

Nigeria: the excesses of the spigot economy Africa's most populous state has been doubly constrained, first by an administrative structure of British design which turned its social and religious divisions into a politically deadly polarization, and then by the discovery of oil, a blessing which became a curse. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, exports of cocoa from the Western Region and a variety of other agricultural products from the Eastern and Northern Regions were sufficient to allow politicians to play their patronage games, for real progress to be made in education, and for Nigeria to build the symbols of its national independence. Ironsi's government was one of Africa's outbursts of military populism: a military elite, trained to get things done, perceiving a government of elected politicians as self-interested, corrupt, and incompetent, announcing its determination to restore competence and regularity to government. Biafra had its outside supporters – France, most notably and as the war and blockade had a devastating impact, particularly on children, the publicity generated sympathy for Biafra and deepened the image of Africa as a land of starving children victimized by wars that seem a product of irrational tribal enmity. Nigeria's educated elite had roots extending to the nineteenth century and a cosmopolitan outlook, from its linkages across much of West Africa and to Pan-Africanist circles in England. In each region oppositions developed, to some extent (notably in the north) as populist challenges to the governing elites, but most importantly among regional minorities. Nigerian cocoa farmers and commercial entrepreneurs, like urban lawyers, teachers, and clerks before them, constituted a politically aware class, with the means to support an active press and political organizations. The east and west feared the north, which was populous and tightly controlled by an Islamic elite, while the north feared that east and west would gain control by insinuating their better-educated population into the bureaucracies that actually ran the state. There had been anti-Igbo riots in the north in the 1950s, but the pogroms that broke out in the Igbo ghettos in northern cities – with the connivance of local elites – killed tens of thousands and made many more into refugees. Its lawyers, teachers, and clerks had experience in state services for decades and familiarity with local, regional, and national deliberative councils, under limited self-administration programs. In July northern officers instigated Ironsi's overthrow and assassination, and he was replaced by another officer, Yakubu Gowon, who was to rule for the next nine years. In Eastern Nigeria the second coup was seen, in the context of the pogroms and the tensions over oil revenues, as an anti-Igbo move. That it was a war of maneuvering politicians, as much to do with geographic region as with ethnicity, was more difficult to convey than the stark images. In each region, a single party, dominated by members of the majority ethnic group, obtained office and used it to provide services and patronage within its bailiwick. The modest powers of the federal government, from independence, were in the hands of Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, leader of the Northern People's Congress (NPC). Unlike agriculture, which involves vast numbers of people in the production and marketing of exports, oil requires little labor, and much of it from foreigners. Gowon had earlier divided Nigeria into twelve states, blurring the correspondence of region and ethnicity of the British three state systems. It also entails relationships between the few global firms capable of extracting it and the state rulers who collect the rents. The diaspora of educated Igbos to Western and Northern cities was also causing tension. What followed was a horrific war: a small regional army convinced of its righteousness, fighting a larger one which claimed the legitimacy of a nation-state. It defines a spigot economy: whoever controls access to

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