Political Development in Nigeria [2]

3. Process of Decolonization

Decolonization is the process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing power. In Nigeria, this was driven by a strong nationalist movement.

A. Nationalism

- **Meaning:** A strong sense of national consciousness, pride, and loyalty to one's own nation. In the colonial context, it was the desire of the colonized people to achieve self-governance and independence from foreign rule. It was often fueled by a sense of shared identity, destiny, and grievance against colonial oppression.

- **Types:**
    - **Political Nationalism:** Demand for political independence and self-governance.
    - **Economic Nationalism:** Desire to control one's own economic resources and policies, free from colonial exploitation.
    - **Cultural Nationalism:** Promotion and revival of indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions against colonial cultural imposition.
    - **Anti-Colonial Nationalism:** The specific form of nationalism that seeks to end colonial rule and establish independent states.

B. Nationalist Movements

- **Emergence:** Several factors led to the rise of nationalist movements in Nigeria:
    - **Dissatisfaction with Colonial Rule:** Arbitrary rule, racial discrimination, economic exploitation, land alienation, forced labor, and heavy taxation.
    - **Impact of Western Education:** Educated Nigerians were exposed to ideas of liberty, democracy, and self-determination, inspiring them to challenge colonial rule.
    - **Role of World War I and II Veterans:** Nigerian soldiers who fought for Britain returned with broader perspectives and discontent, having experienced equality abroad.
    - **Influence of Mass Media:** Newspapers (e.g., Lagos Daily News, West African Pilot) provided platforms for nationalist ideas and criticism of colonial policies.
    - **Pan-Africanism:** The movement advocating for the unity and liberation of African peoples inspired Nigerian nationalists.
    - **Economic Hardship:** Post-war economic depression and colonial policies led to widespread discontent among the populace.

- **Goals:**
    - To achieve political independence and self-determination for Nigeria.
    - To end racial discrimination and social injustice.
    - To gain control over Nigeria's economic resources.
    - To promote African culture and identity.
- **Strategies:**
    - **Petitions and Delegations:** Sending representatives to London to present grievances.
    - **Formation of Nationalist Organizations/Parties:** Creating platforms to articulate demands and mobilize support.
    - **Newspaper Publications:** Using print media to educate the public and criticize colonial rule.
    - **Protests and Demonstrations:** Organizing rallies, boycotts, and strikes (e.g., Aba Women's Riot 1929, Enugu Coal Miners' Strike 1949).
    - **International Lobbying:** Seeking support from international bodies like the **UN**
    - **Constitutional Reforms:** Participating in constitutional conferences to negotiate for more self-rule.

C. Nationalist Leaders

Nigeria's independence was largely achieved through the tireless efforts of prominent nationalist leaders:

- **Herbert Macaulay (1864-1946):** Often called the "Father of Nigerian Nationalism." Founded Nigeria's first political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), in 1923. He used his newspaper, the *Lagos Daily News*, to criticize colonial policies.
- **Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904-1996):** A charismatic leader who championed Pan-Africanism. Founded the *West African Pilot* newspaper, which became a powerful voice for nationalism. Co-founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). First President of Nigeria.
- **Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1909-1987):** A strong advocate for federalism and regional autonomy. Founded the Action Group (AG) party. Introduced free primary education in Western Region. A key figure in developing a welfare state vision for Nigeria.
- **Sir Ahmadu Bello (Sardauna of Sokoto) (1910-1966):** The Premier of Northern Nigeria and leader of the Northern People's Congress (NPC). Advocated for Northern interests and worked towards a united Nigeria, but with strong regional identity.
- **Ladipo Solanke (1883-1958):** A co-founder of the West African Students' Union (WASU) in London, which played a crucial role in fostering nationalist sentiments among Nigerian and other West African students abroad.
- **Mallam Aminu Kano (1920-1982):** A radical nationalist who focused on social justice, democratic rights for the common man (talakawa), and challenging traditional aristocratic structures in the North. Founded the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU).
- **Joseph Sarwuan Tarka (1932-1980):** A prominent voice for minority rights, especially for the Middle Belt region. Founded the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC).
- **Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1912-1966):** Nigeria's first Prime Minister. A key leader of the NPC, who played a significant role in the negotiations leading to independence.
- **Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (1900-1978):** A prominent women's rights activist and nationalist, known for leading protests against colonial taxation and rule, especially the Egba Women's Union.

