. Local political activists and commentators such as Wole Sohinka and Anthony Enahoro have recognised this deceptive structure and have been calling for a sovereign national conference in which representatives of every ethnic group can discuss how they might share government in Nigeria.

1.2 Justification for the study

Despite decades of discussion, administrative governance in Nigeria remains highly centralised. The reason for this is that those in power have not adequately instituted a decentralised system that suits the traditional features, cultures, and socio-political and historical backgrounds of the Nigerian people. The amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates by the British colonial government was undertaken without sufficient understanding of the differences between regions. The joining of two regions as one administrative system has resulted in the administrative
deficiencies that persist to today, as subsequent government officials, military officers and political leaders have maintained this structure. This thesis will propose a decentralised system that suits Nigerian society.

1.3 Objective of the study and research questions

This thesis examines the case for political decentralisation in Nigeria. According to many Nigerians, an over-centralised governing structure that vests enormous power in a winner-take-all central government is the major cause of political unrest and corruption in Nigeria. They stress that the defective administrative structure has hindered development and limited people’s participation in governance to the mere casting of vote during elections. Politicians seek government positions out of self-interest, and some have embezzled and appropriated government funds while in office (Ajayi 2003, p. 1).

General Olusegun Obasanjo, former military head of state and current president, argued in an interview in 1983 that democracy releases the total energy of all citizens for development. Its opposite, restraint, curtailment, suppression and oppression under authoritarian regimes, breeds resentment, apathy and withdrawal which releases negatives thoughts and tendencies that undermine social and economic development (Agbese 1988, p. 3).

Within this strand of social critique, political writers like F. E Iyoha, Anthony Enahoro and Wole Shohinka have argued that the only way out of this political situation is to restructure the country’s administrative system. Therefore, the objective of this study is to:
(i) Explore the implications of the country’s imperfect federal structure.

(ii) Propose an effective and flexible model for genuine federalism.

The thesis concentrates on Nigeria’s defective constitution as well as the issue of resource control and the formula for the allocation of resources, which the federal government has used as a weapon to starve the subordinate units of funds thereby making them ineffective in performing their functions (Okafor 2004; Ossai 1999). The study also considers the differences and similarities between Nigeria’s federal system and that of federal systems in other democratic states. It proposes a model of decentralisation that would devolve power and resources and promote effective participation by marginalised people in Nigeria.

The thesis has three main research questions:

1. To what extent is a flawed federal structure and over-centralisation responsible for various forms of government failure?

2. How adequate are the major existing models for decentralisation in addressing the problems identified?

3. How in practice can decentralisation be achieved in a society as complex as Nigeria’s?

1.4 Research methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is a combination of exploratory and descriptive methodologies. Exploratory and descriptive approaches are useful for
examining current models of decentralisation and practice, with the aim of developing an alternative model that is considered more consistent with the cultural, historical, socio-economic and political realities in Nigeria.

The exploratory approach ‘attempts to seek preliminary understanding of a topic, or a situation when little is known about a particular topic, and also conducted to develop or define and to test hypothesis. By contrast, the descriptive approach ‘attempts to describe systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon, services or program or provides information about…. the living conditions of a community or society or describes attitudes towards issues’ (Fortune and Reid 1999, p. 446).

Exploratory and descriptive strategies have many similarities and are compatible with each other (Neuman 1994, p. 19). Given the research questions to be addressed in this study, it was necessary to explore and describe in detail the federal system of Nigeria in order to provide a well-grounded picture of the degree of centralisation and the level of corruption and governance failure in Nigeria. This will provide an insight into the nature of federalism and political practices in Nigeria, as well as help assess the appropriateness of a federal system and practices, and provide scope for future research.

A historical approach is also used to better understand the origins of the current federal system in Nigeria, and the nature of past debates about constitutional reform. Gay defines historical research as ‘the collection and evaluation of data related to past events and occurrences in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects, or trends of those events that may help to explain present events and anticipate future
events’ (cited in Fraenkel and Wallen 1996, p. 145). This involves defining the problem, locating relevant sources, summarising information obtained from sources and evaluating the available sources (Fraenkel and Wallen 1996). Historical failures and can be considered in terms of their applicability to current problems and concerns. They can help in prediction, in testing hypotheses concerning relationships and trends, and in understanding present practices and policies more fully (Fraenkel and Wallen 1996).

In this regard, the study is based on existing literature on the subject. This involves examining what has already been written on the subject and also providing fresh insight into solving the problem. This method is based to a large extent on secondary sources: textbooks (political histories and political theory on federalism), international organisation reports, journal and magazine articles, and newspaper reports. Government documents have also been used.

The focus of my analysis is successive governments, civilian and military regimes, that have ruled Nigeria from inception to 2005. This is because each government, regardless of constitution, has maintained the centralised administrative structure in the federal system, with only minor modifications. The argument will be that the centralisation of power has contributed to the emergence of corrupt government officials in Nigeria, while the citizens of the country have been made more distant from the government.

Hill and Kerber observe that historical methods (a) enables solutions to contemporary problems to be sought in the past; (b) throws light on present and future trends; (c)
stresses the relative importance and the effects of the various interactions that are to be found within all cultures; and (d) allows for the revaluation of data in relation to selected hypotheses, theories and generalizations that are presently held about the past. As Hill and Kerber point out, the ability of history to employ the past to predict the future, and to use the present to explain the past, gives it a dual and unique quality which makes it especially useful for all sorts of scholarly study and research (Hill & Kerber, quoted in Cohen & Manion 1989, pp. 48 - 49).

Parts of the thesis adopt the narrative form of traditional history by sequential telling of a story, the history of events and, inevitably, the history of those who act them out. Simon Schama, for example, used historical methods in *Citizens*, in which he studied the French Revolution as a connected and longitudinal story. Indeed, Schama claimed that his method was to return to the style of the nineteenth-century chronicles. His justification for this approach constituted a defence of narrative, stating that, ‘if, in fact, the French Revolution was a much more haphazard and chaotic event and much more the product of human agency than structural conditioning, chronology seems indispensable in making its complicated twists and turns intelligible’ (Cohen & Manion 1989, pp. 48-49).

1.5 Limitations to the study

The major limitation to the study has been in sourcing material with the researcher having to rely heavily on online materials such as newspaper articles, journals and other publications sourced from the Internet.
1.6 Thesis structure

Chapter Two explores the major models of decentralisation and their relationship with each other. It will also illustrate how these models have been practiced in some countries and why these models have not put into practice in developing nations.

Chapter Three presents the political history of Nigerian federalism and the processes that brought about centralisation. Its emphasis is on the different inhabitants living in the regions and their political, economic and social background, and how they related to each other with the imposition of indirect rule and constitutional development until independence in 1960.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the country’s political development from independence and examines the circumstances that brought about the first military coup in Nigeria, and the role of military and civilian governments in maintaining a centralised administrative structure.

Chapter Five explores the effects of centralisation, in particular corruption by government officials. It considers the deceptive behaviour of government officials in diverting government funds and the generation of a huge national debt. It also examines regional insecurity and how the states have agitated for greater control of resources, resulting in inter-regional tensions.

Chapter Six discusses the activities of various institutions at the local levels, and considers the operations of these institutions as a model for good governance in Nigeria. It also discusses the role of traditional institutions in the process of
decentralisation in Nigeria during the period covered in the study. It concludes this chapter by pointing out the limitations to the study.

The conclusion summarises the arguments for incorporating traditional institutions the basis for a decentralised system of administration in Nigeria.
Chapter Two – Models of Decentralisation

This chapter reviews the different models for political decentralisation and discusses how decentralisation might be achieved in Nigeria’s complex political system, in particular, how it could be applied to meet the interests of different ethnic nationalities. This chapter stresses the need for any political reform to reflect the diverse interests, political history, economy and religion of the inhabitants of the nation. To this end, I argue that decentralisation is essential, in order to integrate traditional institutions, along with traditional norms and values of various nationalities and regions into the governance structure.

The alignment of administrative governance with traditional institutions and indigenous knowledge in Nigeria is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, which lies at the heart of European Union law. This principle states that matters ought to be handled by the smallest (or the lowest) competent authority. The principle of subsidiarity holds that government should undertake only those initiatives that exceed the capacity of individuals or private groups acting independently. This thesis argues that devolution to regional and local levels of government, which are more closely integrated with traditional power structures, would significantly improve the quality of governance in Nigeria.

2.1 Participation

Participation could be described as an umbrella term that includes different means for the public to directly participate in political, economical or management decisions in
an organisation or country. The absence of citizen participation in a developing nation like Nigeria has, to a very large extent, contributed to the problems of administrative governance in the country. The complex situation stems from the inflexible system of governments and corrupt practices of political leaders and government officials, which, I argue, has resulted from the inability of government officials to imbibe the socio-political, economic and historical background of the nation’s people.

As Turner and Hulme (1997) have noted, the geographical distance between the majority of the population and central government institutions is a major impediment to participation:

A major obstacle to the effective performance of public bureaucracies in most developing countries is the excessive concentration of decision-making and authority within central government. Public sector institutions are commonly perceived to be geographically and socially remote from ‘the people’ and to take decisions without knowledge or concern about actual problems and preferences. The popular remedy for such centralisation is decentralisation, a term which is imbued with many positive connotations—proximity, relevance, autonomy, participation, accountability and even democracy (p. 151).

In recent years, a wide variety of transitional and developing countries have pursued decentralisation as a means of fully involving citizens in decision-making. It involves a central government transferring some of its political authority to local entities and, crucially, some of its resources and administrative responsibilities. These local
entities then provide some basic public services and functions. Multi-purpose local councils have been created for this purpose in many developing states (UNDP 2003a, p. 134).

It is arguable that citizen participation in the local affairs in many developing countries is limited to the casting of votes at election time. Even under the civilian dispensation in most developing nations, participation could be said to be limited to the right to elect councillors and to co-produce services voluntarily without any legal authority. These arrangements may appear democratic but are deceptive. Manor (1999) posited that, ‘[c]ommunity contributions which provide people with no voice cannot be regarded as democratic, but when some form of supervision or influence is permitted, they have some democratic content’ (p. 9). Wide consultation and citizen participation, along with jurisdictions large enough to cope with the problems that pervade an entire area are imperative to the success of any democratically elected government.

According to the United Nations Human Development Report (UNDP 2003), ‘The contemporary understanding of participation is as a means to bring individuals close to social, economic, cultural and political processes which directly affect their lives and affords them the role of responsible citizens’ (p. 8). As citizens, people may have direct control over these processes, or in other cases the control may be only partial or indirect.

Participation means that people are closely involved in economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives…. the important thing is
that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development (UNDP 2003, p. 93).

The Skeffington Committee (UK), in their 1969 report on public participation in planning, put it this way:

We understand participation to be the act of sharing in the formation of policies and proposals. Clearly, the giving of information by the local planning authority and of an opportunity to comment on that information is a major part in the process of participation, but it is not the whole story. Participation involves doing as well as talking and there will be full participation only where the public are able to take an active part throughout the plan-making process (p. 1).

The key aspect of this philosophy is that citizens become equal partners with the government and collectively develop a state. It is commonly agreed that this type of relationship is most likely to create the conditions for high living standards, longevity and good educational opportunities. Thus participation is both a goal of human development and also a means for achieving it. The degree and type of participation are determined by the distribution of power in the society, hence participation and empowerment are linked aspects of development. Participation can be considered as two faces in one; it aims to develop the society and it also develops the person who participates by reinforcing their capabilities, their potential and their active and effective role in the society (UNDP 2003, p. 8).
An earlier UNDP reports elaborated on this point further:

Participation from the human development prospective is both a means and end…Greater participation has an important role to play here…But human development is also concerned with personal fulfilment so, active participation, which allows people to realize their full potential and make their best contribution to society, is also an end in itself (UNDP 1993, p. 21).

The concept of development in general and human development in particular focuses on raising the quality of life and increasing choice by improving the level of satisfaction of the individual in health, education and knowledge, and with the best use of the available resources. Consequently, the individual benefits from a larger and more equitable share of the domestic product.

Invariably, each country has its own way of allowing for participation, in light of its circumstances and development requirements, while the degree and type of participation will be determined by the distribution of power in that society. As stated in the United Nations Human Development Report (UNDP 2003):

Decentralisation efforts are strongly influenced by a country’s size population, history political climate and geographic and ethnic diversity. These differences call for different arrangements between central and subnational levels including devolution delegation and deconcentration (p. 137).
However, participation can only occur in an atmosphere of democratic governance, where grassroots participation is nurtured and every citizen is equally accountable in the society.

Participation requires a social, economic and political context, which for most commentators is the manifestation of good governance. …It carries with it a powerful idea of democratic rule that relies on transparency, accountability and public participation. It is good governance that creates the political space and provides the means for people to participate in society and allows them to influence the decisions that may affect the way they live their lives. In this way citizens help to legitimize governance and governing institutions, while also guaranteeing that the objectives of government action truly meet the aspirations of the people (UNDP 2003, p. 3).

The argument of this thesis follows that of scholars who argue that the issue is no longer whether citizen participation is desirable but what forms and processes of citizen participation are best suited to a specific situation (Irvin and Stansbury 2004). The thesis proposes a decentralised administrative system in Nigeria, which incorporates traditional institutions to foster grassroots participation. This would provide a sense of belonging for Nigerians, including those in rural areas. The already established system of ‘shadow states’ at the community level is a particular example explored.
2.2 Decentralisation

Decentralisation is usually referred to as the transfer of power from the central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Crook and Manors 1998; Agrawal and Ribot 1999). This official power transfer can take various forms. It could involve the transfer of ‘natural resources management to local individuals and institutions located within and outside government’ (Yuliani 2003, p.3). It could also be referred to as the political or democratic transfer of authority to representative and downwardly accountable actors, such as elected local government, and administrative decentralisation, a process known as deconcentration. Another form is the delegation of managerial responsibility for specified functions to other public organisations outside normal central government control, whether provincial or local government or agencies.

Nigeria experienced a form of decentralisation between 1967 and 1975 when twelve states were created out of the previous four regions. The number of states increased to nineteen in 1976, twenty-one in 1987 and thirty-six in 1991, with managerial responsibility transferred to the state and local governments for specific functions.

2.3 Devolution

Maddick defines devolution as ‘the legal conferring of powers to discharge specified or residual functions upon formally constituted local authorities’ (Iyoha 1999, p. 93). In a federal system this entails the sharing of powers or devolution of powers from the national to the state governments and then to the local authorities. Such territorial demarcations of authority have greater capacity to ensure efficient socio-economic
progress and a degree of power-sharing and democratic participation. It entails the downward transfer of power and resources to lower-level authorities which may be more democratic. As subdivisions of the state they are expected to be, within limits, autonomous self-governing and devoid of administrative agents of the central government. Iyoha (1999) adopts Rondinelli’s definition of the delegation of power as an ‘act whereby a political authority invested with certain powers turns over the exercise of those powers in full or in part, to another authority’ (p. 67). Countries such as Spain, Italy, South Africa and France have devolved powers via bicameral legislatures. For example, South Africa, a highly devolved political system, has its legislative power vested in a bicameral Parliament, comprising a National Assembly and a National Council of Provinces and represented on the basis of ten members from each provinces. Delegation is therefore seen as a more elaborate form of decentralisation than deconcentration.

Nigeria devolves power to its subordinate bodies (state and local government) whenever these subordinates are created. The military regime between 1985 and 1993 devolved power and resources to the state and direct finance to local government. However, devolution has not in practice enhanced democracy in most developing countries as it is often found to be a mere passing down of administrative responsibilities with little of the funding required to fulfil those responsibilities. Devolving decision-making to local authorities risks being an empty gesture unless backed by sufficient financial resources, administrative capacity and mechanisms for holding those authorities accountable. Manor (1999), argues that to be effective, decentralised systems must have:
Sufficient power to exercise substantial influence within the political system and over significant development activities; sufficient financial resources to accomplish important tasks; adequate administrative capacity to accomplish those tasks; and reliable accountability mechanisms…to ensure both the accountability of elected politicians to citizens, and the accountability of bureaucrats to elected politicians (p. 55).

In doing so, the central government still holds a larger amount of power, allowing it to control and regulate the governmental processes for smooth administrative governance and development for the benefit of the people of any nation. Peck (1996) observes that:

In shifting responsibilities and resources to lower tiers in the federal hierarchy, the national government still retains authority to set the direction for change, as this complex sub-national reconstitution of state power and regulatory structures is occurring within a set of political, discursive, and institutional parameters established by the national states (p. 3).

Privatisation can result in devolution if it involves the transfer of government functions to commercial firms and non-profit organizations, thus substituting the private sector for components of the public sectors. Examples of the government’s encouragement of, and partnership with, the private sector include the establishment of quasi-government corporations (for example, the US Postal Service, Amtrak); the employment of private contractors (for example, for road construction and other forms of infrastructure); and the use of vouchers and subsidies to be spent in the
commercial sector (for example, food stamps, agricultural export incentives and rent subsidies) (Staeheli, Kodras and Fint, 1997, p. 81).

Staeheli, Kodras and Flint (1997) also refer to dismantling as a form of devolution. This refers to the withdrawal of a government function no longer deemed appropriate for the state to provide (p. 82). Dismantling is accomplished through the outright elimination of programs or by the more covert mechanisms of cutting financial support, allowing funding to fall behind the cost of living, or complicating regulatory procedures to the point that administration oversight is rendered impossible. In the case of complete dismantling, the state reduces the scope of its activities, and these either cease to exist or fall to whomever will take responsibility. Private firms may see financial incentives to acquire government assets or services. Alternatively, responsibilities may fall to the domestic sphere. For example, the retraction of government responsibility for long-term health care in the US, via Medicaid, requires many households to assume responsibility for family members who are elderly or severely disabled, regardless of their financial ability or competence to do so.

2.4 Deconcentration

Deconcentration is the geographical dispersal of agents of the central governments into regional areas. In other word it is a mere shifting of administrative power to local offices of central government ministries, often with no financial backing.

Iyoha (1999), points out that the officials who operate such offices enjoy deconcentrated or delegated powers. But they are functional powers favouring
privileges rather than rights, and they can be withdrawn or manipulated by the centre at will (p. 93).

According to Manor (1999) when deconcentration occurs in isolation, or when it occurs together with fiscal decentralisation but without simultaneous democratisation—that is, when agents of higher levels of government move into lower arenas but remain accountable to only to persons higher up in the system—it enables central authority to penetrate more effectively into those arenas without increasing the influence of organised interests at those levels. In other words the central government has not given up any authority, it has simply relocated its officers at different levels or points in the national territory. It is effectively centralisation, since it enhances the leverage of those at the apex of the system. This is especially true in less developed countries.

Mawhood (1993) argues that:

‘deconcentrated’ field offices takes most of its decisions—even major ones—without being subject to local pressures, though it may sometimes enter into voluntary consultations with local notables. Demands from central government are much stronger than those from the local population and the field officer (less secure than his counterpart in the West) is constantly concerned to satisfy his political masters (pp. 2-3).

Deconcentration, in many cases, can be seen as more of a necessity of governance than a real sharing of the power among the different levels. Historically, deconcentration, the weakest form of decentralisation, has appeared in many cases
and forms. Most of the time, certain forms of weak decentralisation work well in basically centralised systems; even socialist governments had different levels of government.

Calvert (1975) posited:

> Central governments are always forced to distribute power and authority to subnational tiers of government Pragmatically, the power of government needs always to be distributed among a number of individuals if the business of government is to be carried on (p. 5).

This is not only a feature of modern democracies but seems to be present in early historical times also. According to Calvert:

> Even the despot will need to vest authority in others if his position is to be sustained; he cannot personally collect all the taxes, punish all the criminals and, single-handed, wage a foreign war. In all but very small and simplest polities, then, authority needs to be distributed. (p. 5).

While a distribution of power is a necessary feature of all governments, it has often been used as rhetoric in authoritarian and totalitarian systems, as being a form of democratisation.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP 1993) observed that:

> [in] most developing countries decentralisation has been limited to deconcentration. Even Chile, Indonesia, Morocco and Zimbabwe have
dispersed relatively little real power. All four have ostensibly autonomous levels of local government … but the resources they control are small, their decision-making powers narrow and many local appointments are imposed from above (p. 257).

Such countries are governed under the guise of a federal system when in practice key features of a genuine federal administrative system are absent. This style of governance, where power and resources are concentrated at the central government while the subordinates are mere implementers of their federal policies, is generally viewed as undemocratic. While it is clearly an aspect of it, decentralisation in the form of deconcentration is not a satisfying substitute for genuine devolution of central authority. When deconcentration produces, in effect, the opposite of decentralisation, it hardly warrants consideration in this study. But it can also be linked to mechanisms that give people at lower levels some voice in the decisions made within state institutions, and in those cases it can produce a degree of genuine decentralisation.

Nigeria experienced this form of decentralisation during the first military government of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon when twelve states were created, each having offices of federal ministries as representatives of the federal government.

2.5 Decentralisation by default

Decentralisation by default occurs when government institutions became so ineffective that they fail almost entirely to make the influence of central authorities penetrate to lower levels, such that people at the grassroots became cynical about government. When this occurs in countries with lively civil societies, voluntary
associations or non-governmental organisations at lower levels sometimes step in to generate development projects. Resources for such projects—which are either mobilised at local level or obtained from nongovernmental sources higher up—accrue to those groups and a kind of decentralisation, unintended by government, takes place.

This decentralisation by default occurred in Nigeria when the Directorate of Foods Roads and Rural Infrastructure failed to yield any meaningful result, and the military regime of General Ibrahim Babagida in 1986, under the Structural Adjustment Program, encouraged organisations, voluntary or private establishments to provide certain services in the communities (Iyoha 1999, p. 95).

2.7 Privatisation

Privatisation involves the transfer of ownership or control from the public to the private sector, as well as changes in income flows between groups.

Since 1999 Nigeria’s civilian government has been privatising its public enterprises. Unfortunately, the process has been characterised by corrupt practices and those benefiting most are those with political and financial influence.

2.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has examined the major models of decentralisation and their operations and effects. It has also discussed the relationship between these models and considered example of their practice. It argued that the effective practice of these
models is largely limited to developed nations and not developing countries such as Nigeria with complex and diverse natures.

The above-described models of decentralisation which Nigeria had practiced under centralised administrative governance in an ethno-linguistic diverse nation are unlikely to function well when the institutions responsible for governmental activities are ineffective or poor. Hence, Dia’s (1996) reasoning that:

The inherited disconnected system in which modern governance and public administration systems were superimposed on the traditional institutions and indigenous management system of civil society maintains neglect of local self-governance and therefore reintegrated (p. 43).

In Nigeria’s case, therefore, an administrative system that accommodates traditional institutions that already have a strong support base at the local level is an alternative for consideration in subsequent chapters.

This chapter examines the historical origins of Nigerian political federalism. It discusses political, cultural, economic and social formation of the peoples living in these areas and how these groups related to each other before European colonial rule. It also discusses the causes for the imposition of indirect rule and its consequences, including the eventual union of northern and southern Nigeria under colonial rule. It further explains the effects of amalgamation on the people dwelling in these regions and the rise of nationalist leaders. It then discusses the country’s constitutional development up to independence in 1960. This chapter argues that the ethnic differences of the regions are incompatible with centralisation of the state and that this has led to many problems in governance and, further, that these could be alleviated if a decentralised system incorporating traditional institutions was adopted.

This chapter draws on the work of Oyoobvare (1985), Okhaide (1996), Agbodeka (1965), and Elaigwu (2002), Eraikhuemen (2004) and a Library of Congress (1991) country study, to help analyse the development of Nigeria’s federal polity from colonial protectorate, through military rule and to civilian government. Each of these phases in Nigeria political development is considered in turn.
3.1 Pre-independence Nigeria

Nigeria’s borders were set by Europe’s colonial powers when they roughly demarcated the African continent among themselves for economic interest. The Britain established control after it presented treaties it had signed with the people of these regions (Agbodeka 1965). These people had a long history prior to European occupation, which is now outlined.

3.2 Hausa-Fulani states

The rise of the Hausa states occurred between 400 and 800 AD, however, it was not until 1200 that they began to effectively control the region. The history of the area is intricately tied to Islam and the Fulani, who wrested political power from the Hausa in the early 1800s following a series of religious wars. At the beginning of Hausa rule, the seven states of Hausa-land divided up production and labour activities in accordance with their location and natural resources. The Kano and Reno areas of the Hausa-land were known to be the major producers of cotton, weaving and dyeing it before it was sold to other states. Other areas produced groundnuts and reared animals.

The political headquarters of the Hausas was Biram, while Zaria was the main source of labour. Other parts of the Hausa region, like Katsina and Daura, were strategically positioned for the market, while the Gobir area was responsible for protection of the region against invaders. The early Hausa rulers were the seven children of Bayinjida, and those who could trace their lineage back to Bayajidda (their founder) were accepted as royalty (Ndoh 1997). When Islam was introduced, many Hausa rulers
adopted this new religion while at the same time complying with traditional ways. These rulers later formed a centralised system of governance in the northern part of Nigeria.

Hausa social life was in keeping with their religious belief and, as Muslims, they celebrated important dates in the Muslim calendar such as the Id-el-kabiri and Id-el-Fitr. Following a series of religious wars or jihads, the northern part of what is today’s Nigeria was unified in the name of Islam under the auspices of the Fulani Empire between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (Library of Congress 1991, p. 2).

3.3 Yoruba kingdom

The origin of the Yoruba kingdom has it that Oduduwa, the ancestor of the Yoruba people, was brought to earth by God with a chain and directed his seven sons to form cities, which later became kingdoms.

Each kingdom was ruled by an Oba whose bloodline could be traced to Oduduwa and had the blessing of senior chiefs, and who had under him a number of subordinate towns and villages. In terms of political administration, an Oba ruled with a council of chief and elders, and together they formed the administrative system. The main town was ruled by the Oba and the subordinate towns were ruled indirectly through the Baale or Oloja, whose appointment was approved by the Oba.

The Council of Chiefs acted as a legislative assembly that deliberated on political, economic and socio-religious issues and made decisions on how to address them. The
Oba followed the advice of the elders and chiefs and any Oba who ruled autocratically was compelled to commit suicide through the presentation of an empty calabash.

The judicial functions were performed both by the Oba and his most senior chiefs and strict adherence was paid to the basic patterns of people’s lives in judicial matters. The taboos and rules that governed the people were primary and had to be obeyed, while the Oba called on senior chiefs to meet and decide on punishment for transgressions.

The Yoruba system of administration was, therefore a form of check and balance system with the Oba having executive legislative and judicial powers vested in him, with convention dictating a need to have dialogue with his chiefs before making decisions. Likewise, the chiefs were subject to checks by the people.

The people of Yoruba were largely common farmers, predominantly growing cocoa and yams. The political style and social life varied in the different regions, but largely revolved around an urban centre in the area, rather than a singular central authority.

3.4 Igbo society

During the pre-colonial period Igbo society, unlike northern and western Nigeria, had no central government. The Igbo lived in a kind of stateless society, living in a small group of village-based communities with similar administrative structures and customs. The Igbos had no chiefs and some of them relied on oracles and deities to guide them. Farming was the major occupation and the social organisation was based
on an extended family with members bound by kinship. The head of every household represented the family in village meetings, while the most senior heads of families constituted the council of elders in each village. Decisions taken at the meetings of elders would be conveyed to the family by the elder representing them.

The political historian Okhaide (1996) observed that:

> the Igbo had a diffused decentralised traditional political system. A political system with power centred round the council of elders and village assemblies. A system where Kinship groups, aged group society played considerable roles in the governance of the society …. in the Igbo traditional system, no chief or traditional ruler had overwhelming control or could rule absolutely on behalf of the colonialist (p. 35).

### 3.5 The role of traditional rulers

Prior to colonial rule the Emirs, Obas, Obis and others chiefs had each established their own means of administering their regions and were able to maintain peace and order by preserving their own cultural traditions. During this period, there were effective judicial systems and accountability, and crime rates were low as there were mechanisms for maintaining law and order in the different regions. In the traditional administrative system, the region’s youth were effectively mobilized to police the communities and were also called upon to provide communal labour.

Venson (1995) observed that:
Traditional leadership, in its form before external interference, operated on the principle of community participation, consultation, consensus, and an acceptable level of transparency through the village council or open tribal consultative meetings. These principles are not too different from the ones which modern democracies prescribe as essential for democracy! It might serve the purpose, therefore, that countries of Africa which are striving to gain good governance, should look with renewed detail to the role traditional governance and the aspirations of new democracies the world over (p. 2).

Despite the marginalisation of traditional rulers in Nigeria’s government, they are still very powerful at the local level and are often called upon by the government to appeal to people in their regions for calm and co-operation with government authorities.

3.6 **Indirect rule**

Indirect rule was ‘the British policy which enabled the British official or colonial administrators to team up with the chiefs in order to govern the colonial people effectively and efficiently’ (Oyebola 1971, p. 177). It began in 1900, when Federick Lugard was appointed high commissioner to northern Nigeria after having served in India, Egypt and East Africa. Lugard realised there existed an established system of rulership in the region, with the Sultan of Sokoto Caliphate regarded as the spiritual and religious head. The Sultan was held in high esteem and had Emirs that ruled other emirates who reported to him. This well-arranged traditional system of rulership, along with the size of the new territory and its population, prompted Lugard to implement a system of indirect rule. This also addressed the shortage, if not complete
absence, of subordinate clerical and technical staff and artisans to help establish the
new administration, as well as the lack of an effective communication system
(Momodu 2004). In particular, the British faced a shortage of labour for extending the
frontiers of free trade and commerce. They were also anxious not to do anything
which might be construed as interference with the right of Muslims to the practice
their religion.

Lugard introduced a system of indirect rule in northern Nigeria to allow the colonial
rulers to govern the inhabitants of the regions via their traditional rulers. Britain was
more interested in the economic exploitation of her west African colonies than in
establishing extensive governance structures surplus to their requirements. According
to Okhaide (1996):

Lord Lugard who first introduced indirect rule in West Africa, assured the
traditional rulers that they would continue to rule in the same old ways while
maintaining their culture and tradition but that in return the traditional rulers
would obey all instructions of the colonial government through the colonial
representatives…. the reasons for the introduction of the system of indirect
rule was that the geographical area of Nigeria was very large and unknown to
the colonialists; the British officials were too few to make direct rule feasible;
it was a cheaper means of administration for the British whose policy was that
territories should be able to pay for the cost of administering the areas in
question; the means of communication was poor; there was language barrier;
the native political institution particularly that of the northern part of Nigeria
and the Western part were suitable for its practice. The British government did not want to disrupt or interfere with the culture of the people within its British territory (p. 34).

Indirect rule succeeded to varying degrees in all regions of Nigeria. In the north where powerful autocratic emirates had existed before the British rule, indirect rule was very successful and therefore characterised British colonial rule in that area.

Indirect rule implied the existence of two levels of government in northern Nigeria in the period of Lugard’s high commissionership. At the apex was the protectorate government headed by the high commissioner and comprising the residents, the other European political and technical staff and their African clerical and non-clerical supporting staff (Aloje 1996, p. 9).

The authority of this government extended over the whole protectorate and covered every aspect of the internal administration of the territory. Subordinate to this was the native administration of each state headed by the state’s paramount chief and comprising his principle traditional counsellors, aides and staff of lower ranks.

The whole of northern Nigeria was divided into a number of provinces, each placed under the charge of a senior political officer, the Resident, who was expected to conduct the delicate political negotiations between each paramount chief in the province and the high commissioner. For more effective administration and supervision each province was further organised into divisions each of which was placed under the administrative charge of a District Officer assisted, in the case of the larger divisions, by one or more Assistant District Officers. As Ndoh (1997) put it:
The objective of the British administration in Nigeria in its approach towards the indigenous political institutions entailed the incorporation of these traditional institutions as part of the machinery of government. It is also to use them in training traditional rulers in the modern methods of government (p.11).

In order to give practical and legal effect to this principle of governing each African state through its own political institutions, Lugard enacted the Native Authority Proclamation. Under this law, the high commissioner had the power to appoint native authorities who, subject to the resident’s control and supervision, were responsible for communicating the administrative orders and instructions of the protectorate government.

In later years, as native authorities grew wealthier and better able to take on additional responsibilities, various statutes assigned to them more administrative duties. An example of this trend was the Native Revenue Proclamation, which empowered residents, with the approval of the High Commissioner, to levy an annual tax on communities in the region. It also made the native authorities tax collecting agents accountable to the high commissioner via the resident. Okhaide (1996) points out how indirect rule involved complex power relations that were often not understood by the British:

The native authority Ordinance of 1916 formally introduced indirect rule to Western Nigeria. Though the Yoruba areas which constituted the Western part of Nigeria had a centralised traditional political system with authority flowing
from the Obas at the centre, to the chiefs and to the district and village heads, little did the colonial masters know that the powers of the Obas was subject to some checks by the chiefs and in particular the ‘Oyo Mesi’ (p.34).

At the judicial level, Lugard devised a judicial system whose primary objective was to leave the administration of justice, as far as possible, to local courts following their own laws and procedures. In this way he hoped to secure continuity in the administration of justice using broadly the same judicial institution and personnel as each community had evolved for itself prior to colonial rule. He therefore introduced a policy which would preserve the traditional legal system and as many of its legal ideas and procedures as acceptable to British standards.

The effect of the judicial system was to give the paramount chief more control of the people in his region. The Native Courts proclamation can be highlighted as perhaps the most important enactment in demonstrating to the Fulani ruling class the sincerity of the high commissioner in pledging not to interfere with religious freedom and restoring them to positions of authority in return for accepting British sovereignty.

The system of indirect rule was very successful in the northern regions because of its already established traditional Islamic system of rule.

In the northern region, the colonial government took careful account of Islam and avoided any appearance of a challenge to traditional values that might incite resistance to British rule. This system, in which the structure of authority focused on the emir to whom obedience was a mark of religious devotion, did not welcome change. As the emirs settled more and more into
their role as reliable agents of indirect rule, colonial authorities were content to maintain the status-quo, particularly in religious matters (All Refers Reference 2003, p. 2).

On the other hand, the emirs who refused the authorities of the colonial master were deposed and exiled, while their powers became subject to the authority of the colonialists.

If the emirs accepted British authority, abandoned the slave trade and cooperated with British officials in modernizing their administrations, the colonial power was willing to confirm them in office. The emirs retained their caliphate titles but were responsible to British district officers, who had final authority. The British high commissions could dispose emirs and other officials if necessary. Lugard reduced sharply the number of titled fief holders in the emirates, weakening the rulers’ patronage … caliphate officials were transformed into salaried district heads and became, in effect, agents of the British authorities, responsible for peacekeeping and tax collection (Library of Congress 1991, p. 1).

3.6.1 Indirect rule in the southwest

The British, believing that the political and economic situation was the same as that in the North, introduced the same system of indirect rule in southern Nigeria. Unlike those in the north, however, the traditional rulers in the southwest did not have autonomous power like their counterparts in the North. They were subject to checks on their power by chiefs and other title-holders in their territories.
This posed a difficult situation for the colonial administrators. When the traditional ruler started making decisions unilaterally, acting on the directives of the British administrators, the local population began questioning the integrity of the Obas and their chiefs. The situation was exacerbated when a system of taxation was introduced in the Yoruba region, leading to a number of riots. The situation has been described well by Okhaide (1996):

Though the Yoruba area which constituted the western part of Nigeria had a centralised traditional political system with authority flowing from the Obas at the centre to the chiefs and to the district and village heads, little did the colonial administrators know that the powers of the Obas was subjected to some checks by the Chiefs…. [With] the introduction of indirect rule, the traditional rulers began to pass decisions independently acting on the instructions of the colonial administrators to their subjects who rejected such decisions or policy as a negation of the norms of the traditional Yoruba system … [T]he situation got worse when tax was introduced in Yoruba land, which led to the Iseyin riot of 1917 and the riot over collection of water rates in Lagos in the 1920s. Those Obas who opposed the influence of the British rule in their domain were dethroned while those that accepted the colonial administrative system were installed as kings (p. 34).

The complete success of indirect rule in the North and its partial success in the West prompted the colonial masters to introduce it to eastern Nigeria.
3.6.2 Indirect rule in the southeast

While indirect rule was successful in the north, it was far less so in the southeast. Here the British had to deal with societies that, unlike the Yoruba provinces and the Muslim emirates of the northern protectorate, did not have a centralised social and political structure, and a large territory that was more or less acephalous.

The administrators in Nigeria’s south recognised that despite the lack of an indigenous power structure they could not administer alone and that some form of assistance was needed from the chiefs or other leaders of each community. The trouble, however, was that no such chiefs or natural rulers existed or, at least, were willing to come forward.