- **Anthony Enahoro (1923-2010):** A young and vibrant nationalist who moved the historic motion for Nigeria's independence in the Federal House of Representatives in 1953.

D. Emergence of Nationalist Parties

The formation of political parties was crucial for organizing nationalist sentiments and articulating demands.

- **Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP, 1923):** Founded by Herbert Macaulay, initially dominated Lagos politics.
- **Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM, 1934):** A more pan-Nigerian nationalist group that sought to unite Nigerians across ethnic lines, including Azikiwe, Awolowo, H.O. Davies.
- **National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC, 1944):** Formed by Herbert Macaulay and later led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, advocating for national unity and self-governance. Strongest in the East.
- **Action Group (AG, 1951):** Founded by Obafemi Awolowo, primarily strong in the Western Region, advocated for a federal system and self-government.

- **Northern People's Congress (NPC, 1951):** Formed by Sir Ahmadu Bello and other Northern leaders, focused on Northern interests and gradual movement towards self-governance.

E. Influence of External Factors

International events and trends significantly supported Nigeria's decolonization efforts.

- **World War II (1939-1945):**
    - **Weakening of Colonial Powers:** Britain and France were economically and militarily exhausted, making it harder to maintain control over colonies.
    - **Atlantic Charter (1941):** Signed by Roosevelt and Churchill, proclaimed the right of all peoples to self-determination, which was later used by nationalists to challenge colonial rule.
    - **Experience of Nigerian Soldiers:** Nigerians who fought for Britain abroad gained exposure to global politics and Western ideas, returning home with renewed zeal for independence.
- **Pan-Africanism:** The intellectual and political movement promoting the unity and liberation of African peoples worldwide. Leaders like Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, and later Kwame Nkrumah, inspired Nigerian nationalists.
- **United Nations (UN) Charter:** The UN Charter emphasized the principle of self-determination for all peoples, putting international pressure on colonial powers to grant independence.
- **Independence of India (1947):** India's successful struggle for independence from British rule served as a powerful inspiration and precedent for other British colonies, including Nigeria.

4. Constitutional Development in Nigeria

Nigeria's journey to independence and beyond was marked by several constitutional changes, each designed to address evolving political realities and demands for self-rule.

A. Hugh Clifford Constitution (1922)

- **Features:**
  - Introduced the elective principle, allowing for limited African representation (4 members: 3 for Lagos, 1 for Calabar) in the Legislative Council.
  - The Legislative Council had powers over the Colony and Southern Protectorate only; the Governor's Executive Council still legislated for the North.
  - The governor retained full control of the Executive Council.
  - Established a unified judiciary for the Colony and Southern Protectorate.
- **Merits:**
  - First constitution to introduce elective representation for Africans, marking a crucial step towards political participation.
  - Stimulated the formation of the first political party (NNDP).
  - Provided a forum for Nigerian elites to voice their opinions.
- **Demerits:**
  - Excluded the Northern Protectorate from the Legislative Council.
  - Elective principle was very limited (only 4 members).
  - Voting rights were based on property and income qualifications, disenfranchising most Nigerians.
  - The governor retained too much power.