To retrieve the situation the British had to identify, as best they could, the people who seemed to them to possess the qualities they deemed essential in anyone who could legitimate their governance. This resulted in the creation of a new class of chiefs hitherto unknown in southern society. They leaders were named warrant chiefs due to the warrant of appointment they received from the British administration. Okhaide (1996) explains the implications of the appointment of warrant chiefs:

This practice was unprecedented in the annals of the history of the Igbo political administration. Such warrant chiefs appointed lacked legitimacy from the local people and their laws were not executed by the local populace. Matter went worse with the heavy handedness of the warrant chiefs in the handling of issue of direct taxation. This was strange in Igbo land. Hence the women revolted against the warrant chiefs and their obnoxious policy of
direct taxation. Thus the Aba women riot of 1929 attests to the failure of the indirect rule in Eastern Nigeria (Okhaide 1996, p. 36).

The majority who received warrants did not have any traditional claim to the new administrative role the British imposed on them. In general, warrants went to those who had, in one way or another helped the advancing British patrol. There was also a misconception as to what the office of warrant chief involved, the general belief being that the new warrant chiefs were taken away to be sold as slaves or to be detained as servants. Given these misconceptions the local populations attempted to save their societies by hiding their real leaders and withholding their identities, and substituting them with individuals whose loss would not be altogether unwelcome to the society.

Moreover, the method of establishment of British rule by force of arms undermined the faith of the local population and was largely responsible for the lack of cooperation the administration experienced. Given this situation, the colonial office in Britain through its representatives in northern Nigeria decided to merge the northern and the southern protectorates.

Indirect rule had little success in the south-west and was a total failure in the south-east. One of the main reasons for its mixed fortunes in the south-west was that the traditional authority held by local rulers was based on democratic practices, in that the rulers were subject to some checks and could not act unilaterally without first consulting the councils of chiefs. The total failure of indirect rule in the south-east was due to the nature of the stateless communities in that region which had no prior
traditional rulers or centralised administrative systems. For this reason, the warrant
chiefs appointed by the colonial master lacked popular legitimacy and could not
assert control over the people. The main point of conflict that led to the breakdown of
indirect rule was taxation, which many warrant chiefs were unable to collect, instead
their efforts to assert their authority over tax collection sparked protests and riots in
different parts of the country, including the Aba women’s riot in 1929 in the south-
east, the Ire conflicts in the south-west and the large general action in 1945.

3.7 The Nigeria Amalgamation of 1914

Administrative difficulties aside, amalgamation of the two protectorates was based on
economic expediency. The northern protectorate was running at a severe deficit,
which was being subsidised by southern protectorate and an imperial grant-in aid
from Britain each year. This was at odds with the age-old colonial policy that each
territory should be self-sufficient. Secondly, it was felt that since the two
protectorates occupied a contiguous expanse of land without any intervening foreign
power, they should be annexed.

This was further supported by the argument that the northern protectorate could not
justifiably be separated from the southern protectorate since the north was landlocked
and depended on the south for sea transportation. Furthermore, there was the pressing
need to co-ordinate railway policy, which at that time was practically non-existent.
For all of these reasons the unification of the two protectorates was authorised by
Lord Lugard in 1914. Aloje (1997) observes that:
The northern protectorate was running at a severe deficit, which was being met by a subsidy from the southern protectorate. Again, it was a cheaper means of administration for the British whose policy was that territories should be able to pay for the cost of administering the areas in question (p.14).

The unification of the two protectorates, however, paid little regard to the differences in the socio-political, economic and religious ways of life of the people within them. This newly created country contained not only a multiplicity of pagan tribes, but also a number of great kingdoms and emirates that had evolved complex systems of government prior to contact with Europe. The annexation of these different ethnic nationalities and the inherently complex nature of that union and its manipulation by the British, impeded progress towards independence and helped create the problems encountered to date in trying to forge national integration and political stability.

Each of these grouping had different social, cultural, political and economic life different from each other. The colonization of Nigeria brought about the unification of these diverse groupings into a single geo-political entity now known as the Nigerian state without due regard to the district and autonomous existence of these groupings… it has gone down as an important landmark in Nigeria’s political history and also formed seedbed on which to be planted the seeds of Nigerian federalism (Okhaide 1996, pp. 10, 25 & 113).

3.7.1 Problems with the amalgamation

The union of 1914 was so sudden and ill-managed that the colonial masters and the people of Nigeria wondered if the new federation could survive as a country due to its
historical setting. Oyovbaire (1985) explained the lack of historical precedent for the British effort to unify the territory:

When the British had established and consolidated its structures of governance over the contemporary boundaries of the country from about 1900 onwards, no ruler or set of rulers, social class or regime had any claims of power-state over all the pre-colonial state system (p. 29).

The unification of the two protectorates was done in such a way that the merger effectively took place only on paper. As a matter of fact, although the two territories were said to be amalgamated, Lugard chose to maintain a distinction between north and south. The only reason he had for this was that he really did not want to break up the administration he had devised for the north. So even after amalgamation, the northern and southern provinces of Nigeria retained their status as British colonies, with their inhabitants having the rights of British citizens. As Okhaide has observed, Lugard centralised only where absolutely necessary, preferring regional control. This only exacerbated the growing differences between the two regions.

In order to keep the northern centralised political system for purposes of taxation, western educational and cultural values, which had taken roots in the south as a result of missionary activities were prevented from reaching the north. So the two protectorates, though amalgamated, were administered differently. Lugard centralised only those departments that he felt necessary for control of overall policy. At every turn, he shied away from the acquisition
of a large administration, so that the administration was effectively regionalized under the Lieutenant Governors (Okhaide 1996, p. 113).

Tax was introduced and this assisted the colonial authorities in building new infrastructure. Construction of roads and railways linking all the regions and building of hospital as well as other social amenities were in evidence in most cities in Nigeria. Economic interaction flourished between the regions in Nigeria, but indirect rule frustrated political co-operation among them. In fighting the Second World War, the British used revenue from the Nigeria treasury. Over time, more taxes were gradually introduced, and in total there were about fifteen types of tax administered in Nigeria during the colonial era.

The introduction of tax boosted the financial base of the British make economic, education and development activities to flourish. Links among the regions increased only on trade and not political interchange. Public works, such as harbour dredging and road and railroad construction, opened Nigeria to economic development...Other commercial crops such as cocoa and rubber also were encouraged, and tin was mined on the Jos Plateau...and improvements in ports facilities and the transportation infrastructure during World War 1 furthered economic development (Library of Congress 1991, p. 2).

3.8 The emergence of the nationalist movement

This phenomenon of maintaining different administrative systems within Nigeria even after amalgamation is referred to as amalgamation without unification. The
consequence of that policy and the growing awareness of nationalist movements in other parts of the world, coupled with the sense of frustration in continuing colonial rule, motivated Nigerians, especially the educational elites, to begin to demand indigenous participation in the governance of their country.

Early reaction against foreign control in Nigeria took the form of pre-national anti-colonial resistance, involving the early militant resistance put up against colonialism by traditional rulers such as King Jaja of Opobo, King Kosoko of Lagos and the Sultan of Sokoto. The major characteristics of this resistance were the adoption of a military strategy, with a notion of freedom that African traditional rulers should be left to rule their kingdoms in ways stipulated by their ancestors. However, this resistance did not succeed because of the inferior weapons used by African fighters. Abgedoka (1965) has observed:

The nationalist movement in Nigeria in the early stages received encouragement from the traditional ruler protests against British encroachments. As we already seen, it was the traditional authorities like Kosoko of Lagos, Pepple of Bonny and Jaja of Opobo who organised these protests (p.138).

The emergence of nationalist desires amongst the people of Nigeria stemmed from an awareness of nationalist movements elsewhere. Modern nationalism includes sentiments, activities and organisational developments aimed explicitly at self-government and independence as a nation-state existing as an equal in the international system. The position of the colonial government in Nigeria and the
policies it perpetrated, coupled with the desire of Nigerian elites for self-
determination, laid the ground for the modern nationalist struggle. As a matter of fact
although the years that followed Lugard’s governorship were among the quietest in
Nigeria political history they marked the emergence of a new class of Africans who
began to think of themselves as Nigerians rather than Igbo, Hausa or Yoruba. It was
this group which, though initially confined almost exclusively to Lagos, wrested
control of affairs from the British government and attained independence for Nigeria
in 1960.

At first modern Nigerian nationalism was promoted largely by non-Nigerians, and its
focus was on Africa as a whole, rather than on the seemingly artificial units drawn up
by the European colonial powers. Men like Edward Blyden from the West Indies,
who sought the cultural emancipation of blacks, and J. P. Jackson, a Liberian, who
edited the Lagos Weekly Record and constantly attacked the British administration,
spearheaded nationalist activity until the 1920s. It should be remembered that British
policy in Nigeria thus far had been to keep educated Africans out of local
administration.

Agbodeka (1965) argues that the rise of nationalism in Nigeria was shaped by both
external and internal influences:

[T]he work of the Pan-African Congress championed by Dr. Du Bois, the
celebrated American Negro scholar, the activities of the communists, the work
of the West African Students’ Union and the explosion of the idea of white
superiority. The influence on Nigeria of the West African Students’ Union,
founded in the United Kingdom by a Nigerian, Lapido Solanke in 1925 was particularly great…. Ex-servicemen came back propagating new ideas about democracy which they had fought to save for the world (p. 139).

The publication of the Atlantic Charter in 1945 prompted much public discussion centring on its famous third clause, which stipulated the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live. Herbert Macaulay, revered today by many as ‘the father of Nigerian nationalism’ was, however, already agitating against the government of Lagos even before Lugard became Governor-General. Although Macaulay’s activities were initially limited to Lagos, those early nationalists had a wider aim: to fight the exclusiveness and racial basis of the Crown’s system of government.

At the beginning of the struggle, the issue was not so much self-government but a measure of participation in the existing government. To this end, the National Congress of British West Africa was founded in 1920 in order that people of African descent could participate in the government of their own country, an aim inspired in part not only by the writings of W. E. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey, but also by the declaration of the American President himself on the rights of all peoples to self-determination.

This led to the formation of different political parties by Nigerian politicians, such as the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) founded in 1922 by Herbert Macaulay, the Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM) in 1937, Action Group (AG) in 1940, the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC) in 1943, and the
Northern People’s Congress (NPC) in 1951. These political organisations could be said to be the beginning of organised nationalism in Nigeria. The priority of these parties was to demand for Nigerians equal participation in the political and economic opportunities enjoyed by the colonisers. It is important to note here that the nationalist movement in the northern region was more religious in outlook, geared towards Islamic doctrines which recognised the rule of the Emirs, so nationalist sentiments there were decidedly anti-Western.

3.9 Party conflicts and their effects on federalism

With ethnicity as a ready tool for elite mobilisation for access to power and resources, and regionalism as a framework for class formation and politics alongside the structural inequities embedded in the colonial state, the stage was already set for a troubled process of federalisation in Nigeria. By 1923, when political parties were formed and with the introduction of the Nigerian Legislative Council, party formations were drawn along regional lines. As pointed out by Babatope (2004):

The period of 1951 to 1962 witnessed the consolidation of politics of ethnic chauvinism in the history of Nigeria. While the Action Group Political Party dominated political activities in the West, the NCNC was the major political power in the east and the Northern People Congress under the control of Ahmadu Bello was in control of the North (p.2).

This led to the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923. The failure of the NNDP to be an umbrella party led to the formation of the National Youth Movement (NYM) in 1938. In that year, the NYM ended the domination of the
NNDP in the Legislative Council and went ahead to establish a party that had affiliations with other political organisations. However, internal conflict caused by ethnic loyalties split the NYM. Members such as Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (a journalist and newspaper proprietor) and other Igbo members of the NYM left the organisation in Yoruba hands.

Conflict began over whom to replace Abayomi, a member of the Nigeria Youth Movement, who was to resign his seat from the Legislative Council. Yoruba indigenes within the party wanted one of their own to replace him, while the Igbos one of theirs was the best option. This controversy left the party divided and an entirely Yoruba affair. Matters came to a climax when Azikiwe, who wanted to enter the House of Representative, was defeated in his bid due to the constitutional requirements for membership of the House of Representatives.

In 1943 the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC) was formed. The NCNC later became the National Council of Nigerian Citizens which was initially by Herbert Macaulay, a veteran nationalist leader. On his death in 1947 he was succeeded by Azikiwe. In the meantime, different regional associations like the Egba Omo Oduduwa and the Jam’iyyar Mutanem Arewa (JMA) were formed in their various regions, later becoming the Action Group (AG) Party and Northern People’s Congress (NPC) respectively. Conflicts within these parties brought about the formation of other parties as well. The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), the United Nigeria Independence Party (UNIP), the Bornu Youth Movement (BYM) and the Kano People’s Party (KPP) were all formed out of NPC, while the
United People’s Party (UPP) and Midwest Democratic Front (MDF) also broke out of the AG party.

The NCNC, NPC, and the AG were the main parties of the first republic. Other political parties were highly localised parties focused on specific issues and whose main significance was that they provided avenues for one or other of the three dominant to extend their electoral reach into regions outside their principle sphere of influence.

This early history of conflict between political parties prior to independence highlights the importance of regional interests from the very beginning of Nigerian democratic politics. The conflict between the Yorubas and the Igbos, which started in the 1930s, has extended beyond Nigerian independence and the demise of the first republic until today.

In 1952-53, a census was conducted which showed that about half of the population was residing in Nigeria’s north. However, because it was assumed that the census was for tax collection purposes, many people in Nigeria evaded being counted. The estimate of numbers in other regions was considered totally unacceptable as the figures were to be used in allocating seats in the House of Representatives and for the allocation of resources. This led to strong calls for another census.

The northern region’s political strength, marshalled by the NPC, had arisen in large measure from the results of the 1952-53 census, which had identified 54 percent of the country’s population in that area—politicians stressed the connection between the census and parliamentary representation on one hand,
and the amount of financial support for regional development on the other
(All Refers Reference, 2003, p. 2).

The motive behind the agitation for a new census was the desire to break up and
weaken the northern region since it would now have more than half of the country’s
members in the House of Representative. Knowing this, the northerners created a
regional alliance with the west.

Ethnic tension and fear of domination between the three dominant ethnic groups in
Nigeria was blown out of proportion when in 1953 Anthony Enahoro, an AG member
of the House of Representatives, moved a motion for self-government for Nigeria in
1959. The northerners saw the motion as an attack on them and an attempt by
southerners to dominate them should independence be granted. On grounds of
unpreparedness the northerners rejected the motion. The result was that the British
granted self-government to the southern protectorate in 1956 before granting
independence to the whole country in 1960. The struggle for leadership positions and
dominance within the political scene due to fear and mutual suspicion led to the
adoption of a federal system of government upon independence in 1960.

3.10 Constitutional development

The pressure from these organised nationalist movements was the real beginning of
Nigeria’s constitutional development that started with the Nigerian Council of 1914
after the amalgamation of the northern and the southern protectorates.

3.10.1 The Nigerian Council of 1914
This council was the first type of constitution put in place in Nigeria. It consisted of thirty-six members in all and comprised the governor, members of the executive council, first-class residents, political secretaries, and the secretaries of the southern and the Northern provinces. According to Aloje (1996)

There were also thirteen non-official members nominated by the governor to represent the interests of commerce, shipping, mining and banking. Each nominee was to represent Lagos and Calabar chambers of commerce and one represented the chambers of mines. Six Nigerians were nominated by the governor to represent the native population of the coast and the interior. It was observed that this council was a purely advisory body as resolutions passed by it had no legislative or executive authority (p.25).

The Nigerian Council failed to meet the aspirations of Nigerians, being limited to the discussion of the governor-general’s annual address and constitution was replaced.

3.10.2 The Clifford’s Constitution

When Sir Hugh Clifford became Governor in 1922 he replaced the 1914 constitution with another which sought to remedy inadequacies. Under the new arrangement, two councils were created: a Legislative and an Executive Council. The Legislative Council had an official non-Nigerian majority and of the non-official minority fifteen were nominated by the governor to represent banking, mining, shipping and commercial concerns.
The Clifford’s constitution collapsed partly due to the lack of Nigerian representation. Another important consideration is that the constitution did not bring the north into the Legislative Council. As Okhaide (1996) has observed, the inclusion of southern Nigeria fuelled the emergence of political activities in the south, while the exclusion of the north placed it ‘in a backward position as regard political education’ (p. 59). Furthermore, the Executive Council was a purely advisory body whose advice was not binding on the governor in the exercise of his executive powers. Fatally, it was made up of twelve officials none of whom was African.

3.10.3 The Richard’s Constitution

The Richard’s constitution was drafted based on the proposals devised by Sir Bernard Bourdillion (the colonial secretary) and came into effect in August 1946 creating a Legislative Council for the whole country. It was composed of a governor (president of the council), sixteen official members and twenty-four nominated or indirectly elected members. The constitution also formally created the northern, eastern and western regions. Of the members of the Legislative Council, the north was represented by two officials and nine non-officials, while the western and eastern provinces were represented by two officials each as well as six and five non-official members respectively. Under this constitution, the regions had Houses of Assembly with the north also having a House of Chiefs. Ndoh (1997) declared that:

The three main objectives of Richard’s constitution were: to promote Nigerian unity; to stress a diversity of outlook by encouraging each of the regions to
develop along its characteristic lines; and to secure greater participation by Nigerians in the discussion of their own affairs (p.36).

The implementation of these objectives gave the Richard’s constitution its unique characteristics: the inclusion of the north in Nigeria’s constitutional development; its concept of regionalism; the incorporation of the native authorities in to the constitutional structure; the domination of the legislative councils by a non-official majority (whether nominated or indirectly elected); and efforts to represent and cater for all interests and sections of the country.

The Richard’s constitution was, however, bitterly criticised for a number of reasons: it was arbitrarily imposed on the country; its proposals were designed to create a false impression of providing for an unofficial majority when in actual fact the non-officials were either chiefs appointed by the governor or those chiefs’ nominees; it created regional councils with no legislative autonomy even on matters which were of their immediate concern; and it did not in any way extend the elective principle introduced in the Clifford’s constitution.

Again the native authority served as electoral colleges to the regional assemblies and the principles of election were not extended to the north as in the 1922 Legislative Council. Furthermore, Nigerians were not made heads of government departments and governors had veto powers that could be used arbitrarily. Moreover, the property or income qualification for voting in Lagos and Calabar excluded all the working class from voting.