B. Arthur Richards Constitution (1946)

- **Features:**
  - Aimed to promote unity by integrating the North and South under one legislative council for the first time.
  - Divided Nigeria into three regions: Northern, Western, and Eastern regions, each with its own House of Assembly (and House of Chiefs in the North).
  - The Legislative Council became largely advisory to the Governor.
  - Increased Nigerian representation in the Legislative Council (28 out of 44 members were unofficial, including 4 elected).
- **Merits:**
  - First constitution to unify Nigeria legislatively.
  - Increased African participation in the Legislative Council.
  - Recognized Nigeria's regional diversity.
  - Paved the way for regionalism, which became a key feature of Nigerian politics.
- **Demerits:**
  - Still largely controlled by the Governor, who nominated most members.
  - Nigerians were not sufficiently consulted in its drafting ("imposed constitution").
  - Did not give Nigerians real power in policy-making.
  - The regionalization sparked inter-regional rivalry.

C. John Macpherson Constitution (1951)

- **Features:**
  - Resulted from wider consultations with Nigerians, including local meetings and regional conferences.
  - Created a truly federal structure with a central legislature (House of Representatives) and regional legislatures (Houses of Assembly).
  - Introduced a quasi-federal system, with stronger regional autonomy.
  - Allowed for regional executive councils with Nigerian ministers, though the Governor retained significant powers.
  - Increased the number of elected representatives significantly.
- **Merits:**
  - Significant progress towards self-government by granting more legislative and executive powers to Nigerians at both central and regional levels.
  - Increased consultation with Nigerians, giving it more legitimacy.
  - Further strengthened the federal principle, which suited Nigeria's diversity.
  - Led to the formation of stronger regional political parties.
- **Demerits:**
  - No provision for a Prime Minister at the centre, leading to a weak central government.
  - Ministers were not given full responsibility for their departments.
  - Still gave the British colonial officers and Governor too much power.
  - The lack of a clear revenue allocation formula caused friction.
  - The crisis over the "self-government in 1956" motion highlighted regional differences.

D. Oliver Lyttelton Constitution (1954)

- **Features:**
  - Introduced a true federal system, making the regions almost completely autonomous.
  - Established Lagos as a federal territory, separate from the Western Region.
  - Created the office of Premier for each region and a Speaker for the Federal House of Representatives.
  - The Governor-General's power was reduced, and ministers gained more executive authority.
  - The Judiciary was regionalized.
  - Established a clear revenue allocation formula.
- **Merits:**
  - Firmly established federalism, which was seen as the best option for a diverse country like Nigeria.
  - Granted significant internal self-government to the regions.
  - Reduced the powers of the Governor-General, increasing Nigerian control.
  - Addressed the Lagos issue and revenue allocation.

- **Demerits:**
    - Weakened the centre too much, leading to regionalism dominating national politics.
    - Did not fully resolve the minority question within the regions.
    - The retention of an expatriate Prime Minister at the center, pending full independence.

E. Independence Constitution (1960)

- **Features:**
    - Established Nigeria as a sovereign independent state, though still retaining the Queen of England as Head of State (Elizabeth II) and a Governor-General as her representative.
    - Retained the federal parliamentary system of government (Westminster model).
    - Created three regions (Northern, Western, Eastern) and the federal capital territory of Lagos.
    - Provided for a bicameral legislature at the centre (Senate and House of Representatives).
    - Enshrined fundamental human rights.
    - Established the Supreme Court as the highest court, but the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London remained the final court of appeal.
- **Merits:**
    - Achieved independence for Nigeria.
    - Maintained federalism, which was widely accepted.
    - Provided for fundamental human rights.
    - Set the stage for democratic governance.

- **Demerits:**
    - Nigeria was still a dominion under the British Crown, not a full republic.
    - The Privy Council as the final court of appeal was a symbol of lingering colonial influence.
    - The parliamentary system, with its weak opposition and dominant regional parties, proved fragile.
    - Failed to adequately address minority fears.

5. Post-Independence Constitutions

After independence, Nigeria continued to evolve its constitutional framework, largely in response to political crises and military interventions.

A. 1963 Republican Constitution

- **Features:**
    - Formally established Nigeria as a Republic, replacing the Queen of England as Head of State with an elected President (Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was the first).
    - Abolished the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London as the final court of appeal, making the Supreme Court of Nigeria supreme.

    - Maintained the federal parliamentary system.
    - Created a fourth region, the Mid-Western Region (out of the Western Region).
- **Characteristics:** It signified Nigeria's complete break from its colonial past in terms of political sovereignty. It reflected a more nationalistic and independent spirit.
- **Shortcomings:**
    - Retained many features of the 1960 Constitution, including the regional structure that was prone to ethnic tensions.
    - The fundamental issues that led to the 1966 military coup (e.g., regionalism, ethno-religious rivalries, corruption, electoral malpractices) were not effectively addressed by the constitution itself.

B. 1979 Constitution

- **Features:**
    - Introduced a **Presidential System of Government** (similar to the USA model), replacing the parliamentary system. The President became both Head of State and Head of Government, directly elected.
    - Introduced the concept of **Federal Character**, aiming to ensure proportional representation of all states and ethnic groups in federal appointments and institutions.
    - Enshrined **Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy** (non-justiciable, but guiding principles).
    - Abolished the regional structure, replacing it with **19 states** and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.
    - Provided for a bicameral National Assembly (Senate and House of Representatives).
    - Stipulated a clear **separation of powers** among the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches.
- **Characteristics:** It was a landmark constitution, largely drafted after extensive public debate during military rule, aiming to address the failures of the First Republic. It sought to create a more stable and unified nation.
- **Shortcomings:**
    - The "Federal Character" principle, while aiming for unity, sometimes led to a focus on representation over merit.
    - The cost of governance increased significantly due to the presidential system and expansion of ministries.
    - Despite its strong provisions, it could not prevent the military coup of 1983.
    - Challenges in implementing separation of powers effectively.

C. 1989 Constitution

- **Features:**
    - Drafted during the Babangida military regime, it was designed to transition Nigeria to a two-party system.
    - Maintained the presidential system.
    - Increased the number of states to 21, and later 30.
    - Included a chapter on socio-economic rights, making them justiciable (enforceable by law), a significant departure.

- **Characteristics:** It was a forward-looking constitution but suffered from being produced under military rule and was never fully implemented due to the annulment of the 1993 presidential election.
- **Shortcomings:**
    - Its full impact cannot be assessed as it was not fully implemented.
    - It was largely a product of military decree and political engineering (e.g., forced two-party system), which ultimately undermined its legitimacy.

D. 1999 Constitution

- **Features:**
    - The current constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
    - Maintained the **Presidential System of Government** with separation of powers.
    - Retained the **Federal Character** principle.
    - Increased the number of states to **36** and the FCT.
    - Enshrined extensive **Fundamental Human Rights**.
    - Established a three-tier system of government: Federal, State, and Local Governments.
    - Provides for an independent judiciary.
    - Contains similar Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy as the 1979 Constitution.
- **Characteristics:** It was enacted by military decree (Decree No. 24 of 1999) before the handover to civilian rule. It largely re-adopted significant parts of the 1979 Constitution. It aimed to provide a framework for a stable democracy after years of military rule.
- **Shortcomings:**
    - **"We the People" Deception:** Criticized for beginning with "We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria..." when it was essentially decreed by the military, raising questions about its legitimacy and popular ownership.
    - **Over-centralization of Power:** Many critics argue it grants too much power to the Federal Government, weakening the states and hindering true federalism.
    - **Ambiguity in Clauses:** Some clauses are vague, leading to legal interpretations and conflicts.
    - **Cost of Governance:** The presidential system and numerous states are seen as financially burdensome.
    - **Revenue Allocation Issues:** Continues to be a source of contention among states and between states and the federal government.
    - **Inadequate Local Government Autonomy:** Local governments are often dependent on state governments.
    - **Challenges in Amendment:** The process of amending the constitution is often lengthy and difficult.