3.10.4 The Macpherson’s Constitution
Against the backdrop of criticism of the Richard’s constitution and following a series of constitutional conferences and an elaborate consultation that extended to the grassroots a new constitution was introduced. The Macpherson’s constitution established a bicameral legislature in the northern and western regions of the country with Houses of Chiefs and Assembly for the two regions and a House of Assembly for the eastern region. A House of Representatives was at the central level and made up of a governor or president appointed by the governor, six executive members, 136 representatives and no more than six special members appointed by the governor. According to Aloje (1996), these members were selected through the electoral college, with an Executive Council established for each region and a Council of Ministers for the centre. Each regional Executive Council consisted of a lieutenant-governor as president, three ex-official members, two official members appointed by the lieutenant-governor and nine regional ministers. The central Council of Ministers comprised the governor as president, six ex-official members, and twelve ministers, four from each region. Nigerians were now made ministers though without any ministerial responsibility. It was:

A federal system of government with considerable powers given to the regions and a new legislative body came into being in the regions: a House of Assembly in each region, as well as House of Chiefs in the western and northern regions. These new bodies could make laws for their own regions but the Central Legislative Council which became the House of Representatives could still legislate for Nigeria as a whole. Regional Legislative Assemblies were mainly Africans (Nigerians) members and a minority of ex-officio
ministers in charge of Finance, Justice and Defence. The Lieutenant-Governors, however, possessed reserved powers to veto the decisions of these assemblies should the need arise (Agbodeka 1965, p. 143).

The Macpherson’s constitution could not work, however, for a number of reasons: it did not provide for a responsible government at the centre in that it created ministers who were only charged with responsibility for matters and not made heads of departments concerned with these matters; it did not provide for the position of the premier in the regions and prime minister at the centre; the continued power struggles between regional parties; and the Kano riots which followed.

3.10.5 The Lyttleton’s Constitution

The breakdown of the Macpherson’s constitution gave birth to yet another constitution in 1954, named after the then Secretary of State, Oliver Lyttleton. With a new fiscal arrangement and regionalisation of the public service, the constitution accepted the federal nature of Nigeria, recognising three regions, with the state government exercising residual powers. Elections were held to a House of Representatives and to The House of Regional Assemblies on a party basis. It also granted a quasi-federal status to southern Cameroon and a regionalisation of marketing boards.

Again, the constitution provided for enlarged legislative assemblies with Nigerians in the majority elected Party leaders with an overwhelming majority in the Houses of Assemblies were appointed as either premiers or prime minister in the central government. Each region, with the exception of the north, now had a premier.
Speakers were appointed to the House of Representatives and in the eastern and western Houses of Assembly. Presidents were to lead the House of Chiefs in the northern House of Assembly. Lagos was to remain the capital, while Southern Cameroon now enjoyed a large measure of autonomy subject to the assent of the high commissioner. Aloje (1996) attested that:

The constitution had a number of weaknesses: it created ministers whose loyalty tended towards their regions; it failed to provide a second chamber at the centre; and it did not provide for a prime minister at the centre. These defects led to its revision through the constitutional conferences in 1957 (p.29).

3.10.6 The 1957 Constitutional Conference

The 1957 Constitutional Conference was held in London under the leadership of the Colonial Secretary Alex Lennox-Boyd. Under the Constitutional Conference, the western and eastern regions were granted self-government in 1957, while the northern region was to have self-government in 1959. The conference provided the eastern region with a bi-cameral legislature with the establishment of a House of Chiefs for the region.

According to Okhaide (1996) report, the central legislature was to be bicameral in nature with the establishment of a Senate. The Senate was to have twelve members from each region and southern Cameroon, four from the Federal Territory of Lagos and an additional four members. The House of Representatives was to be enlarged, including an office of prime minister to be created and the governor-general
empowered to appoint any person to the position he felt commanded majority support in the House. Universal adult suffrage was to serve as the yardstick for election of members into the regional legislatures although only adult male suffrage was allowed in the northern region. 1 October 1960 was chosen as the date for Nigeria’s independence.

3.10.7 The 1958 Constitutional Conference

The 1958 Constitutional conference dealt with two vital issues. The first was the fear expressed by the minority groups that independence would mean their domination by majority ethnic groups. They therefore agitated for the creation of separate states for their areas. To allay their fears, a commission was set up under Henry Willinck to investigate whether the creation of more regions would solve this problem. At this point, the north and southern Cameroons were to be administered as trusteeship territories under the United Nations and were no longer parts of Nigeria.

3:11 Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has explored the ways in which Nigeria was legally bound together by the colonial authority and how it has operated different administrative systems in each of the regions. It also explained that nationalist movements in the northern regions were more religious in outlook, focused towards Islamic doctrines that recognised Sultan rule. The chapter also highlighted the British authority’s interests as being chiefly in the economy and that the few Nigerians who were made official and non-official members had little or no authority.
The constitution did not bring the north into the legislative council until after 1946, while the powers of the traditional rulers were drastically reduced in being given instructions and regulations by the colonial representatives. It is argued that in all constitutions, the governor-general, representing British interests, possessed too much power and, at a later stage, that ministers appointed by the governor-general had strong loyalty towards their regions. On the whole, the centralisation of powers during this period shows that decentralisation was absent in Nigeria’s formation.

The Nigerian political federation was formed on the basis of amalgamating various tribes whose differences were not sufficiently considered. The attempted merger of these pre-colonial units paid little regard to the differences in the social, political, economic and religious ways of life of the people within them. Oyovbaire (1985) observed that, ‘[p]rior to this century, the contemporary Nigerian formation was composed of state-systems or communities described variously as empires, a caliphate, kingdoms, chiefdoms, city-states, and village republics’ (p. 29). The colonisation of Nigeria brought about the unification of these diverse groupings into a single geo-political entity now known as Nigeria state without due regard to the distinct, complex and autonomous existence of these groupings (Okhaide, 1996).

The struggle to cope with the burden of administrative governance by the British colonial authorities led to the introduction of indirect rule. It is argued, however, the British merely put in place an administrative system to facilitate their economic activities. The British, as the central authority, held overwhelming power over it regional representatives. Over time, this resulted in reducing the powers of the
traditional rulers as the system was operated in different ways in every region. Political instability ensued before and after independence, and constitutional development and other forms of decentralisation that followed were not sufficient to solve the initial administrative deficiencies on which the nation was built.

The various constitutions drafted to accommodate the working of a centralised administrative system were all inadequate as the nation suffered political and administrative instability, and civil unrest as its policies were built around weak institutions. It is in response to this that the thesis argues for a decentralised system of administration incorporating traditional.
Chapter Four – The Political History of Nigerian Federalism (1960 – 1999)

This chapter deals with the period after independence, focusing on how political parties and their leaders in the first civilian administrations were bound or strongly related to their regions, and how successive military regimes further centralised power throughout their rule. It describes the circumstances that brought about military takeover of the administrative governance and how its long stay in governance further centralised the administrative system of governance in Nigeria until it relinquished power to a civilian government in 1999. The concluding part of this chapter explains the factors that brought about the centralisation which has supported corrupt practices.

4.1.1 The 1960 Independence Constitution

In 1960, a constitutional conference was held in London to put finishing touches to the independence constitution. As a result of this conference, provisions were made for an office of the prime minister in the constitution, while ex-officio members were removed from the Council of Ministers and the House of Representatives. Fundamental human rights were entrenched in Nigeria’s constitution. The federal structure of Nigeria was retained with Lagos as the federal capital. Judges of High Courts and Supreme Courts were to be appointed on the advice of a Judicial Service Commission. The independence constitution also made provision for Nigerian citizenship.
4.1.2 The 1963 Republican Constitution

At the 1963 constitutional convention held in Lagos, political leaders agreed that Nigeria should become a republic within the Commonwealth and a constitution was passed into law by the federal parliament. Under the constitution, an elected president took over the duties of the governor-general who represented the Queen of England as head of state of Nigeria. The president was also to act as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The Judicial Service Commission was abolished and instead the president was empowered to appoint judges to the Supreme Court and the High Court on the advice of the prime minister. The Supreme Court of Nigeria became the highest court of appeal in Nigeria, while the premier was to act as head of executive government at the regional level. Emergency power was conferred on the federal government to declare a state of emergency throughout Nigeria or any part thereof.

The process of creating a new region and the alteration of the existing regional boundaries were entrenched in the constitution. The constitution further gave residual powers to the regional government and entrenched a revenue allocation formula based on need, national interest and balanced development. An amendment procedure to the constitution was also entrenched, requiring a two-thirds majority of all members of each house of the federal parliament and the concurrence by simple majority of each house of the legislature of at least three regions.

The 1960 independence and 1963 republican constitutions of Nigeria epitomized some elements of a true federal system. The 1950 National conference had been followed by other consultations in 1953, 1954, 1957, and
1959, in which the practice of federalism was perfected (World Bank 2003, p. 25).

An important feature of these constitutions was the extensive powers granted to the regions making them effectively autonomous entities, along with an effective revenue arrangement, which ensured that the regions had the resources to carry out the immense responsibilities of governance.

4.2 The first republic

Disunity among Nigeria’s political leaders became obvious after Nigeria was granted self-rule, as political intrigue and inter-ethnic feuding took hold. In 1964/65, a general election was conducted to usher in the first civilian government under the parliamentary system of administration. However, the election was postponed for several weeks due to falsification of voter lists and census figures. This resulted in some parties boycotting the election, mostly in the eastern part of the country. When the election was finally conducted it produced a NPC-NCNC coalition. Alhaji Tafawa Balewa of the NPC became the first prime minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, while Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC became president. The AG, headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, became the opposition party. However, as Okhaide (1996) noted:

Soon after independence, that unity among the nationalists which was essentially instrumental for Nigeria’s independence started to crack. With no more colonial masters to fight, they resorted to fighting one another using ethnicity, essentially as a battle-cry. Each of these nationalists was forced to
look up to his region or ethnic group for support and soon, ethnic politics gained ground with all its devastating effects. The parties which they formed were ethnically oriented and they were co-terminous with the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. For example, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was for the northerners, the Action Group (AG) was for the west and the National Council for Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) was for the east. Each of these parties held on jealously to their regions and resisted very vehemently, any attempt by any other party to have inroads into their regions. Each of the parties adopted the strategy of encouraging rebellion in other regions and soon, splinter groups started to form their parties in these regions (p. 133).

Claims that the 1965 election was rigged led to civil unrest in most parts of the country, especially in the west where fierce fighting erupted and many houses of political opponents were burned down. Despite the widespread charges of voting irregularities, the United People’s Party (UPP) headed by Akintola (a former member of the AG) with support from NPC in the north won convincingly in the elections. Akintola became the prime minister and took over the government of the western region.

This resulted in a quarrel between Awolowo and Akintola. The situation later degenerated into a bloody riot in the western region, which brought effective government to an end as rival legislators brought violence to the floor of the regional legislature. Eventually, the federal government declared a state of emergency and AG was removed from power in the western region. The federal government dissolved
the legislature and named a federal administrator for the western region, while many AG members were placed under house arrest. Awolowo was later indicted and allegations of misappropriation of government fund and conspiracy to overthrow the government were levelled against him and some other leaders of the party. He was jailed along with other prominent politicians.

During this period, Nigeria embarked on its first development plan. The northerners with their political party, the NPC, in power were able to use the development plan to the advantage of their region. Many of the federal government’s viable projects, military establishments and establishments were taken to the north, while northerners were recruited and trained to replace the more qualified southerners in civil service and government establishments.

The NPC sought to redress northern economic and bureaucratic disadvantage … many of the federal government’s projects and military establishments were allocated to the north. There was an “affirmative action” program by the government to recruit and train northerners, resulting in the appointment of less qualified northerners to federal public service positions, many replacing qualified southerners. Actions such as these served to estrange the NCNC from its coalition partner. The reaction to the fear of northern dominance, and especially the steps taken by the NCNC to counter the political dominance of the north, accelerated the collapse of the young republic (Library of Congress 1991, p. 2).
It should be noted here that the administrative system of governance in Nigeria in the first republic was regionally based, with every region having its own constitution, controlling its resources and paying fifty percent to the federal government. In the subsequent chapter, the issue of regional government will be discussed further as it forms the basis of the argument for decentralisation.

4.3 The first coup, counter-coup and civil war

Amidst the confusion, five army officers led by Major Patrick Chukuma Kaduna Nzeogwu (an officer from the eastern region) staged a coup that changed Nigeria’s political history. It resulted in the killings of Balewa in Lagos, Akintola in Ibadan, and Ahmadu Bello (the premier of the northern region), along with some top-ranked army officers from the north. In his broadcast to tell Nigerians their reasons for staging the coup, Nzeogwu stated that he would establish a strong, united and prosperous nation, free of corruption and internal strife. Nzeogwu failed to take over state power and, instead, the commander-in-chief Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo, became the first military head-of-state. Ironsi promulgated Decree Numbers 33 and 34 in May 1966, which abrogated the federal system of government and substituted a unitary system (World Bank, 2003).

This supplanting of the previous party-based federal political system by the military regime was, at least in theory, an imposition of a command relationship upon the politics of a federation (Oyovbiare 1985, p. 91). Because of the general inclination of Nigerians for a federal system of government, the abolition was resisted and repulsion for Ironsi’s unification of the country by military fiat led to a violent and
bloody riot in the north. The north, realising that the political power which had been their safeguard against the economic strength of the south had been suddenly taken from them, reacted and produced a counter-coup in July 1966 led by northern soldiers in which Ironsi and most top-ranking Igbo officers lost their lives. After a week of military manoeuvring, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon from the middle-belt took over as head-of-state. He returned the country to its federal structure and appointed military governors to each region. As is characteristic of military rule Nigeria became a unitary state in name only.

The control of oil and oil revenue became centralised, while the subordinate units became mere representatives that depended fully on the federal government for directives and resources. The military governor of the eastern region Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, who claimed that he was the most senior military officer and thus should be appointed head-of-state, was being pressurised by other Igbo military officers to negotiate for more regional autonomy from the federal government. When they couldn’t reach an agreement on this issue, fight broke out between the Igbos and Hausas in the northern and eastern regions. The military high command then called a meeting with the governors in Lagos to resolve the problem but, for fear of his life, Ojukwu refused to attend the meeting in Lagos.

Military leaders and senior officers of the police met in Ghana to reach an accord on a loose federation, but the northerners refused and the easterners threatened succession. Ojukwu declared the Republic of Biafra after the eastern Region Consultative Assembly voted to secede from Nigeria on May 30 1967 and a civil war ensued.
Major cities in the eastern region were captured in fierce battle and many casualties were recorded on both sides.

The federal troops with the assistance of the Soviet Union and British fighters attacked Biafra on all fronts. As the fighting became tougher the Biafrans resorted to the use of propaganda, which won them international sympathy with a number of European countries, such as France and Sweden, who assisted them on occasions. In 1969, Ojukwu appealed to the United Nations to mediate and called for a ceasefire as a starting point for peace negotiations. Ojukwu later fled and his chief of staff, Phillip Effiong, called for an immediate, unconditional cease-fire. The civil war lasted thirty months and ended in January 1970.

The eastern region was co-opted into the federal fold and all significant political power remained concentrated in the federal military government. Gowon, on resuming office after the civil war, embarked on a process of rehabilitation and construction, which fortunately coincided with an international oil price rise. He drew up a transition program that would usher in a democratic civilian government in 1976. He then created twelve states out of the Nigeria’s regions of Nigeria. ‘[T]he oil price boom, which began as a result of the high price of crude oil (the country’s major revenue earner) in the world market in 1973, increased the federal government ability to undertake these tasks (Library of Congress 1991, p. 2).

The Gowon administration drew up a nine-point program which included the creation of states, the introduction of a national economic development plan, the drafting of a new constitution, the reconstruction of war-damaged areas and a new revenue
allocation formula. However, the regime fell short of achieving these goals due to widespread corruption and inefficiency at every level of its government. Embezzlement, bribing and nepotism were obvious, while crime, including armed robbery, extortion and killing, were at their highest levels during this period. The situation came to a climax when Gowon, without consultation, shifted the 1976 handover date set for a return to civilian government. As a result, he was overthrown in a palace coup in July, 1975.

4.4 The Murtala and Obasanjo regimes, 1975-79

On assuming political leadership, Murtala Muhammed set his administrative machinery in motion by embarking on cleansing exercise of the armed forces and the public service to rid them of corrupt officers. Through the exercise about 10,000 civil servants were dismissed. Three panels were set up to probe and punish corrupt officers and civilians found guilty of corrupt enrichment whose assets were confiscated.

Murtala cancelled the planned 1973 Census and set up a constitutional drafting committee made up academicians and prominent civilian political leaders to submit a draft constitution to a constituent assembly for approval. He drew up a timetable for a return to civilian in October 1979 (Library of Congress 1991). Before this could happen, however, Murtala Muhammed was assassinated in a coup attempt in February 1979. His deputy Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo, a Yoruba, took over as head-of-state and followed the agenda left by his predecessor until he handed over power to a civilian government in late 1979.
4.5 The second republic, 1979-83

President Shehu Shagari led the incoming civilian government for the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), after a controversial election in 1979. The civilian government turned out to be weak because the coalition at the centre was not strong. Although the NPN was the dominant ruling party, the opposition controlled twelve states and there was little co-operation between these parties. Corruption was again very pronounced within the civilian administration. Dubious federal government contracts of little evident economic or developmental benefit were indiscriminately awarded.

At the domestic level, the NPN-controlled federal government embarked on politically expedient but uneconomic projects, such as establishing a federal university in every state, commissioning iron and steel plants that remained unfinished in 1990, and indiscriminately awarding contracts to build the new federal capital at Abuja (Library of Congress 1991, p. 1).

Many government officials raided the government treasury sending their gains to foreign countries, while in 1981 teachers staged a strike because they had not been paid. There were also religious riots in the north, which resulted in the deaths of thousands of people. It was not surprising, therefore, that in December 1983 the military responded by staging a coup.

4.6 Return to military rule, 1983-1999

General Muhammedu Buhari, a Hausa-Fulani northerner from Katsina state and a former member of the Supreme Military Council of the Muhammed/Obasanjo
regime, led the new military government. The structure of the new regime was the same as those of Gowon and Muhammed/Obasanjo. Their immediate task was to resuscitate the economy, which was failing as a result of corruption and misappropriation of funds by previous governments.

The Buhari regime arrested and imprisoned corrupt government officials found guilty of embezzlement and mismanagement of government funds, and most of them had their properties confiscated. A ‘war’ was declared against indiscipline and efficiency was brought into the civil service and government system. However, popular discontent, a result of perceived government inflexibility, was used as a ploy by another top military officer General Ibrahim Babangida who staged a palace coup on 27 August 1985 which brought the regime of Buhari to an end.

Babangida, a middle-belt Muslim from Gwari in Niger state, stressed the need for urgent economic recovery and declared a national economic emergency. Under the economic emergency, the government introduced the Structural Adjustment Program, which was very harsh on the people but was believed to be the only alternative at that time. His agenda further strengthened his plan to handover to a civilian government in 1990, set up a constitutional drafting committee, formed and sponsored two political parties—the National Republican Party and the Social Democratic Party—and asked politicians to join whichever party suited them.

Babangida kept on shifting elections and the handover date, while some of his policies and actions led to tensions, especially when in 1986 Nigeria became a member of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Then in April 1990,
there was a coup attempt that threatened to split the country. On surviving the coup, Babaginda renewed his transition programme and in June 1993 presidential elections were finally held.

Chief Moshood Abiola, a prominent Yoruba businessman from the south, contested for the Social Democratic Party, while Alhaiji Bashir Othman Tofa, an economist and businessman from the north, contested for the National Republican Convention. Voter turnout was reportedly low but the elections were thought to be free and fair.

When it became apparent that Abiola would be the victor, Babangida declared the elections null and void. Abiola declared himself president, but later fled the country in the wake of death threats against him. Violent protests and strikes followed over the next two years in an attempt to return Abiola to power. He eventually returned to the country but was subsequently arrested on charges of sedition. Nigeria then plunged into its worst crisis since the Biafran war of the 1960s. After much pressure, Babangida resigned in August 1993. The government was taken over by an interim council but the real power was in the hands of General Sanni Abacha, then Secretary of Defence.

The important thing to note is that all military governments had the same features. Okhaide (1996) summed it up this way:

Since Gowon’s regime, through to Murtala/Obasanjo, Buhari/Idiagbon to Babangida, it has been a betrayal of hope. Tales of intimidation, oppression, high-handedness, corruption, insensitivity and official deceit have been the...
order of the day. The difference between these regimes is of degree rather than of kind (p. 152).

Abacha, a northerner from Kano state, again citing necessity, dismantled all political structures and set up his own, then laid out another transition program and handover date. He led a particularly oppressive regime under which thousands were jailed and countless numbers killed before he suddenly collapsed and died in 1998. After twelve hours of deliberation within the military’s top ranks, General Abdusalemi Abubakar, was appointed as the new military head-of-state.

Within six months of taking over, Abubakar released a number of political prisoners and drew up a transition program to usher in a civilian government. A new constitution was hurriedly drawn up and put before a constituent assembly. However, as Shonibare (2004) opined, ‘[o]nce a draft constitution is forwarded to a constituent assembly which is composed of military apologists, it is already manipulated (p. 1). Nevertheless, elections were held as schedule and by May 1999 a civilian government was in power.

4.7 Centralisation and its effects on Nigerian federalism

Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, it has experienced thirty years of military rule. All through this period military leaders implemented the hierarchical command and authority structure of a military organisation, which is a great deviation from the usual principles and practices of federalism.
Except for the brief period following General Ironsi’s Decree No. 33 and 34 of 1966, when Nigeria was officially declared a unitary state, successive military regimes exhibited pretensions in operating the federal system of government. Thus each military regime called itself “the federal military government.” Its administration was hierarchical in structure (not federal pyramidal). The Military Head of State and Commander-In-Chief appointed and removed the Military Governors/Administrators of the states. These appointees were answerable to their boss, not to the people. As events showed later in Nigeria’s history, these governors (depending on the personality of the head of state) were quite autonomous in their administration of the states (Elaigwu 2002, p. 75).

Since the first military coup in 1966 all governments, whether military or civilian, have functioned under a centralised system of administration. In military regimes the most senior military officer assumed the position of the head-of-state and appointed other military officers as members of his cabinet. Moreover, in Gowon’s regime, the Supreme Military Council was the legislative body that made laws and also acted as the executive body, promulgating decrees that could not be challenged by any law court. The head-of-state appointed ministers, state governors, and commissioners while removing them at will.

This period also saw increasingly centralised control over the economy and some of the responsibilities of the states, such as education and the media.
Although General Gowon had abandoned unitarism, the hierarchical unitary structure of the military remained unchanged, and contributed to the strengthening of the federal government at the expense of the state governments (Ademolekun and Ayo 1989, p. 161).

Shell and British Petroleum Oil discovered oil in large quantities in Nigeria in 1956 and it has become the main source of Nigeria’s revenue as the seventh largest oil producing state. With this enormous wealth, particularly since 1974, the federal government has resorted to changing the revenue allocation formula in its favour and has increased expenditure that has been of little development benefit to the states and the people, while making the states beg for funds in order to survive.

Little wonder then that since focus has shifted from majority to minority beneficiaries under the derivation principle, it has become the federal government policy to reduce the emphasis placed on the principle. And mainly for the same reason, Nigeria has been criminally turned into a Unitary State, where all the State powers and resources are concentrated at the centre. A situation that has made the subsidiary governments to go cap-in-hand to the Federal government, as Father Christmas, begging for fund in order to make it through the day (Eraikhumen 2004).

The arrangement did not change significantly during the brief civilian administration of 1979 to 1983 and the second military period of 1983 to 1999. In order to find an avenue for expanding the increased resources at its disposal as a result of this centralisation of revenue, the federal government began to extend it activities to areas
of expenditure once reserved for the states, first by the process of encroachment and later by formal legislation-backed take overs. The federal government became directly involved in primary and basic education, agriculture, banking, commerce and industry. Some of these involvements were later formalised in the 1979 and 1999 constitutions.

Eraikhuemen (2004) has shown that, the percentage of resources accruing to the federating units [provinces and states] based on the principle of derivation has been reduced by successive governments’ (p. 2). These changes in the allocation of resources and the principles of derivation, eventually gave the federal government over ninety percent of revenues, and these are still very much in effect.

A recent World Bank report concluded that:

The process of centralisation was completed with the introduction in the 1980 of the Federation Account (FA) to hold all federally collected revenue, including the 20 percent onshore mining rents and royalties hitherto conceded on the basis of derivation, and inclusion of local government in the federal account revenue sharing arrangements (2002, p. 3).

Civil unrest also had a great impact on the federalisation of the country by the military, as the emergency powers acquired by the federal government in order to deal with uprisings were not subsequently returned to the concurrent list of powers shared by the central government and the states. The federal government implemented:
emergency powers to intervene in any region where law and order had broken down, as it did in the Western region in 1962. Relative to the power of states in 1990, however, the regions were very powerful; they had separate constitutions, foreign missions, and independent revenue bases. All this changed under military rule (Library of Congress Studies 1991, p. 2).

The creation of states has also contributed immensely to the centralisation of Nigeria. Since 1960 each military regime has added to the numbers of states, allowing the central government to adopt a divide and rule approach to its dealings with the states, with the intention to weaken them and reduce their revenue.

The creation of additional states from the four regions that existed by 1966 meant weaker states, with narrower resources base. General Gowon created 12 states in 1967. These were increased to 19 states by Murtala Mohammed in 1976. General Babangida created two additional states in 1987, thus making 21 states. He increased the number of states to 30 in 1991, while General Sanni Abacha increased the number of states to 36 in 1996. Paradoxically, as additional states were created to meet the demands of subnational groups for greater autonomy, the greater the number of states, the stronger the federal centre, and the more imperative its role, as a centre for taking necessary homogenizing or harmonizing actions in matters that transcend each state (Elaigwu 2002, p. 76).
Historical patterns have continued despite the type of government. An often-cited reason for this is that it is effectively the same set of people in leadership positions rotating power between themselves.

The feudal oligarchy has always wielded power, whether as civilians or military dictators since it has both military and civilian wings. Whenever the civilian wing is in trouble, the military wing takes over. The rest of us have always remained in the wilderness, marginalised (Iyoha, Chizea & Akpotor 1995, p. 249).

Moreover, as Elaigwu (2002) point out:

Except for the first republic, the constitutions of all the civilian regimes were drafted and handed over to the incoming civilian government after being manipulated by the various military governments through constituent assembly (p. 75).

During this period, the role of the traditional institutions was further reduced, to the point where they had no formal executive, legislative or judicial responsibilities. Instead, they were tacitly accorded constitutional and legal recognition in the political system, and were placed on the government payroll.

In the second republic, a Council of Chiefs was established in each state and granted power to advise the governor on any matter relating to customary law, cultural affairs or chieftaincy matters. At the federal level, traditional rulers were made members of the Council of State, with representatives from each state to advise the president only
on matters relating to population census, prerogative of mercy and the awarding of national honours.

Governments interfered in the selection of traditional rulers and the politicisation of the traditional institutions helped to erode their dignity, status and power in society. Moreover, the Land Use Act of 1978, which vested the allocation and use of land in the hand of state governors further curtailed the powers of the traditional rulers in land matters (see Ajayi 1992 pp. 134-5). From 1979, Nigeria witness unending rows, confrontation and bitterness between many state governors and traditional rulers. Governors dismissed many traditional rulers without due regard for people’s wishes, while candidates favoured by these governors were installed as de facto kings and chiefs (Nwankwo 1988, p.227).

All through this period of military rule, the role of the traditional institutions was undermined and their potential roles were not given any serious consideration. Under the regimes of General Buhari, Babangida and Abacha, their role was restricted largely to traditional and ceremonial functions. The situation was so grave that in many instances the governors went as far usurping the right of the affected people to choose their own traditional rulers.

4.8 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has shown how, after a brief period of decentralisation during its first years of independence, the administrative system of Nigeria has become ever more centralised, particularly during the long stay of military regimes characterised by a unitary system of administration. The impact of civil war further strengthened the
justification of military holding onto power which created more centralised administrative system of governance. The chapter further stressed that during this period of military rule, the government merely broke down the administrative processes by creating States and later Local government Councils. Ethnic and cultural diversity as well as a measure of fairness in the distribution of resources have suffered as a result, leading to conflict and considerable suffering for the vast majority of Nigerians. The appointed governors and local government chairmen were answerable to the federal government and vested with superior powers over traditional rulers.

Over this period, the military and the elected civilian government became involved in nomination and appointments of persons to the throne of a traditional ruler. This was done most times against the people choice. The traditional institutions were stripped of their autonomy and brought under the states and local government respectively to a purely advisory capacity. Therefore the authority and legitimacy of the traditional ruler was eroded enormously. After deviating from the attributes and practices of real federalism during the more than thirty years of military rule, by May 1999 when the military handed over power to a civilian government, the Nigerian state had become excessively centralised. It is not surprising that various groups are calling for a Sovereign National Conference of all ethnic groups to discuss the restructuring of the Nigeria administrative system. The next chapter examines the effects of over-centralisation in Nigeria.
Chapter Five – The Consequences of Over-Centralisation

This chapter argues that excessive political centralisation in Nigeria has increased the level of government corruption. It will argue that over-centralisation of the Nigerian state is responsible for the power struggle by Nigerian politicians to occupy positions at the central, state and local government levels.

Corruption has eaten deep into every sphere of human activity in Nigeria today, to the extent that Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index 2005 ranks Nigeria as the world’s sixth most corrupt nation (Transparency International 2005). Statistics shows that 85% of Nigeria wealth is gotten from oil and since control of oil and oil revenue has become centralised states and local government units have become mere outposts, relying on the central government for directives and funding (Almasih 2005).

The spoils of office available at all levels of government have led to elections that have involved massive rigging, assassination of political opponents, stuffing of ballot boxes, bribing of police and intimidation of electoral officers. While politicians and officials exploit the opportunities for enrichment provided by their positions, high rates of unemployment and youth restlessness now afflict the nation despite massive natural resource revenues. This situation has given rise to the emergence of renewed agitation for resource control and fiscal federalism as a means of achieving stability and progress.
This chapter also examines the deceptive nature of government officials and political leaders in diverting government funds to private accounts, and the deceptive setting up of commissions to cover up their corrupt practices. The chapter also considers the large sums of money in Nigerian politics and why it is that only ex-senior military officers can afford to contest federal elections. Further, it examines the state of insecurity, human right abuses, self-imposition and ethnic politics. It shows how religion has infiltrated Nigeria’s political, economic and social life, and how it has been used to undermine the pursuit of genuine federalism in the country. Lastly, the chapter discusses the role of successive governments in fostering youth restlessness in many parts of the country.

5.1 Corruption and centralisation

Given the extent of cultural heterogeneity in Nigeria, along with the associated primordial paradigms, regionalism and religions, many Nigerians do not see themselves as belonging to the same country. Rather they hold allegiance to their own constituencies. This lack of national identification may explain the ease with which public officials have been willing to plunder the national treasury to enrich themselves and their followers. It also helps explain why the likes of Babagida, Abacha, Governor Joshua Dariye, and Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, amongst others, remain popular heroes in the consciousness of their ethnic region and kin.

Retired General Ibrahim Babangida was regarded as a hero among his followers because many of his kinsmen got rich over night during his tenure in office (Ihenacho 2004, p.4). Prior to 1985 when he became a military head of state, it was widely
believed that Babangida and his co-conspirators were the architects of many coups in Nigeria. After he was forced out of office in 1995, he handpicked Chief Ernest Shonekan to head an interim government for eventual take over by his friend General Sani Abacha. When Abacha died in 1998, Babangida masterminded the choice of General Abdusalam Abubakar as head of state and later co-sponsored President Olushegun Obasanjo and other political office holders. It is believed that Babangida is nursing the ambition be become a civilian president in 2007 (Obumselu & Adekunle 2004).

In Nigeria corruption within government circles has grown alarmingly over the past two decades, but it has a long history. During colonial rule and the period of the first republic corruption ran rampant, first at the federal and then at the regional and local levels. It was most serious at the federal level and then in the cocoa-rich western region, where investigators found that the activities of a small clique of ruling–party politicians and businessmen had drained the region’s marketing board of more than ₦10 million essentially bankrupting it. Throughout that period government contracts, purchases, and loan programs were systematically manipulated to enrich political officials and the politically well connected.

Corruption reached unprecedented levels during military rule from 1966 to 1979 and then from 1983 to 1999. It was this period that revealed the magnitude of the oil revenues. As the chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, Nuhu Ribadu, told the United Nations:
Nigeria earned a whopping ₦54,000 billion (US$400 billion) in the last 40 years but there is little or nothing to show for it due to corrupt practices of past military leaders in the country, (Ige 2005 p. 1; Blair 2005).

The brief stay of civilian government from 1979 to 1983 and since 1999 has not changed matters but rather increased the levels of corruption in Nigeria. Indeed the elections that brought them to power were highly dubious, as has always been the case in Nigerian elections. As academic Dr Iyayi lamented, ‘It is regrettable that the country has never witnessed a conclusive free and fair elections that what the country had witnessed since independence was a failed elections” (Amokeodo & Soniyi, 2004, pp. 1-2).

It is widely accepted that the 2003 elections that brought members of the National Assembly and the executive to power were anything but credible and that the integrity of these elections was highly compromised (Erakhuemen 2004, p. 1). A number of dubious and fraudulent tactics were employed in collaboration with INEC officials and a partisan Nigerian police force, to the utter disillusionment of both the local and international election monitors who were unfortunate enough to witness the charade. Newspapers published a number of reports of electoral fraud and irregularities (for example, see Jason 2003, p. 2; Omo-Abu 2003, p. 2; Ganago 2005, pp. 2-3; Ajayi 2005, p. 1), making it difficult to accept the Obasanjo government’s claims to legitimacy. (Erakhuemen 2004, p. 2).

It is widely believed that the reason Nigerians seek government positions is not to serve the nation but for financial gain. Many will spend millions buying their way to
into power, an investment based on the expectation of being able to access government funds when they get in to office.

The Nigerian press regularly reports on corrupt practices by government officials, often with little effect (see, for example, Jalil 2003, p. 1; Onwukwe 2003, p. 1; Oduyela 2004, p. 1; Adesina & Madunagu 2004, p. 1). One Nigerian newspaper summarised the situation in this way:

It is ironic that a country whose economy cannot generate the income to pay a debt of $36 billion can boast of citizens who have in foreign banks $107 billion and property worth $63 billion. Few creditors, especially those who believe that the money came from the looting of the public treasury and that nothing is been done even now to stop the looting would be willing to write off the debts of such a nation. That is the point that ICAN was trying to make but the government appeared to have missed (‘Government looted funds’, ThisDay, 21 October 2003, p.1).

It is clear that elections in Nigeria have been characterised by corruption and violence right since independence, leading to calls for political reform, including an electoral body that is truly independent of government funding, influence and interference in it operations. The need for a federal constitution with sound electoral rules that guarantee free and fair elections is vital in instilling confidence in the system. Another pressing issue is the need for public disclosure of both how campaigns are financed and the financial interests of candidates.
So far there has been little to show from the federal government’s avowed desire to tackle the issue of corruption in the administration of the country. The current president has been reluctant to take the allegations of fraud among his colleagues seriously. The Independence Corrupt Practice Commission, ‘a commission that seeks to prohibit and prescribe punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences’, was replaced with a very weak *Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Bill 2003* and the federal government established the Economic and Financial Crime Commission to prosecute those found guilty of any financial crimes. However, this has been widely criticised as a ploy to remove and attack some certain individuals, state governors, local government chairmen and other party members seeking to restructure the Nigeria polity. Other Nigerian Newspaper reporters made similar reports (for example Fawibe 2005; Sonowo 2004; Olaleye 2005, p. 1; Epiá 2005, p. 1; Alli 2005, pp. 1-3).

Tellingly, since the present regime declared its fight against corruption no public officer or individual has been found guilty and punished (Ganago 2005). Odogwo (2005) is one of many commentators lamenting the extent of corruption and the inability of the government to address it:

> Which side of the scoreboard is anybody interested in looking? How about the Military Pensions, National Housing Fund, Privatization Share Purchases, National Identity Card, the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)? What about the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE), the Nigeria Telecommunications (NITEL) and its contract with Pentascope, Missing Ship
and Oil Bunkering? The March 27, 2005 Daily Independence Online reported about $22 million said to be lodged in a bank account owned by the president’s son Gbenga Obasanjo. On the National Assembly side, the Deputy Senate President Ibrahim Mantu and Senator Jonathan Zwingina were accused by Mallam el Rufai, the former Minister, and Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Both men were said to have solicited and insisted on a ₦54 million bribe to facilitate Rufai’s confirmation as minister. Ibrahim Mantu himself is alleged to own a 5-star hotel in the Gambia.

5.2 Money politics

Money politics, or the use of large sums of money to win elections to public office, has acquired a unique form of notoriety in Nigeria politics. In recent years, this type of political competition has become an important aspect of the country’s political culture. Given the fact that this approach is not well understood and also because social scientists are still to fully conceptualise it policy measures adopted to deal with it have proven ineffective.

Politics everywhere involves the use of money by contesting candidates, political parties and the electoral commissions. Most developed countries, including the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Germany and Italy, have an established system that stipulates and limits the amount of money individuals, candidates and political parties can contribute to support an electoral campaign, and which requires that all donations or spending are publicly disclosed (Brademas 1999, p. 2).
Nigerian politics involves the use of huge, unregulated amounts of money in campaigns, meaning that only the rich or those sponsored by them are able to venture into politics. There are frequent reports of bribes being paid to electoral officers and police and intimidation of other party representatives at polling stations on election days.

The last Nigerian general election was no exception. For example, the Obasanjo-Atiku re-election campaign reportedly received a ‘Businessmen and Federal Government Contractors’ donation of ₦1 billion each, a ₦400 million donation from a construction company, and the donation of a 150-seat Boeing 727 by Dasab Airlines. The serving ministers in Obasanjo’s cabinet received donations of ₦10 million while the twenty-one PDP governors received donations of ₦210 million (Ajayi 2003, p. 2).

The ‘political godfather’ is a prominent feature of Nigerian political life. Together they comprise a small but highly influential and wealthy group within Nigerian society who routinely influence the outcome of elections by mobilising their enormous wealth and political connections. Most are simply self-seeking individuals who aim to use the government for their own purposes, wielding tremendous influence over the politicians they sponsor. They are often accused of hijacking the economic and political machinery to their own advantage. Okoye (2003) likened their regionally-based influence to that of the Sicily’s Mafia on Italian politics:

The ‘political godfather’ in this context is a clique of well-placed and influential personages of Anambra state origin, who claim to have right
political connection with powers that be at Abuja. Most often they adopt a mafia-related approach in achieving their entrenched pecuniary interest…. These political godfathers exhibit common characteristics, thus the money-bags, they sponsor or influence the sponsoring of candidates during elections. The cost of this incidence is enormous to the state as what usually obtains is that when the incumbent godson is at pain to satisfy the whims and caprices of the godfather among other competing demands on the scarce resources of the government, the interest of the larger number is savagely undermined (p. 1).

These godfathers are often rewarded with substantial contracts and incentives from federal and state governments.

Tope, a presidential aide in the 1999-2003 tenure, was Chief Operating Officer of Sahara Petroleum that was awarded most cargoes imported during the period…. Strangely Dangote Industries was given a huge 40% discount in price of gas to be supplied to its new cement factories. No other industry has gotten this form of incentive and discretionary treatment. The big man ordered for all hands to be on deck to ensure immediate delivery of gas at less than cost price (Sanusi 2005).

Politicians who do not comply with the wishes of their godfather may be removed via the courts (which may also be bought) or other more violent means. The refusal by Governor Chris Ngege of Anambra State to pass on a share of his state allocation to his political Godfather led his kidnapping in a terrorist-style operation reportedly arranged by the brother-in-law of the president (Sanusi 2005).
Other politicians have been accused of taking out loans to finance their election campaign and thereafter stealing government money to repay their debts and boost their personal accounts. Ehikiyoa (2004) reported:

Recently, the senate president confirmed the notion that to be a lawmaker in Nigeria is an investment. His view is that, in such an investment, you not only try to recoup the huge electoral expenses, you also ensure a good return on such investment (p. 1).

Jide Ajani, a political editor with the Vanguard Online newspaper, observed that the immunity granted to public office holders makes a mockery of anti-corruption measures:

Whereas so much noise is being made about the exploits of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, as well as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, in investigating and attempting to bring to justice public office holders looting treasury, the continued existence of Section 308 of the Constitution that gives immunity to public office holders makes their efforts a fools errand, at least until such public officers leaves office (2004).

In most cases the government denies corruption allegations against public officers. A case in point was the denial by President Obasanjo of a former military head-of-state’s alleged corruption between 1985 and 1993. NigeriaWorld columnist Dr. Femi Ajayi quoted President Obasanjo as saying that, ‘speculations and rumours on allegations of wrongdoings in coffee shops and market places, not one of these allegations have been substantiated’ (2005, p.1).
Most times, most allegations lead to the setting up of commissions of inquiry and in some cases the person(s) accused have been dismissed but their spoils remain untouched. The president once stated:

I have never said that any investigation is absolutely perfect. But you tell me how many Nigerian has admitted wrong. If the Senator from Abia state and the minister hadn’t spoken out, they would have denied receiving any money. They would have turned the case against the government (Ajayi 2005, p. 3).

As things stand today, it is argued the federal government appears not to really want to tackle the issue of corruption in the administration of the country as transparently as it should (for example Onwukwe 2003, pp. 1-3; Olaleye 2005, p. 1; Epia 2005, p. 1; Sonowo 2004; Fawibe 2005, p. 2). The President does not take the issue of fraud within his clique seriously when such allegations come up. Moreover, opponents have claimed that the president is using an anti-corruption crusade to prosecute his political opponents.

The plundering of government funds is worst at the federal level but has also spread to lower levels of government. Since 1999, six years in to civilian government, the Independence Corrupt Practices Commission has been unable to complete investigations and prosecute governors indicted for fraud. State governors have been accused of misusing allocations meant for the development projects in their states and sending the money to their private accounts in foreign countries.

The 1999 Constitution introduced a new complication into the system through its prescription of the state/local government joint account. States have in several
instances deprived local councils of their approved shares of funds accruing from the federal account. The newspaper *ThisDay* (2004) editorialised on this issue:

… the trouble, it would appear, is that some state governors have been very extravagant in making spurious deductions from the funds meant for the local governments. In some instances, the state governments impose financial responsibilities on the councils that are not permitted by either the constitution or any law enacted by the assigned state assembly. Sometimes the governors are said to keep for themselves as much as 95 percent of the original revenue from the federation account, leaving only five percent to the councils (p. 2).

Of the small amount of funds that are eventually disbursed to the councils by the states, much is misused. According to Okafor (2004), local government secretariats around the country have over time created opportunity for ambitious but illiterate or barely literate men and women in the village. Educational limitations, in most cases, circumscribe the developmental vision that these office holders bring to bear on their work- in the conceptualisation of projects, planning and execution. Indices of social development and critical success factors are unknown to them in some cases, and the common tendency is to divert financial resources into worthless undertaken. Today, even with the competitive salaries and benefits of council chairmen and councillors, the right calibre of personnel is lacking in most secretariats (p. 1).

The federal government has at times attempted to discredit state governors from opposing political parties by withholding allocations meant for these states, causing these states to fail in their development programs. In some cases this may pave the
way for the ruling party at the federal level to instigate impeachment procedures or call for state elections to be held (Okafor 2004, p. 2). This situation is similar in all of Nigeria’s 774 local governments, with little social and infrastructure development to show for the funds received from the federal account. Elaigwu (2002), for example, argued that, ‘[m]any governors claim that a majority of chairmen and councillors of local governments only sit down to share money drawn from the Federation Account and hardly embark on development projects’ (p. 82).

The perceived failures of local government have generated considerable discussion as to who should oversee local governments, an issue that was not clearly set out in the constitution.

5.3 Insecurity and human rights abuses

The level of insecurity in Nigeria is alarming. Numerous prominent political leaders have been assassinated, usually without the perpetrators being brought to justice by the authorities. A case in point is the manner in which Iyiola Omisore, (Deputy Governor of Oyo State) emerged as a senator of the Federal Republic. He won an election he was technically unqualified to contest: from prison awaiting trial for the murder of a former justice minister (Ganago 2003). Another example occurred in 1990 when Colonel Odeleke, husband of Bola Odeleke died suspiciously in a hit-and-run accident, after which the family was not allowed to carry out a post-mortem. (Oduyela 2003). More recently Uche Orji, a senate candidate for the All Nigeria People’s Party, was killed in the wake of the 2003 elections and Harry Marshal, a former chieftain of People Democratic Party and later co-ordinator of the All
Nigeria’s People Party presidential campaign in South-South, was murdered in his Abuja home (Oduyela 2003; Ganago 2005).

What is disturbing is that during Obasanjo’s presidency the police have not been able or willing to solve political assassination cases. Because perpetrators are rarely caught and political assassinations are often made to look like accidents or disguised as random criminal acts it is difficult to ascertain the number of political murders conducted in Nigeria, but rarely does a month pass in which a politician is not killed. Indeed according to one report there were more murder cases in the first four years of civilian government after 1999 than in any other four-year period in the country’s history (Obiagwu & Onwubiko 2004). In fact between May 1999 and July 2001 252 cases of extra-judicial killing by the police and other security agencies were recorded, which is far higher than in the last military regimes.

There have been several recent massacres by the military. In three days in October 2001, Nigerian soldiers killed more than 200 unarmed civilians in Gbeji, Zaki-Biam and several other towns and villages in Benue State, in a well-organised reprisal operation following the abduction and killing of nineteen soldiers by an armed group. The soldiers also destroyed hundreds of houses and other buildings in the area. The events in Benue were similar to those of a military reprisal operation in November 1999 in Odi, Bayelsa State. Following the murder of twelve policemen, soldiers went on a rampage and killed hundreds of civilians. To date no-one has been prosecuted for either atrocity (Takirambudde 2002, p. 4).
It could be argued that the main reason why Nigeria has not been able to progress despite a large population and vast natural resources is due to the absence of a well-articulated national security policy. This policy failure has been disastrous, with people losing lives and properties every day.

Nigeria leaders have tended to make decisions on an ad hoc basis, as dictated by the immediate circumstances and as a result they have generally been reactive rather than proactive in guiding Nigeria’s future. This type of approach to nation-building often leads to political, social, economic, religious and military problems due to the often irrational and haphazard nature of the decisions taken, and this has certainly been the case in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Nigeria’s police force has often been a tool in the hand of the federal government and used to intimidate the populace and opposition parties, rather than serve the public in their interests. Part of the argument for decentralisation is that police powers should rest at the level of government closest to those being policed, which is why in many countries policing issues are the responsibility of state or local government. Decentralisation of police powers would work effectively in a multi-ethnic nation such as Nigeria, with officers drawn from the local areas in which they will operate. Decentralisation of the police forces could arguably improve the ratio of police to the general population, which is well below the United Nations target (Adeyemi 2005).

Multinational companies have also been involved in human rights abuses in Nigeria. Ohia (1999) noted that Shell has engaged in paramilitary activity to subdue the oil
producing communities and continues its environmental damage for their economic interest as have other oil companies:

Chevron Nigeria gave out its helicopters and boats to Nigeria military to crack down on the civil populace of the oil communities. Dumez (Nigeria) Limited, a road construction company employs security forces to attack villagers and is destroying newly planted crops of local farmers without paying compensation for crops or carrying out any environmental impact assessment. Julius Berger, a German construction company in Nigeria is not left out in this case. They left their original mission and are involved in sales of arms and money laundering and other illegal businesses (p. 2).

Multinational’s activities have negatively impacted on Nigeria’s environment, economy and political life over more than four decades.

With the involvement of Shell, the matter has taken a different tone; the Anglo–Dutch international business concern had become a collaborator with corrupt governments in Nigeria to fraudulently explore our crude oil in accordance to the dictate of their corporate headquarters. Their activities have negatively impacted on Nigeria’s environment. Shell and other multinationals has refused to abide to international business ethic, they engage in sponsoring local politicians and youth gangs working in tandem with government security forces in desperate attempts to force its way into most communities (Ganago 2004).
Expatriate engineers are sent to work in Nigeria and paid in foreign currencies and most of the machinery used is also imported. In this manner, revenue from crude oil is repatriated to Europe and America. Nwokedi (2005) observed:

In Africa and Nigeria in particular it is a game of cat and mouse, a game of pray and predator. They have become a ready replacement for colonization and in some cases outright slavery…. For example Royal Dutch become prominent in Nigeria after the colonial master. In absence genuine concession and firm agreements with national interest in mind their presence is merely a replacement of colonial powers…. Most oil companies could not operate successfully in a stable and organised third world country. They prefer chaotic and anarchic situation because it helps to draw attention away from their activities. Usually the corrupt government is kept in power by the host country while the government in turn provides protection for the oil company. Shell is known to be a major source of endless corruption and conflicts in Nigeria (see also Ohlsson 2002).

After many years in which these adverse effects either received scant attention or were simply ignored, fresh efforts have been mounted in recent years by environmentalist non-governmental organisations to address the situation. Shell appears to have acknowledged that its practices in Nigeria have fuelled conflicts. A British newspaper quoted a leaked Shell report in which Mr. Emmanuel Etomi, the Sustainable Development Manager for Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria accepted that the company had been:
… ‘inadvertently contributing’ to the conflict in the country. In 2003 Shell enlisted three internationally known conflict experts to better understand how our activities are affected by and contribute to the conflict. The experts highlighted ‘how Shell sometimes feed conflict by the way we award contracts, gain access to land and deal with community representatives; how drastically conflict reduces’ the effect of our community development program (Ganago 2004).

Since independence, political observers have long complained of external influence in the administration of Nigeria by Western nations pursuing their own economic interests (Nwokedi 2005). Opposition parties have regularly accused Nigerian governments of being puppets of Western governments who, along with their representatives, multinational corporations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, have contributed to the underdevelopment of Nigeria (Nwokedi 2005).

5.4 Self-perpetuation and military involvement in politics

In Nigeria political power and influence can be maintained across different regimes. For example:

Obasanjo has been around power since the 1960s, he was the military head of state for 3 years (1976 -1979), and he was the first military leader to hand over power to a democratically elected government in Africa (not succeeding himself). Obasanjo then came back to power as a civilian in 1999 in a new
attempt at democracy by Nigeria till date (after many years of stealing and
looting by military dictators) (Awodele 2006).

While the means of entering government may have changed, little else about the
current regime is fundamentally different to earlier periods of military rule. Across
the continent many political leaders in Africa have been able to stay in power for
decades by selectively embracing aspects of democracy to legitimate fundamentally
undemocratic governments. For example, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has been in
power since 1978, Libya’s Gaddafi came to power in 1969 and has ruled his country
since, Husni Mubarak of Egypt has been president since 1981 and has contested
elections in which he was the only candidate (until the 2005 elections), while
Gnasingbe Eyadema of Togo ruled from 1969 and was succeeded by his son.
Meanwhile, President Museveni of Uganda has just amended the constitution and is
serving a third term, and the ruling parties in South Africa and Nigeria are pushing
for similar amendments so that there political leaders can remain in power beyond the
maximum term stipulated in their constitutions (Awodele 2006).

The excessive military involvement in Nigerian politics continues to hinder
development in every aspect of life. Former military and serving senior officers have
tremendous influence over social and economic policy and many of those who are
contesting elections, or who have already won political office in the current civilian
governments, are former senior military officers. For example, Muhammadu Buhari,
a former military dictator famous for launching an authoritarian ‘war on indiscipline’,
used a government-owned office to contest ‘an election campaign dominated by
former senior army officers who present themselves as the most suitable managers of a country in crisis of corruption, poverty and volatility’. (Peel 2003, p.3).

5.5 **Aggressive sub-nationalism and the politics of resource control**

In the absence of political reform in Nigeria, aggressive sub-national responses of various types have erupted in many parts of the country. There is a long history of agitation by successionist movements in Nigeria. This first was led by Isaac Adaka Boro shortly after the January 1966 coup when he declared the Niger Delta Republic, a move made to liberate the Niger Delta people from the oppression of the then eastern-dominated federal government. Further attempts at secession have been made in different parts of the country, including an attempt by General Odumegu Ojukwu, a military officer from the southeast, which led to civil war.

Since the 1999 handover of power to civilian government, latent aggressive sub-nationalism has exploded into violence. This was a resurgence of sub-nationalism that had been suppressed under the previous military regime of Abacha and was fuelled in many ways by the emergence of a fiscally and politically dominant centre which undermined the basic sense of security of many groups around the country.

After May 1999, the O’dua Peoples Congress (OPC) from the southwest declared its stand for the freedom of Yorubas to go it alone as an independent nation. It declared its desire to protect and defend Yoruba interests anywhere in Nigeria. The first eruption of violence was in Shagamu, a town in western Nigeria, between an OPC-backed group and Hausa settlers. Many people were killed and goods were destroyed. The corpses of Hausa men that were carried back to the northern town of Kano
sparked a retaliatory wave of violence in that city against Yorubas. In response, northern youths formed the Arewa People’s Congress (APC) to challenge OPC violence, while in Lagos angry Ibos set up the Ibo People’s Congress (IPC) to deal with what they considered OPC’s unwarranted meddling and violence. Most Nigerians saw the OPC’s espousal of Yoruba nationalism as propaganda behind which to hide from police (BBC 2003, p. 1).

Another recent secession bid was made by Chief Ralph Uwazuruike from southeastern Nigeria, who sought secession under the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), a non-violent civil rights movement. Chief Uwazuruike has stressed that the non-violent method was chosen so as not to offend the United Nations and a Biafra Bill of Rights was sent to the global body, which had visited Nigeria to monitor things situation themselves. MASSOB members are active internationally and in the United States Radio Biafra broadcast the activities of the Biafra Republic on a daily basis. In the Eastern part of Nigeria and some parts of neighbouring countries where the agitation for self-determination is very strong the Biafran pound is still in use.

The mere gathering of any group of Igbo people anywhere in Nigeria today is liable to be seen by authorities as Biafran independence activists holding meeting. In 2004 a football tournament organised by a group of Igbo traders in Lagos State was said to be a Biafra meeting and everyone in attendance, including the players and those selling bottled water around the pitch, were arrested and are presently being tried for treason (Anaba & Charles 2005, p. 1).
Fear of secession and regional sub-aggressiveness was recently heightened when Mujahid Dokubo Asari, a militia leader of Ijaw origin, successfully marked the death of Isaac Boro despite police warnings. In February 2005 Asari threatened to declare war and ordered all crude oil flow stations closed until the federal government agreed to develop the Niger-Delta. This led to an increase in crude oil prices before Asari was flown by presidential jet to meet the president Olushegu Obasanjo and an agreement was reached. But his recent pronouncements have prompted a tightening of security measures in the Niger-Delta as he has been preparing war-like tactics for achieving self-determination, while the US has positioned a war ship in the Gulf of Guinea to safeguard its economic interests in the region.

If the threatened secession of the coastal regions were to succeed the north would be landlocked and this could lead to civil war as most of the defence installations, arms and ammunitions are located there. A second argument against secession is that when the crude oil in the south eventually dries up, as has happened in Oloibiri (where commercial quantities of crude oil were first discovered in the Niger-Delta region in 1967), the south may need to rely on income from the numerous solid mineral deposits in the north.

Since military rule, the Niger-Delta has been an area of violence. Devastated by oil exploration, inadequately compensated, and overwhelmed by an army of unemployed youth, the area has seen violence aimed at extracting positive responses from the federal government and oil companies. At various times, oil pipelines have been sabotaged while communities involved in illegal siphoning of crude oil from
pipelines have suffered tragic consequences resulting from unexpected explosions and inferno.

In the South-South there is the Niger-Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, a militia group operating in the riverine area where oil exploration takes place. This group is headed by Alhaji Dokubo Asari, who in October 2005 led his group in violet agitation and was said to be prepared to blow up oil installations in the Niger-Delta region. As the government appeared to be uncomfortable with his claims and his preparedness a special envoy was sent by the federal government to bring him for discussions in the federal capital.

Similarly, the middle-belt (the north-central zone) has reacted to a number of issues. The trigger for middle-belt anger was the complaint by core Hausa-Fulani that service chiefs of the armed forces were drawn from the middle-belt and not from the north. This prompted spontaneous reactions to what was regarded as northern hypocrisy: using the middle-belt when it was convenient to fight its war, and then turning on them. The Middle-Belt Forum that followed made it clear that it was no longer interested in being part of the old northern geo-polity or in sharing identity with the Hausa-Fulani (The Nigerian Standard (Jos) 17th August, 2000, p. 7). The middle-belt has supported a federation with a strong centre but with equality of opportunity. It called for equity in the distribution of resources and the need to encourage solid-minerals, agricultural, and industrial development in the region. Like the southeast, southwest and south-south zones, the middle-belt has called for a national conference to discuss all outstanding issues in the Nigerian federation.
Arguably, Nigeria’s federal government is playing politics with the nation’s natural resources, with eighty percent of its income from the sale of crude oil from the Niger Delta. Resource control was the most prominent issue for the state governors from the Niger-Delta at a national conference organised by the federal government.

The extent of secessionist activity in Nigeria is evidence of the extent to which many regions have been dissatisfied with the existing federal administrative governance and its ongoing fragility in multicultural Nigeria.

5.6 Treatment of the media

The Abacha government (1993–99) has been the most publicly criticised for its treatment of the media. This volatile relationship between government and the media has continued in the Obasanjo administration, with offices and premises of some media houses invaded and copies of their newspapers and magazines seized by state security agents. Most journalists are prevented access to the Presidential Villa reportedly on grounds that they refuse to co-operate in government cover-ups syndrome (Ojedokun 2003, p. 2). Ganago (2005) described one recent case of media intimidation:

In just five days between September 4 and 9, the State Security Service (SSS) came down hard on some media outfits in a manner suggestive of repression and disrespect to the Nigeria Constitution. In one instance, the SSS stormed the premises of the Insider Weekly magazine, arrested three of its staff and laid siege on it, effectively shutting it down. In another instance … an
editorial consultant to the *Global Weekly Star*, another weekly newspaper, was reportedly arrested and detained since then.

Nigeria’s newspapers often publish reports of inhumane treatment of journalists (for example see Obijiofor 2003, p. 2; Mbidoaka 2004).

The National Assembly has attempted another version of press censorship by introducing a General Code of Conduct for National Assembly Correspondents. In part, the provisions of the code read that ‘speculative journalism will attract punitive action’ and ‘leaking of official secret documents will attract disciplinary measures’.

These directives are not in any way different from the decree under which the Buhari/Idiagbon government jailed journalists, Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor, in 1984. Nor are they different from the decree invoked in 1993 by Abacha to sentence four journalists to death, as accessories after the fact of treason (Fawibe 2003, p. 2). Recently, three journalists covering protests against the increase in prices of petroleum products were arrested and brutalised by the police for no just cause. Despite the criticisms of these senseless displays of aggression by the police no explanation has come from any official quarters despite these actions having been co-ordinated by an assistant inspector-general of police.

Normally, the police are constituted as an agent of government responsible for arresting perpetrators of crime. However, in Nigeria it is completely different. Police commit all kinds of atrocities, ranging from the illegal mounting of roadblocks to murder, intimidation, and robbery (Onwukwe 2005). Newspapers in Nigeria regularly publish reports of maltreatment at the hands of the police (for example see Obijiofor
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2003, pp. 1-3; Ojedokunn 2003, p. 1). Onwukwe (2005) expressed a frustration with the role of the Nigerian police force that reflects widely held concerns:

While the Inspector General of Police is playing the role of an accountant for the police, the murders of Ige and Marshall Harry have still not been resolved. The murders of several high profile individuals have not been solved. The police as usual will come promising to find the killers and bringing them to book. After the outrage dies down, they return to their usual inactivity until another politician is gunned down and then we go through the same motions…They take bribes, they kill over meagre sums, sometimes as small as ₦30. They rob and mistreat Nigerians all because the [Inspector General] has misappropriated funds meant for the upkeep of the Nigerian police force (p. 2).

In the same vain, the people of Ikot Effaga Mkpa community in the Cross River state are at loggerheads with the state police command over the cold-blooded murder of one of the community’s leaders, who was killed at his residence by a team of policemen led by an assistant superintendent of police (Eno-Abasi 2003, p. 2).

On the other hand it appears some journalists and media houses have become mouthpieces for corrupt politicians and dishonest businessmen. There is a growing trend in Nigeria for members of the press to accept bribes in return for reporting stories differently, while those journalists that refuse to be compromised can be denied accreditation to cover government activity. This is the bane of the Nigerian press today (Ihenacho 2003).
5.7 Public debt burden

Since 1960 successive governments, whether a military or civilian, have sought out foreign loans. As a result Nigeria, despite its huge mineral resources, is among the world’s most indebted countries. As of August 2003 the nation total debt stood at US$31 billion (Ozomena 2003, p. 1). Nigeria faces enormous debt repayment and penalties for defaulting on these repayments and it is clear that the these loans were not always used for their intended purpose when one considers the poor nature of social infrastructure, health care facilities, high rate of unemployment and depressed economic situation.

Further confirmation of this came from Chief Olu Falae, secretary to the federal military government (1985–90), who announced after a debt verification exercise that over ₦30 billion (or US$4.5 billion) of Nigeria’s external debt was found to be ‘fraudulent and spurious’ (Ebeh 1994, p. 7). A 2003 newspaper report summed up the country’s financial position:

The report that the Federal Government owes contractors about ₦1 trillion and another ₦2 trillion backlog to pensioners, added to the US$31 billion indebtedness to foreign creditors should alarm all of us. First, the domestic as well as the foreign debts represent substantial increase over the figures inherited by this administration in 1999. At that time, the foreign debt was US$28 billion while the domestic component was under ₦800 billion. Every annual budget has included provision for the settlement of outstanding debts which everyone expects would have been adequate for the discharge of those
obligations as at when due. That the liabilities are rising should have been worrisome by itself (‘Trillion Naira debts: National Assembly must act now’, *Vanguard* (Lagos), 11 September 2003).

So Nigeria, a country endowed with rich natural resources, is ranked among the poorest countries in the world. However, despite this poverty the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation reported in 2004 that individual Nigerians have about US$107 billion deposited in foreign banks. This amounts to an estimated 70 percent of the nation’s total private wealth (Adesina & Madunagu 2004, p. 1; Odeyemi 2004). The country’s plight has been exacerbated by the conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Nwokedi (2005) observed:

For 20 years debt has been serviced by half of the country’s annual income. Almost 90% of Nigeria export is from crude oil and the price of oil is determined by the same western powers that buy them. Of the ten cruel strategies adopted by the IMF to derail Nigeria, debt is the meanest. It is the final nail that sealed the Nigerian’s coffin. The unfortunate African nation, even though it had no capital project at hand to finance, was lured into their debt or death trap in the 80s when it was forced to accept a debt burden of about US$28 billion. Since then it has been paying about US$5 billion every year in debt servicing alone. After 23 years and over 100 billion dollars siphoned without mercy, Nigeria still has the same amount in debt hovering above US$30 billion. Specifically Nigeria has paid their debt three times over but still has the same amount left. To make things worse it is even against IMF and World Bank’s
rule for any debtor to pay off their debt even if they have the money (p. 4). (See also Akintunde 2005, p. 1)

Recently the Paris Club of creditors agreed to reduce Nigeria’s external debt stock by sixty percent. In effect, about $18 billion of the $30.848 billion external debt owed to fourteen members of the club has been cancelled. Also the leaders of the G8 countries have pledged $50 billion for the development and eradication of poverty from Africa.

The arrangement of having a general accounting system for the whole country is undemocratic, catering to the interests of the few rather than the needs of the majority, particularly in rural areas. Regions need their own accounting systems in conjunction with the federal system. The tax system also requires an overhaul to be effective especially in its application to government officials, federal government contractors, government agencies and companies (Ekpunobi 2005, p. 1; Nwankwo 2005, p. 1).

Given these problems, Nigerians are clamouring for a national conference of all ethnic groups to develop a strategy for restructuring the polity and to lay the foundations for an effective administration that will benefit all. The call for a Sovereign National Conference shows the extent to which the various ethnic nationalities were dissatisfied with the centralised system of administration in Nigeria. Diverse groups of Nigerians at various times have called for the need to convene a conference to discuss the fundamental issue of restructuring the nation’s polity, power sharing and co-existence, resource control and the role of traditional institutions.
The call for a Sovereign National Conference started after the counter coup of 15 July 1966 when the Igbo of the south-eastern Nigeria threatened to secede over restructuring. A meeting was convened in Aburi in Ghana but the Nigerian government refused to implement the agreement reached at that meeting. Between 1985 and 1993 the head of state set up a conference by appointing delegates that went round the country, consulting with different people in every ethnic group. The effort and recommendations of the bureau was not put into practice as it was not in the interest of the head of state.

After the annulment of the 12th June 1993 general election, another military head of state took over and quickly convene a constitutional conference. Delegates from the conference came up with a formula and recommend a rotational system of administration for Nigeria, similar to that in use in the European Union. The recommendation was stage-managed and later put aside.

Similarly, the present civilian government has set up its own conference. Pro-democracy groups have have organised their own conference, angered that representatives invited to successive government-organised conferences since independence do not reflect the choices of the ethnic groups they are supposed to represent (Okoror 2003). Opposition groups observe that most of the delegates to the most recent conference have also been appointed as delegates to many of previous conferences, hence the outcome was dictated by the regime that organised it. As Oduyela (2005) puts it:
I do not need to go into personalities but it is clear that these people are representatives of the ‘Owners of Nigeria’ camouflaging as the masses representative in helping to renew the mandate of the ‘Owners of Nigeria’. They are negotiating our future again, mortgaging our children and the generation to in future on our expense, spending our taxes and oil money (p.3).

Like previous conferences, the current president has placed an embargo on some sensitive areas of confrontation. In his statement, it appears that the recommendations will not be considered seriously.

5.8 Summary and conclusion

The chapter has clearly enumerated some of the obvious consequences brought about due to excessive centralisation of the Nigeria nation where powers are concentrated in the hands of the federal government. It was observed that Nigeria operated a centralised political, economic and financial system where the federal government dictate and distributes finance according to there wish to other levels of government. The excessive centralisation appears to have fuelled the struggle for political position by fraudulent means.

As such, politicians and military politicians indulge in every avenue to contest and win elections either by rigging or buying votes during elections. This has intensified the use of huge sums of money for elections for them to recoup it when in office. It has also increased and brought other forms of corrupt practices such as looting of the nation’s treasury, embezzlement and misappropriation of fund meant for the
development of the country. The chapter points out how sequence of centralisation has further heightened the level of insecurity, while various sections of the country under different regional organisations are clamouring for restructuring. The call for restructuring has taken different forms such as frequent political and ethno-regional violence to more recently the use of arms in every part of the country. Media men who report corrupt activities are routinely beaten or killed. While the violent situation persists, the nation has incurred a huge debt despite the enormous mineral resources at its disposal. In the process, the roles of traditional institutions have not been made clear or given serious consideration. Their powers have been largely restricted to providing advice to government and for the conferment of chieftaincy titles.

While the UK and India are culturally diverse they are less so than Nigeria, which has more than 300 recognisable cultures, each with its own languages and costumes (Honey and Okafor 1998, p. 3). About forty-five percent of the nation populations are Moslems (with different denominations), mostly based in the north, while another forty-five percent are Christians (of different denominations) based in the south. Ten percent are of indigenous belief and other religions. However it is the poor quality of Nigeria’s institutions which is the principle reason for its slow and uneven development. According to Easterly (2000):

Poor institutions have an even more adverse effect on growth and policy when ethnic diversity is high…Ethnically diverse nations that wish to endure in peace and prosperity must build good institutions (p. 19).
As this thesis argues, a decentralised structure incorporating traditional institutions is the basis for strengthening the country’s administrative structures. These arguments are reviewed and summarised in the following chapter, while developments that are taking traditional institutions into account are also examined.
Chapter Six – Towards Institutional Reconciliation

This chapter reviews the major themes of the study and emphasises the role of traditional institutions in the process of decentralisation in Nigeria. The chapter discusses the idea and importance of traditional reconciliation and indigenous knowledge in development. It also outlines the usefulness of traditional reconciliation in a diverse society such as Nigeria, as well as the limitations of the study and possible areas of future research. In analysing the formation and reformation of federal structures in Nigeria since its inception, it is clear that a truly decentralised administrative system remains a distant possibility. Despite the intent of various attempts at processes of decentralisation, these are yet to take hold.

The interest in the role of institutional reconciliation/indigenous knowledge was inspired by the failure of governmental institutions to provide basic services, which have declined sharply in quality and quantity. Many states have variously been described as failed or collapsed at one time or another throughout their post-independence lives. They have been variously been described as shadow states quasi-states, criminalised states, disrupted states or collapsed states (Kimathi 2005, p. 2).

The problem of governance and political instability in the Nigeria state is intractably rooted in the people’s view of their roles within the political system, their relationship to the state and the various cultural institutions. The Nigeria states and their various institutional structures have therefore enhanced the role of the imperial states in the international system without advancing the concepts of democratic governance and economic development in Nigeria. So invariably the structural disconnect between
the formal institutions transplanted from outside and the indigenous institutions born of the culture and traditional values of the Nigerian past hinders the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria state.

The Nigerian state can be classified as a failed state as there is no functional institution in place to counterbalance the power of the person that is heading the national government. The rule of law is not adhered to, and there is only minimal health, economic, financial and social infrastructures. Despite its huge mineral resources its citizens are living in abject poverty, largely due to the ineffectiveness of public institutions. Billions of dollars are being budgeted for public works every year but there is virtually nothing on ground to show for it. The country is ranked among the poorest and most corrupt nations in the world as funds for development are diverted to the personal accounts of public officials. According to Njoku (2004):

We are virtually the only country outside Saudi-Arabia in this world that that lives on nothing but the legacy of oil and yet we are the poorest. We are supposed to be the sixth largest oil producing nation in the world but we have remained poor (p.4).

Interest in the role that traditional institutions/indigenous knowledge can play in truly participatory approaches to the development has increased drastically during recent years. This interest is reflected in the myriad of activities generated within communities that are recording their own knowledge for use in their educational systems and for planning purposes. Within national institutions traditional knowledge systems are now regarded as an invaluable national resources, and within the
development communities, where traditional knowledge provides opportunities for
designing development projects that emerge from problems identified and assigned
priority by the beneficiaries themselves, which builds upon and strengthens
community-level knowledge systems. Recent titles such as *Tradition as a Modern
Strategy* (Lund 1996), *The Indigenization of Modernity* (Sabbarwal 1999) and so on,
reflect the growing interest accorded to culture and in current development thinking

The renewed interest in indigenous knowledge and institutions is in line with the
current advocacy of the minimalist state and the ‘enabling approach’, as conditions
for good governance in a period of structural adjustment and public sector reforms.
Under pressure from civil society and the donor agencies governments are urged to,
and obliged to reduce their role to what their dwindling resources and capacities
permits (Opoku-Mensah 2004, p.9). This implies decentralising the structure of
governance, promoting genuine partnership and enlisting the broad participation of
non-state actors and stakeholders, including traditional institutions and other civil
society/community-based organisations).

This trend has been reinforced by the UNESCO-sponsored, ‘World Decade for
Cultural Development’ (1988-1997), the Earth Summit in Rio de Janiero on
Environment and Development (1992), and other global initiatives and debates that
have stressed the cultural dimension of development, and the need to take local
knowledge and practice fully into account in the development process (UNESCO
In his influential World Bank studies, Mamodou Dia, with his group, has argued that the most promising way to overcome the shortcomings of the state system and its alien formal institutions in Africa is to recognise ‘the structural and functional disconnect between the informal, indigenous institutions rooted in the region’s history and culture, and formal institutions mostly transplanted from outside’ (Dia 1996, p. 226; Francis et al. 1996, p. 34). The remedy he argued is to ensure ‘a reconnect between state and civil society’, and to identify the opportunities within indigenous institutions for building a more pluralistic and participatory form of governance and development.

Ekeh (1975), in trying to draw a distinction between the morality of the civic public associated with colonial rule and alien institutions on one hand, and on the other the primitive public associated with traditional sentiments, values, and restraints in various indigenous societies and institutions, states:

> There is a general apathy and cynicism towards government, and some ambivalence about accountability in governance. By contrast, the general attitude to the premodern realm (ethnic, clan, or village) is much more selfless and transparent, because of the cultural norms, obligations, and sanctions that come into play (p. 91).

This partly explains the pervasiveness of ethnic and clan unions in the cities, with strong links to home towns. The argument then is that these traditional values attitudes and institutions should be consciously harnessed and brought to bear on governance and public affairs in the cities and other spheres of public life.
In the same way, Dia’s (1996) World Bank studies have urged for synergy or institutional reconciliation between state and community, through measures that increase the technical and organisational capacity of community institutions, and also create a more responsive and accountable public sector. Both formal and informal institutions are here to stay, and need to be more flexible in their relationship to each other. The formal sector and its institutions need to adapt to local conditions for greater legitimacy and enforceability, while informal sector institutions, in some cases, also need to be renovated and adjusted in order to remain relevant. Local institutions, which are sometimes handicapped by limited skill and resources, need support links to the budgetary and technical resources available in government and its numerous agencies. (p. 234)

It is through this adaptation that formal and informal institutions can converge or be reconciled and build on each other’s strengths, reduce transaction costs and maximise institutional performance.

6.1 The role of traditional governance and institutions

Successive constitutional arrangements since 1914 have featured a centralised system of administration. The role of the traditional institutions and governance were not given serious consideration hence the 1995 Draft Constitution, which preferred the familiar (colonial) ways of establishing and maintaining links with culture, norms and values through traditional governance. The erosion of the powers of traditional institutions was most notable in 1979 when the appointment, promotion and payment of salaries of traditional rulers were enshrined into the 1979 constitution, in many
ways reducing the rulers to the status of public servants in the sense that they became directly answerable to the governments who appoint and pay them.

Despite the relegation of traditional institutions, traditional rulers are still very powerful and influential. Consequently they are often asked by governments to appeal to the people in their regions for peace and co-operation with government authorities, to convey messages to the people, and to encourage participation in community development programs. Vaughan (2004) observes that, ‘Invented, appointed, promoted or not, traditional rulers wield enormous power and influence and have successfully manipulated state power holders for personal gain and corporate group gain’ (p. 93).

It must, however, be admitted that the traditional unfettered powers of chiefs have undergone transformation as a result of colonial rule and the attempts by some post-independence governments to influence the role of chiefs in political affairs. Consequently, the overall powers and authority of chiefs have ebbed and flowed depending on the regime preferences and dynamic changes in the chieftaincy roles themselves.

Before colonialism, indigenous institutions in Nigeria governed the villages and cities in all of the regions that make up Nigeria today. However, these institutions now exist in different forms and are either traditional (i.e. from pre-colonial times) or relatively recent indigenous responses to the limitations of post-colonial state institutions. Examining the pattern and procedures for administrating some selected villages and cities in Nigeria, Olowu and Erero (1996) list three forms of indigenous institutions in
Nigeria: political and administrative institutions; socio-cultural organisations; and development and economic associations (p. 7).

Indigenous political and administrative institutions play very useful roles in the governance of their communities. Often these consist of the traditional leadership structures as modified by colonial rule and post-independence governments. These institutions are also in every community in Nigeria. Their functions include the maintenance of law and order, the collection of taxes, the settlement of minor disputes (although most disputes now end up with the police and the courts), the supervision of the market (even though this function is now largely performed by a market chief appointed by the local government), and the endorsement or regulation of all land transactions.

Indigenous socio-cultural organisations represent another form of traditional/indigenous organisations through which Nigerian communities govern themselves. These organisations are largely voluntary associations crafted locally for the peculiar needs of like-minded individuals or reflective of religious and gender solidarity. They provide welfare services to members in times of need. In this category could be included age-grade associations, which are used partly for socialisation and education of specific age-grades into roles they are to play in the community. They are also used for the implementation of decisions taken by superior institutions e.g. in respect of sanitation, construction of roads and buildings, and in the management of common pool resources. These associations exist in one form or another in all of Nigeria’s communities.
Indigenous development and economic associations are focused on infrastructure and economic development. These institutions could be traditional (i.e. pre-colonial) or relatively recent responses by the communities to the perceived weaknesses of the traditional structures on the one hand and the ineffectiveness of state-based structure on the other. These associations could be in the form of market women associations (especially in the southeast) that regulate markets and monitor the prices of goods or the Parakoyi chiefs who are in charge of commerce in the southwest. Others are trade and professional guilds, and thrift and credit associations (ESUSU). Community development associations, town/village associations and co-operatives also belong in this category. In some communities these associations not only assume political and administrative roles from the traditional structures, they have also been responsible for most of the self-help economic and development projects undertaken by community members themselves or in collaboration with state-based government structures. Successful associations have become pillars for directing youth in to productive activities, and for the initiation of peace meetings with neighbouring villages to resolve land and other conflicts. Francis et al. (1996) listed thirty-six such community organisations in Nigeria. The leaders of these associations are being enlisted by members of the community.

Home-town associations, a form of ‘shadow state’, have been responsible for the building of schools, courthouses, primary health centres, roads, police posts post offices, and markets. They have also provided the impetus for direct economic activities such as community banking, fish farms, and construction of feeder roads to facilitate the movement of produce and goods to and from communities.
The lack of or inadequate integration of the central/formal and traditional/informal systems of governance has several implications for decentralisation and efforts to promote participatory democracy and rapid socio-economic development at the local government level. In particular the lack of formal representation of chiefs in local government has resulted in strained relations between some traditional chiefs and government officials and their communities. In some regions the governor or local government chairman and the traditional rulers are not on good terms while in others it is the traditional rulers and the members of the National Assembly or state House of Assembly who are at loggerheads (Ayee, cited in Boafo-Arthur 2001).

The absence of traditional rulers in the working of state or local governments has meant that a potent force for mobilising communities at the local level is being wasted. Even though some researchers have generally described the relationship between government officials and traditional rulers in their electoral areas as cordial, other researchers such as Ayee (cited in Boafo-Arthur 2001) have indicated that this cordial relationship may not exist in all communities and regions. Co-operation and mutual respect are essential elements in the promotion of decentralised development, as well mobilising communities for development.

6.2 Strengths of Nigeria’s traditional institutions

In making the case for the incorporation of traditional governance/indigenous knowledge into modern governance, the real challenge is not to romanticise traditional government or over-idealise modern government, as both have their
strengths and limitations and should complement and not confront or undermine each other (Nwaka 2004, p. 384). Olowu and Erero (1996) observe that:

A major strength of the indigenous institutions is their legitimacy which is recognised not only by community members, but also by government institutions and functionaries and ensures orderly succession to political office. This is closely followed by the fairly stable nature of indigenous institutions over time as opposed to state institutions which are stable (p14).

Similarly Makepe (2006) reasoned that:

Traditional rulers enforce management responsibility and overseers of decentralised system. It also allows those with ultimate understanding of the people culture, norms and values so as to monitor and enforce rules pertaining development projects (p.44).

The failure of past attempts at decentralisation in Nigeria program suggest the need for Dia’s ‘institutional reconciliation’ between state and community through measures that increase the technical and organisational capacity of community institutions, while creating a more responsive accountable public sector. Therefore, there are sound reasons for integrating traditional and modern systems of governance as a means of enhancing community and district development. This approach would strengthen rather than weaken the process of decentralisation.
A major strength of traditional institutions in Nigeria is their legitimacy, which is not only recognised by community members but also by government institutions and functionaries over time. Head Heeb (2003) puts it this way:

The Sardauna of Sokoto and the Alaafin of Oyo would have legitimacy regardless of what any government decided, by virtue of the fact that they are both heirs to sovereign states that long predated the arrival of the British, and to which a great many people continue to feel more loyalty than to “Nigeria” itself (p. 2).

Checks and balances also exist in traditional institutions that largely prevented traditional rulers from becoming authoritarian. A further strength of indigenous institutions is their informal approach to conflict resolution and the administration of justice. It is a system that works effectively and at low cost.

Developmental successes resulting from the integration of traditional institution/indigenous knowledge is leading to increased support within government, as in Ghana and Botswana. Most traditional organisations have sound administrative knowledge and are development oriented. They are very active in mobilising their people to initiate and implement self-help projects as well as facilitating the implementation of state projects. Owusu (2006) posits that:

In Ghana chiefs and their traditional bodies are given responsibilities for mobilising support for local development projects aimed at improving living standards. As natural leaders and symbol of unity of the people, a chief is barred from taking part in active politics; accordingly any chief wishing to do
so and seeking election to parliament must abdicate his or her traditional office. As in the case of Botswana, Owusu pointed out that in Botswana as in Ghana, chiefs and traditional bodies enjoy constitutional guarantee and protection, and perform important functions contributing to the stability of the state and welfare of the citizens (pp. 34-5).

The motivation of traditional institutions and leaders chiefs is captured in this comments from the Chief of the Ho-Asogli a traditional area of the Volta region:

Our predecessors led our ancestors to war with the objective of territorial security but today we are faced with a new kind of exigency – the need to wage a relentless battle against poverty, ignorance and disease, which must be fought in unity (Osei-Tutu 2004, p.9).

Ho-Asogli was describing the important role of traditional leaders in mobilising, disseminating information, and resolving conflicts. He explained how his courts have resolved over 400 cases since his accession, which would otherwise have been bogged down in the modern legal system. He suggested that the absence of traditional system in Cote D’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia may well have played a part in the emergence of conflict in those countries. He has been a strong advocate for a pivotal role for traditional systems of governance, and has provided an example through his numerous charitable activities, including HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns and his educational fund which has provided scholarships to more than 2000 people, including doctoral candidates. He declared that while the traditional system was not a panacea for Africa’s challenges, he argued that they should be part of the solution.
As Nwaka (2004) has observed, this concept of institutional reconciliation can be given practical support in urban governance by consciously trying to integrate the vast urban informal sector to the economic and administrative mainstream; and by encouraging and utilizing informal urban neighbourhood associations, not only for the well known functions of local security and solidarity, but also as active agents for governance and development (p.387).

The approach advocated by Dia and his group sees institutional reconciliation resulting neither in institutionalising or disuse of the informal institutions, nor solidifying the formal institutions, but integrating and encouraging coherence between adopted formal institutions and rejuvenated informal, indigenous institutions. Although there are variations in the administration style of these traditional institutions in every region, their activities are similar in terms of providing services to their communities. As Dodson (2003) has explained:

> Each community will have to find a common feature between the type of governing structure and processes it develops, and the culturally-based standards and values of its members about who should hold power, how it should properly be exercised, how decisions-making and disputes should be handled, and how the different rights of different community members should be recognised and protected (p.6).

In a developed political system, the practical approach is to redesign existing national structures into relevant political blocks to which a political input that would serve as growth parameter is developed and implemented for a specific result. In this vein,
such a practical political approach would seek to identify the obstacles to good administrative governance, and restructure or remove them entirely so as to facilitate smooth administration.

Elaborating further, Dia argues that although there are some areas where the informal institutions will not be readily at hand, in many cases there will be a need for an initiative of finding adaptable formal institutions that are amenable to reconciliation activities with renovating indigenous institutions to achieving institutional convergence.

Reconciliation between indigenous and formal institutions is an exercise that brings together dominant societal values of indigenous culture on one hand, and technical and organisational ideologies supporting modern institutions on the other. For reconciliation to take place and bring about convergence, development programs and initiatives need to approach institutions the prime medium of development efforts as social entities with established value structures and organisational preferences, and not as mere organisational instrumentalities ready to implement externally defined objectives.

Dia further explains that strengthening governance through traditional institutions could be strong only if the institutional and legal framework reflects societal norms and behaviour, as enshrined in indigenous and informal institutions. Such reconciliation between formal and informal or customary institutions has been achieved in Botswana and Ghana in the rule of law and land allocation, as well as in the interface between the state and local governments. And in the Gambia
reconciliation was used to strengthen popular participation and improve the responsiveness and relevance of policy.

As mentioned previously, indigenous development and economic associations have demonstrated a great emphasis on responsive, accountability and transparent leaders in the community including political office holders. This corresponds with Dia’s view that an institutional synergy reform program could be used to remove institutional and governance barrier and strengthen accountability of economic management.

In Nigeria there are no national formal consultation mechanisms where the voice of the traditional authorities is included. The means of communication in many communities is in native dialects where town-cryers go through the communities to disseminate information to the people. Dia gives credence to Institutional reconciliation in areas of communication which will serve as a powerful instrument of change. As we have seen in the role reserved for information dissemination in the reconciliation process, Dia argues that information is of primary importance in giving voice to project beneficiaries, thereby boosting empowerment, transparency, and legitimacy. Dia further explains that in looking for ways of adapting indigenous African channels of information to innovative uses, valuable insights can be gleaned from the AM90s findings reported by Hagos (1993). The Hagos research shows how the traditional and modern system of communication was blended, thereby converting the modern channels into two-way, interactive media where massages were assessable to the people in the rural areas.

6.3 Critics of institutional reconciliation in Nigeria
Critics of institutional reconciliation have dismissed the role of an informal sector in Nigeria by claiming that the political difficulties in the country are in fact a result of traditional institutions. Unobe (1989) advocated the abolition of traditional leadership altogether because some traditional ruler were seen as ‘exploiters’ during the colonial period. It has also been argued that many traditional rulers continue to use their positions to accumulate wealth at the expense of ordinary people. In this vain Yohana Madaki argued:

No traditional ruler of substance has less than about three companies. They use fronts to demand for contracts and acquire shares in companies. This is why they try to capture or befriend every governor in office. Foreigners use them as company directors and they in turn provide land for projects (Sunday Champion, October 16 1994, p. 4).

Some critics of traditional institutions believe they should have no role in modern Nigeria because they are patently undemocratic, a source of disorder and an obstacle to the development of a modern economy. Oladosu (n.d.), for example, said that the traditional kingship was founded on historical injustice and that it has no relevance and utility to modern African states.

There is also the argument that traditional rulers are selective in their commitment to their communities. Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian writer, mocked Igbo traditional rulers as ‘traders in their stall by day and monarchs at night; city dwellers five days a week and traditional village rulers on Saturdays and Sundays’ (1983, p. 48).
A cause for concern is the question of whether the appointment of traditional leaders can be divorced from politics and the influence of government officials in Nigeria, or from the need to have the right heritage. Also there is the possibility Igbos will react against the use of traditional institutions as a basis for decentralised administrative system, as the system of traditional rulership has not historically been a strong feature of their society.

The counter-argument to critics of traditional rulers is that they govern with the assistance of other chiefs and are chosen to rule after much grassroots consultation. Their administrative style is guided by unwritten principles and precepts, by past events and traditional laws of the land. In other words traditional rulers are just one part of the traditional institution considered as a whole. As Agbese (2004) stated:

> In reality, the traditional ruler is merely at the apex of entire panoply of a network of indigenous governing systems which include a council of elders, titled men/women, age-grade or other similar associations. It is the combination of these and other institutions that make up the totality of the indigenous political systems (p.13).

In Nigeria, traditional organisations do not have the more obvious failings of the state in that they are relatively accessible to ordinary people and are more relevant to the daily lives of most Nigerians, particularly those in the rural areas.

There is also a counter-argument to the view that the positions of traditional rulers might be politicised or only for people with the right lineage. In the last two decades of the appointment of traditional rulers in Nigeria has been determined following
consideration of experience, knowledge and education, while the appointments are highly contested in many communities in Nigeria. This is one of the major reforms in traditional institutions in recent years. Agbese (2004) stated:

Wealthy, powerful and well-known Nigerians continue to show considerable interest in traditional rulership by actively contesting to sit on the thrones. In recent years, the list of victorious candidates reads like a who-is-who of Nigeria: Ibrahim Dasuki as Sultan of Sokoto, Oladele Olashore as Oba of Iloko in Ijeshaland, Omo N’Oba Eraduwa, the Oba of Benin, to name a few (p. 4).

Recent developments suggest Igbo society has come to terms with the traditional style of rulership. This is reflected in the numbers of politicians or military governors paying courtesy calls to traditional Igbo rulers when assigned to states in Igbo regions. There is also a trend among those contesting elections in the region to take chieftaincy titles to show their familiarity with the culture, values and customs of his community. Furthermore, an umbrella home town association, N di Igbo, in the Igbo community, is recognised by the state and national governments and has proven to be a successful example of how a traditional institution can be integrated into the region’s governance.

Efforts to establish grassroots participation which do not involve traditional institutions and leaders often fail as they hold extensive knowledge and concern about the actual problems and preferences of the people, and a degree of popular legitimacy that the government lacks. When the administrative system is decentralised (both
administratively and fiscally) by incorporating the traditional institutions/indigenous knowledge attention is more focused on the local communities. Severe penalties associated with traditional institutions also serve as a check and which are absent in the state-based institutions. Supporting this claim Venson (1995) stated:

Traditional leadership, in its form before external interference operated on the principle of community participation, consultation, consensus and an acceptable level of transparency through the village council or open tribal consultative meetings. These principles are not too different from the ones, which modern democracies prescribe as essential for democracy (p. 2).

The official transfer of powers from higher to lower levels (decentralisation), the dispersal of agents of higher levels of governments into the regions (deconcentration) and the withdrawal of government functions (dismantling) does not necessarily incorporate the traditional ruler or institutions into the administrative structure. While highly centralised systems may work effectively in France and Sweden, this is because such systems are built upon a political and cultural history that supports and legitimates central rule. These foundations are lacking in Nigeria as they are in many post-colonial developing countries. A means of strengthening these foundations in Nigeria is by giving constitutional powers to traditional rulers, along with the right to participate at the federal level of administration.
Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Nigeria has a flawed federal structure and that there is a need for decentralisation to provide communities with responsive governments that provide for a more equitable distribution of resources and promote greater participation in local and national affairs.

The thesis has also considered the country’s history, particularly its constitutional development, and how centralisation under a single constitution in a highly diverse nation resulted in ongoing constitutional and regime change, which gradually eroded the powers of the traditional institutions and leaders who, nonetheless, still have tremendous influence over people’s lives. The various pre-colonial communities were bound together legally under one central administrative government by a colonial authority which pragmatically implemented a different system of administrative governance in each region. Gradually, the highly diverse regions were centralised under a single constitution, a processes which slowly eroded the powers of traditional social and political institutions. Despite this formal marginalisation, traditional forms of power and authority still hold tremendous influence over the life of the people.

The thesis has examined the major models of decentralisation while highlighting their inadequacies in dealing with needs and characteristics of Nigerian society. Nigeria has tried to decentralise its administrative system on a number of occasions but has always failed due to weak and ineffective institutions. The thesis has recommended incorporating traditional institutions in to the state’s administrative structures as a
way of strengthening the country’s institutions. These traditional institutions have sustained communities through periods of ineffective formal governance. Many indigenous institutions are built around a decentralised framework of reciprocal relationships that provide checks and balances against corruption and abuse of power by individuals. The introduction of traditional institutions at all levels would bring government and services closer to the people and, although there are variations in these traditional institutions, they have the capacity to meet federal, state and local conditions.

Furthermore, it has explained how Nigeria’s ethno-religious diversity has intensified the struggle for political power and resulted in an unstable political environment with a lack of core values around which the political development of the country is structured. The thesis therefore proposes a model for decentralisation based on ‘institutional reconciliation’, which promotes policies that are consistent with the ethnic, religion and cultural beliefs of the people.
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